

FRANKENSTEIN'S SIBLINGS: SELF-DEFORMATION IN ROMANTIC LITERATURE



„Von Zeit zu Zeit seh ich den Alten gern
Und hüte mich, mit ihm zu brechen.
Es ist gar hübsch von einem großen Herrn,
So menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen.“

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ABSTRACT



According to a widely-accepted interpretation, Romantic literature is characterised by a particular conception of the self. For the Romantics, the self was *deep* and *developmental*. We are not born with a stable sense of identity, but have to discover or create one through a course of reflective experience. To explore this form of selfhood, the Romantics developed new forms of literature. They wrote lyrical poems and plays depicting the formation of consciousness in nature, *Bildungsromane* depicting the formation of people in society, and autobiographies depicting the formation of the author in the world. The self-formation interpretation of Romanticism remains influential today, even though decades of historicist scholarship have uncovered numerous unfamiliar texts, and new aspects of familiar texts, which the concept of self-formation cannot explain.

The biggest, yet frequently disregarded problem with the self-formation interpretation is that so many Romantic texts seem to be about exactly the opposite. The most famous example is *Frankenstein* (1818). Victor and his creature, far from forming coherent senses of identity, are deformed by their experience. In this thesis, I consider a range of other deformed selves in British Romanticism, from the sad protagonist of Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) to the speaker of John Clare's sonnets and the heroes of Joanna Baillie's tragedies. I describe the different kinds of self-deformation these authors portray, and show how they shaped their texts in order to portray it. While other scholars—most recently Alan Richardson, Andrea Henderson, Jacques Khalip and Michael Gamer—have considered neglected varieties of selfhood in Romantic literature, this is the first study which systematically considers the relationship between deformed selfhood and the

different forms of Romantic writing. I am thus able to provide wider and more powerful descriptions of the major Romantic genres.

The self-formation interpretation has affected how scholars define and evaluate every genre of Romantic literature. In each chapter, I tackle a different one, showing how our received understanding of the genre is challenged by texts of self-deformation. Chapter 1 lays the philosophical groundwork. In it, I show how eighteenth-century ideas about self-deformation survived into Romantic-era thought. In Chapter 2, on fiction, I compare Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* to Maria Edgeworth's *Vivian* (1812). In these tragic anti-*Bildungsromane*, the very possibility of self-formation is questioned, as the protagonists are ensnared in social conventions. In Chapter 3, on poetry, I analyse the sonnets of Charlotte Smith and John Clare, which resist the synthesis of mind and nature usually held to be typical of Romantic lyric. In Chapter 4, on life-writing, I focus on Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, With Notices of his Life* (1830-31), whose baggy form mirrors its subject's "multiform" personality, and embodies its author's sceptical, Humean philosophy of self. In Chapter 5, on drama, I compare the gothic tragedies of Joanna Baillie and Charles Harpur, which reveal the frightening and metaphysical aspects of Romantic self-deformation.

As I argue throughout this thesis, it is no coincidence that readers have often found these texts ugly and banished them from the canon. They challenge our received notions of genre, and so can appear deformed, when in fact their apparent deformities are sound aesthetic strategies for portraying self-deformation. To show how well-formed they are for this purpose, I employ a range of digital techniques, such as text analysis, sentiment analysis and character networks. Not only can these techniques uncover hidden aspects of a text's structure, but they also allow precise, large-scale comparisons of many texts, allowing me to demonstrate for the first time

that these apparently marginal books about misfits and failures are actually central to Romantic debates about aesthetics and selfhood.

The Romantic self, I argue, is mysterious and complex, and its deep and developmental aspects are often in conflict. The self can be deformed by deep inner forces, as in Opie, Smith and Baillie, and grow into a monstrous, malformed self. Or it can be deformed by excessive openness to external influence, as in Edgeworth, Clare and Harpur, and crumble into a formless self. Moore's multiform Byron is malformed and formless all at once, and indeed the two paradigms of self-deformation mix in complex ways in all these texts. These are Frankenstein's siblings, the agonised villains, quivering victims and self-annihilating mystics who stalked the darker byways of the Romantic mind, shedding new light on the challenges of self-identity, and its burden.

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A GALLERY OF GOTHICK GROTESQUERIES



The man of the world is whole in his mask. ... What he is, is nothing; what he appears to be is everything for him.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762

No; to th'embattled foe I will present
This hated form—and welcome be the sabre
That leaves no atom of it undefiled!

—Horace Walpole, 1791

He contemplated his picture—he shrunk from it, but he could change its deformity only by an effort too nobly daring for a mind already effeminated by vice.

—Ann Radcliffe, 1791

Fix not thy steadfast gaze on me,
Shrunk atom of mortality!

—Mary Robinson, 1791

Does not slavery itself depress the mind, and extinguish all its fire, and every noble sentiment?

—Olaudah Equiano, 1794

My soul's an atom in the world of mind,
Hurl'd from its centre by some adverse storm ...

—Charles Lloyd, 1794

I now am nothing.
I am a man, of holy claims bereft;
Out of the pale of social kindred cast;
Nameless and horrible.

—Joanna Baillie, 1798

By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, ... society makes monsters of them ...

—Mary Wollstonecraft, 1798

[He] never gains
One energy of will, that does not rise
From some external cause, to which he hies
From his own blank inanity.

—Anna Seward, 1799

A GALLERY OF GOTHICK GROTESQUERIES

... my mind is eaten away like my body by incurable disease—inveterate remorse—
remorse for a life of folly ...

—Maria Edgeworth, 1800

Her mind, alas, was an eternal night, which the broad beam of virtue never
illuminated.

—Charlotte Dacre, 1806

... his very soul
Unmoulds its essence, hopelessly deformed
By sights of evermore deformity!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1813

I became
A loathsome thing, all pestilence, all flame!

—Thomas Moore, 1817

The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities or aspirations; ... but his
intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of
execution only, but even of proposing or willing.

—Thomas De Quincey, 1821

'Tis but one devil ever tempts a man,
And his name's *Self*.

—Thomas Lovell Beddoes, 1822

O'er my soul
Lightening hath pass'd—and seared it.

—Felicia Hemans, 1823

'Tis done! and I am now a lonely blot
Upon the face of nature!

—Catherine Gore, 1824

The heat o' the sun brain'd you that time methinks, for you talk extremely wild!

—Charles Harpur, 1835

In this strange death of life to be,
To live in death and be the same,
Without this life or home or name,
At once to be and not to be ...

—John Clare, 1847

INTRODUCTION: ROMANTICISM AND SELF-FORMATION



IN 2013, I visited a touring exhibition at the National Gallery in Canberra: *Turner from the Tate: The Making of a Master*. Visitors were invited to accompany William Turner on his quest for mastery. In the first room were his teenage canvasses, already shining with prodigious talent despite the clichéd subject-matter. Then came the academic painter of early adulthood. Then the sojourn to Italy, and the discovery of light. Finally, the sea. Massy, sublime breakers smashing across the canvas. Great deep skies reflecting eternity in them. And those enigmatic final canvasses—sketches, drafts, abandoned? Presages of something grander? The painter we met in these rooms was the Turner of Mike Leigh’s 2014 biopic, played by the stupendous curmudgeon Timothy Spall—Turner the uncompromising genius, the eccentric, the radical with a keen eye and a revolutionary paintbrush, the Turner who strove for a new vision of the world, and found it.

In the gift shop, visitors were invited to delve deeper into Turner’s Romantic genius. Among a number of books about Turner himself, two were on offer that put him in historical context: Timothy Blanning’s *The Romantic Revolution* (2011) and Michael Ferber’s *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (2010). In these books, visitors would learn that Turner was not the only visionary quest-hero of the period. Blanning argues that the Romantic Revolution was as important as the American, French and Industrial ones. Its prophet was Rousseau, whose great deed was “[to place] the creator, not the created, at the centre of aesthetic activity.” The

old “mimetic” theory of art was out, and the “expressive” one was in.¹ From now on, art was autobiography. A purchaser of Ferber’s book would find that Romanticism laid the stress on the struggle to achieve self-expression more than on the expression itself. The Romantics “found a symbolic and internalised romance plot a vehicle for exploring one’s self and its relationship to others and to nature.”² For Ferber, Blanning, and the curators of the exhibition, Romanticism was characterised by a particular ideal of self-formation. The Romantics explored the world to explore themselves, seeking a source of meaning deep within. They shaped new and more complete visions of themselves in their imaginations. Then they used their art to express their hard-won senses of self, or to portray other people who achieved self-formation.

This is a beautiful ideal, but an incomplete description of Romanticism. Not every work of Romantic art depicts self-formation. Even a canonical Romantic like Turner, whose subjective style of painting seems to fit Ferber’s and Blanning’s theories, could produce artworks like *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842) (Figure 0.1). Napoleon stands by a muddy pool, his back to the world. He wears a uniform, but the army it represents is no more. He is a soldier, but he is unarmed, and watched by the quiet foe. He is contemplative, but he does not gaze on the glory of the setting sun, nor on the beautiful city atop the hill, nor on the birds that wing their way into the infinite sky. Instead, he stares at a shallow pool, which contains his cross-armed self, his guard, and the puny, nearly invisible rock limpet. Napoleon is not a well-formed but a *deformed* self. He has lost what defined him, and become a shadowy reflection, lit only by the reddening light of a setting sun.

¹ Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (London: Phoenix, 2011), 17.

² Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

Figure 0.1

J.M.W. Turner, *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet*



1842, oil on canvas, 79.4 × 79.4 cm. Tate Britain, London. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-war-the-exile-and-the-rock-limpet-n00529> (accessed June 6 2017) Photo © Tate. Licensed under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported).

Turner's Napoleon has many fellows in Romantic literature: Joanna Baillie's De Monfort, with his cry of "I now am nothing;" Olaudah Equiano's slave, whose mental "fire" is extinguished; Catherine Gore's Falkenstiern, a "lonely blot | Upon the face of nature;" or the aging John Clare, living his "strange death of life" in the Northampton General Asylum. These are all examples of self-deformation, of men and women whose experience destroys or misshapes their self, rather than enriching

or completing it. This thesis investigates the deformed selves of Romantic literature, showing how our conceptions of the Romantic self and the Romantic style change if we include them in the picture.

Since the 1980s, many scholars have sought to widen our picture of Romantic literature, in the name of a more “open literary history.”³ This trend has brought many more authors, texts and genres into view. Unlike 20 years ago, it is now quite usual to encounter discussion of fiction, women writers or scientific texts in books, courses, and conferences on Romantic literature. These texts are so various, that their rediscovery has led many scholars over the last two decades to doubt whether Romanticism can be coherently defined at all.⁴ Others, like Jerome McGann, claim that the old concept of Romanticism remains useful, but that it does not apply to every text from the period.⁵ But neither of these is today the dominant view. Instead of rejecting the concept of Romanticism, or limiting its scope, most scholars have set about redefining the Romantic concept of self-formation, the concept at the heart of most definitions of “Romanticism,” so that it can explain an ever-wider selection of texts. The best example of this redefinition is Jane Austen.

Austen was once considered to be thoroughly non-Romantic.⁶ Indeed, visitors to the Turner exhibition could have learnt from Ferber that attempts to

³ Marilyn Butler, “Repossessing the Past: The Case for an Open Literary History,” in *Rethinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History*, ed. Marjorie Levinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

⁴ For example, Butler herself: *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 178-87. Of course such arguments go back at least as far as Arthur O. Lovejoy’s famous paper, “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms,” *PMLA* 39, no. 2 (1924).

⁵ Jerome J McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 17-20.

⁶ See Northrop Frye, “The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism,” in *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 2, 11-12; *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 45-46; McGann, 18-19; Stephen C. Behrendt, “Questioning the Romantic

prove she is Romantic are “strained.”⁷ The problem with Austen is her social comedy. Romantic literature is supposed to take “imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for the poetic style,” according to René Wellek’s influential definition.⁸ But Austen’s novels concern rationality, not imagination, take place in society, not nature, and are realistic, not symbolic or mythical—or so the argument used to go. It has been turned on its head, however, by historicists like Deidre Lynch and Clifford Siskin, who raise the discussion to a higher level of abstraction. All Wellek’s keywords—imagination, nature, symbol, and myth—have a feature in common. They all point towards the deep, self-developing parts of the human psyche. Lynch observes that psychological depth is a key feature of Austen’s novels. Her heroines may spend a lot of time stitching and discussing the news in fashionable drawing rooms, but they are complex, have “inner meanings and psychological depths,” and embark on epic voyages of “self-discovery.”⁹ For Siskin, Austen is as Romantic as William Wordsworth, because both share the idea that “the self [is] a mind that grows.”¹⁰

As Figure 0.2 shows, arguments like Lynch’s and Siskin’s have transformed the study of Romanticism. The graph shows the relative frequency of the words “Wordsworth,” “Byron” and “Austen” in a sample of 1000 literature articles about Romanticism downloaded from JSTOR Data for Research.¹¹ The data has been

Novel,” *Studies in the Novel* 26, no. 2 (1994): passim.

⁷ Ferber, 12.

⁸ René Wellek, “The Concept of ‘Romanticism’ in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism,” *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 2 (1949): 147.

⁹ Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 6, 17. Ironically, the sceptical Marilyn Butler makes just this kind of argument about Austen, and her forebear Maria Edgeworth, in Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 299.

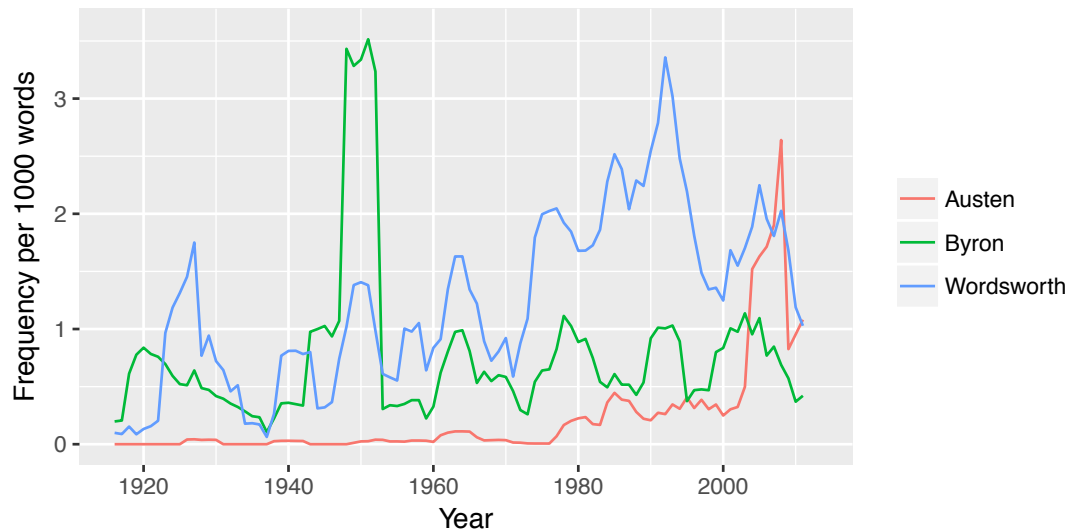
¹⁰ Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3. See also Clifford Siskin and William Warner, “If This Is Enlightenment Then What Is Romanticism?,” *European Romantic Review* 22, no. 3 (2011).

¹¹ The computer uses a *tf-idf* algorithm to determine which articles are about Romanticism. This stands for “term frequency-inverse document frequency.” It measures how distinctive a particular word is in a particular text. For instance, one article might use the term “romanticism” 20 times. This

smoothed with a five-year rolling window, meaning each point on the line represents the average of that year and the two either side. Though the JSTOR data can be messy, and simply counting the frequency of these three words has obvious problems,¹² the graph still gives a good overall picture.

Figure 0.2

Three Big Names in Romantic Literature



Source: JSTOR Data for Research, retrieved June 2015.

From the 1980s, Austen’s name has become far more frequent in discussions of Romanticism, sometimes even outstripping Byron’s and Wordsworth’s. Another trend is equally important: the divergence of Wordsworth’s and Byron’s names since the 1970s.¹³ At this time, the “Yale School” of Wordsworthian scholars were in

is the *term frequency*. In a massive corpus like JSTOR, however, perhaps only 1/1000 articles have the word “romanticism” in them. This is the *document frequency*. To calculate the *tf-idf* of “romanticism” in this particular article, you simply multiply the term frequency by the *inverse document frequency*: $20 \times 1000/1 = 20,000$. Since this article uses this rare word “romanticism” so many times, it must be important to the subject-matter. If the word “romanticism” appears among an article’s most distinctive words by *tf-idf*, then it is included in the sample. JSTOR’s metadata is not perfect, however, so some of the 1000 “articles” were removed from the sample—e.g. the annual bibliographies of the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, which are not actually articles, and significantly skewed the numbers.

¹² For instance, it will count mentions of “Wordsworth” even if the Wordsworths in question are Dorothy or Johnathan.

¹³ The large peak in the frequency of Byron’s name around 1950 is a statistical anomaly, caused by a single article that mentions Byron 216 times: Daniel G. Samuels, “Critical Appreciations of Byron in Spain (1900-1929),” *Hispanic Review* 18, no. 4 (1950).

ascendance. Since then, Wordsworth has been mentioned at least twice as often as Byron in articles about Romanticism, a ratio that persisted even when Wordsworth's frequency plummeted in the 1990s. His and Byron's names have also tended to move in lockstep, increasing and decreasing in frequency at the same time, suggesting that he and Byron are often mentioned alongside one another, the club-footed Lord a constant point of contrast to the philosophical Distributor of Stamps.

Byron has always held a strange place in the Romantic canon. He was undoubtedly a titanic figure in European Romanticism, yet British scholars from Maurice Bowra to Timothy Blanning have denied him full Romantic status.¹⁴ The problem is that self-deformation is his major preoccupation. If Wordsworth's poems and Austen's novels tend to portray the growth and development of the self, Byron's works tend to describe its decay:

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.¹⁵

Time misshapes Byron's characters, turning them into remorseful criminals like Manfred, Conrad or Lara. Or it erodes the self into nothing: "I steal | From all I may be, or have been before, | To mingle with the universe," he writes at the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) (251). In *Don Juan* (1819-24), he finds himself wondering whether he even exists:

'To be or not to be?' Ere I decide,
I should be glad to know that which is being.
'Tis true we speculate both far and wide
And deem because we see, we are all-seeing.

¹⁴ Maurice Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 149; Blanning, 167. See in particular Wellek's classic comment: Wellek, 165.

¹⁵ George Gordon Byron, Lord, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 101, ll. 9-12. All future reference to Byron's poetry will be to this edition, indicated by *BW* with a page number, and line numbers for shorter poems.

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For my part, I'll enlist on neither side
Until I see both sides for once agreeing.
For me, I sometimes think that life is death,
Rather than life a mere affair of breath. (771)

The Romanticism of self-deformation has always been something of an embarrassment for scholars who place Wordsworth, and now Austen, at the centre of the Romantic canon. They have developed various approaches to deal with it. The oldest solution is that of great nineteenth-century critics such as William Hazlitt and Matthew Arnold, who simply held that Byron was a lesser poet than Wordsworth because of his less perfect self-cultivation. Wordsworth forsook the world and took to nature, discovering in the humble affections of the heart a cure for the ills of civilisation. This was a great discovery, argued Hazlitt: "It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age."¹⁶ Byron also forsook the world, but in a different way: "By hating and despising others, he does not learn to be satisfied with himself."¹⁷ His poetry was thus a giant self-falsification: "he sets up for what he is not."¹⁸ Arnold made a similar point: "The way out of the false state of things which enraged him he did not see,—the slow and laborious way upward; he had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue, requisite for seeing it."¹⁹ Byron deformed himself, and in so doing, deformed his poetry.

In the twentieth century, a different approach became more popular. According to this approach, Byron and his kin espoused a kind of "negative"²⁰ or "secondary"²¹ Romanticism. Byron's greatest poems are "parodies of the Romantic

¹⁶ William Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth," in William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works*, 21 vols. (London and Toronto: Dent, 1930-1934), XI.87.

¹⁷ "Lord Byron," in *ibid.*, XI.77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1888), 198.

²⁰ Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," *PMLA* 66, no. 2 (1951), 14-15.

²¹ McGann, 107-18; Roger Cardinal, "Romantic Travel," in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 150.

completed quest,” as Northrop Frye put it.²² For critics of this school, the Romanticism of self-formation remained central, and the Romanticism of self-deformation was best understood as a sceptical movement of writers who questioned the core tenets of the Romantic faith. Perversely, this meant that texts of self-deformation helped to prove that self-formation was central to Romanticism: for Stuart Curran, Percy Shelley’s *Alastor* (1816) demonstrates that in Romanticism “the quest is always for a completed self,” even though the quest in that poem ends in self-destruction.²³ A closely related approach was to study the Romanticism of self-deformation under another heading, the Gothic. In Robert Miles’s influential definition, the Gothic is essentially “a series of ... forms, devices, codes, figurations, for the expression of the ‘fragmented subject’.”²⁴ Thus the healthy Romantic self could be insulated from the pathological Gothic one.

Recently, a third, more flexible approach has taken hold, stressing that there was no single idea of self-formation in Romantic Britain. In a series of books on Romantic conceptions of the mind, Alan Richardson revealed the sheer variety of Romantic-era ideas about human development. It may be true to say that the idea of “mental growth” defined the “romantic ethos,” but the nature of growth was hotly debated in the period—there were, for instance, at least seven competing views about how children become adults.²⁵ Andrea Henderson tackles the “depth model” of Romantic subjectivity head-on, showing how Walter Scott, Ann Radcliffe, Percy Shelley, Byron, and even Wordsworth explored different kinds of selves in their writing, shallow selves without mysterious inner depths pushing them on to grow.

²² Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism*, 59.

²³ Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 148.

²⁴ Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing, 1750-1830: A Genealogy*, 2nd ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 3.

²⁵ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6, 11-12.

She concludes that it is impossible to provide “any monolithic account of Romantic subjectivity.”²⁶ Michael Gamer, meanwhile, has shown how thoroughly “Gothicised” even the most quintessentially Romantic writers of the period were.²⁷ Nonetheless, although all three of these writers argue for a more flexible approach, they all still use the term “Romantic” to refer to the classic ideal of Romantic self-formation, and see it as the dominant ideal of the period.²⁸

All of these approaches push texts of self-deformation to the margins of the Romantic canon. Such texts are at best rare and different, at worst ugly and imperfect. I take a different approach. How would Romanticism look if we put the loners and misfits at the centre of it? How would we understand the Romantic self if we focussed on examples of its collapse? Such questions have been posed before. When “les romantiques” began to flex their muscles in the Paris of the 1820s, M. Auger, director of the Académie Française, knew what they threatened:

Ayez horreur de cette littérature de cannibales, qui se repaît de lambeaux de chair humaine, et s’abreuve du sang de femmes et des enfants ; elle ferait calomnier votre cœur, sans donner une meilleure idée de votre esprit. Ayez horreur ; avant tout, de cette poésie misanthropique, ou plutôt infernale, qui semble avoir reçu sa mission de Satan même, pour pousser au crime, en le montrant toujours sublime et triomphant ; pour dégouter et décourager la vertu, en la peignant toujours faible, pusillanime et opprimée.²⁹

²⁶ Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166. Jacques Khalip takes a similar approach in *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

²⁷ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Fred Botting tries to break down the distinction between “gothic” and “romance” in *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9-10, 19-21.

²⁸ In Gamer’s defence, he argues that the canonical Romantics invented the distinction between Gothicism and Romanticism themselves, to buttress their reputations: *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*, chap. 1. His argument is obviously indebted to McGann’s.

²⁹ “Recoil from this literature of cannibals, which feeds on ribbons of human flesh, and drinks the blood of women and children; it would calumniate your heart, without giving a greater idea to your spirit. Recoil, first of all, from this misanthropic, or better, infernal poetry, that seems to have received its mission from Satan himself, to encourage crime by showing it always as sublime and triumphant, to disgust and discourage virtue by portraying it always as feeble, pusillanimous, and

According to Auger, the Romantics promoted a vision of self-deformation. They saw the heart as a reservoir of satanic passions that tear apart the body and render virtue weak. Auger found this vision of humankind's inherent deformity repulsive, and he found the Romantic style repulsive too, when it brought the old rules of neoclassical decorum crashing down. A century later, T. E. Hulme calumniated Romanticism on different grounds:

They had been taught by Rousseau that man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. ... Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress.³⁰

Hulme had a different conception of Romantic self-deformation. The Romantics were all naïve Rousseauans, who blamed society for the deformity of the self. Although he disagreed with Auger about the nature of Romantic self-deformation, he agreed about the remedy: Romantic poetry, disordered, explosive and free, needed to be reduced to a more harmonious and civilised form by a sense of classical order.

It is not only Romanticism's enemies who have seen self-deformation as its core feature. In *The Romantic Agony* (1933), Mario Praz argues that the "essence of Romanticism" is the attempt to describe "that which cannot be described."³¹ To express the inexpressible is of course futile, and it is this inevitable failure that leads to the agony of the Romantics, to their obsession with "the uncontrolled, the macabre, the terrible, the strange."³² Hannah Arendt argues that the Romantics

oppressed." "Le manifeste d'Auger contre le romantisme," in Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, ed. Bernard Leuillot (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994), 123.

³⁰ T. E. Hulme, *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 61.

³¹ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

believed in a formless self. Their “unlimited idolization of the ‘personality’” made personal identity essentially arbitrary,³³ and led to their “morbid lust for the exotic, abnormal, and different as such.”³⁴ In his history of the modern self, Roy Porter agrees with Praz and Arendt that the Romantic yearning for a more perfect self contains the seeds of its own demise:

Romanticism dramatised the struggles of the individual – typically male – portrayed as forming and forging himself over and against the oppressions of power and the stale conventions and numbing constraints of polite society. The Romantic psyche declared war upon the ‘world’ as colloquially understood, and also grappled with its own lower elements. Inner conflict, self-destructiveness even, were integral to the Romantic agony.³⁵

These writers raise three deep unanswered questions about self-deformation in Romantic literature. First, what did the Romantics think were the nature and causes of self-deformation? Was it society that deformed people, or dark inner passions? Second, what was the Romantic attitude towards deformed selves? Did they find all self-deformity repulsive, or were there kinds of self-deformity they advocated? Third, what was the relationship between the deformity of the Romantic self and the forms of Romantic writing? Were Auger and Hulme right to see a link between the Romantics’ rejection of neoclassical formal conventions and their interest in the oppression or monstrosity of the self?

A good starting-point for answering these questions is *Frankenstein* (1818), one of the archetypal texts of Romantic self-deformation. Mary Shelley presents two main paradigms of self-deformation in the novel. Victor is the victim of “enthusiastic frenzy,”³⁶ driven by solitude and quixotic scholarship into the dark byways of the

³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev. ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 168.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁵ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 448.

³⁶ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, 3 vols. (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones, 1818), I.39.

mind. He gives his passion flesh in the form of his Creature, and it destroys him. The Creature himself is the victim of society, “spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on,”³⁷ reduced to a vicious nothing by an unjust social order. Shelley’s attitude towards self-deformation is complex. Both Victor and his Creature display the moral ambiguity of her friend Byron’s great antiheroes, being simultaneously sympathetic and terrible in their deformity. And the novel they star in is as deformed as they, with three narrators vying for moral authority, their narratives stitched together like the hewn members of the Creature’s body. In this the book resembles the first great classic of Romantic self-deformation, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), an epistolary novel whose stream of letters is brought to an abrupt end by the protagonist’s madness and death, requiring the intervention of a humble “editor” to try and sort out the mess.

In each chapter that follows, I consider a different genre of Romantic writing. I show how nearly every major Romantic genre has been defined in terms of self-formation, and present texts of self-deformation which challenge these definitions. In Chapter 1, on philosophy, I lay the groundwork for this analysis, defining the key concepts of “self” and “form.” I trace different ideas about self-deformation through eighteenth-century philosophy, showing how thinkers from Mary Astell to Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed a range of theories about how the self can be deformed, and how these theories were taken up by Romantic writers. I conclude by considering how prominent British Romantic philosophers understood the process of self-deformation. In Chapter 2, on fiction, I compare two realist novels from the period, Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Vivian* (1812). Romantic novels are usually understood as *Bildungsromane* or historical

³⁷ Ibid., III.189.

novels, whose protagonists grow into marriage, reconciling their personal aspirations with their social duties, healing the rifts in their evolving societies. Opie and Edgeworth bring this ideal into doubt, Opie by revealing the tragic contradictions of feminist rebellion, and Edgeworth by portraying a morally weak hero overborne by vicious social conventions. In Chapter 3, on poetry, I compare the sonnets of Charlotte Smith and John Clare, which have obtained classic status while also being seen as dubious examples of the Romantic sonnet. In our Wordsworth-centred histories, the Romantic sonnet is defined in terms of organic unity. The concise form of the sonnet mimics a moment of self-formation in the poet's consciousness. Smith's harsh sonnets, with their brutal twists, and Clare's mystical sonnets, with their blurred edges, both break this model apart. In Chapter 4, on life-writing, I consider Thomas Moore's monumental *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, With Notices of his Life* (1830-31). Romantic biographies are often derided for their massive size and lack of proportion. Moore turns these supposed weaknesses of Romantic biography into strengths, using his mass of detail to present a coherent account of Byron as a "multiform" personality, whose character was deformed by alienation from society even as his titanic genius shattered social conventions. Finally, in Chapter 5, on drama, I turn to Gothic tragedy, comparing Charles Harpur's *The Bushrangers* (1853, orig. 1835) to Joanna Baillie's *Orra* (1812) and *The Dream* (1812). Anglo-American scholars have often argued that the Romantics were too optimistic to write tragedy, even though tragedy is seen as the central Romantic genre in other European literatures. Close analysis reveals that Harpur and Baillie's plays, in spite of their popular Gothic conventions, are thrilling explorations of the deepest metaphysical aspects of the Romantic self.

In each chapter, I use digital methods to quantify and visualise the form of the texts. Franco Moretti suggests that methods like this have two key advantages. First, by transforming a text into numbers and graphs, we can reveal subtle patterns not visible to the naked eye of the reader.³⁸ Sentiment analysis reveals the latent plot structure of Moore’s massive and unwieldy biography. Character network analysis reveals hidden patterns in the way Harpur and Baillie’s characters interact. By examining the often unexpected output of an algorithm, we are forced to rethink our understanding of the structure of the text. Second, since computers can process large numbers with ease, when we turn texts into data we can conduct large-scale analysis, or so-called “distant reading.”³⁹ Collocation analysis reveals the shared vocabulary of self-formation in 50 or so realist novels of the Romantic period, and allows us to drill down to see how Opie and Edgeworth used this vocabulary in comparison with their contemporaries. Meanwhile, text analysis shows how differently Clare, Smith and Wordsworth handled couplets, alexandrines or keywords like “I” to shape their sonnets. Distant reading can help us determine what is typical and what is atypical about the way these texts are formed.

Since these texts challenge our received definitions of Romantic genres, they give us the chance to redefine them. Opie and Edgeworth’s novels lack the optimistic plot arc of the classical *Bildungsroman*, but draw on many of the same motifs,

³⁸ Or, as Moretti puts it, we create an “abstract” model of the text which “will possess ‘emerging’ qualities, which were not visible at the lower level.” Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 53. See also McCarty’s discussion of “interactive modelling” in Willard McCarty, *Humanities Computing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), chap. 1, Stephen Ramsay’s discussion of “algorithmic criticism” in Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Towards and Algorithmic Criticism* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), passim, and Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuel’s essay on “Deformance and Interpretation,” in Jerome J McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), chap. 4.

³⁹ Moretti’s most famous version of this argument was a Faustian provocation: “... what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let’s learn how *not* to read them.” Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 48.

themes, and vocabulary, twisting or adding to them in original ways. Instead of defining the *Bildungsroman* by its plot, we could define it by its main concerns: history, freedom, privacy. Seen in this way, *Adeline Mowbray* and *Vivian* are not ugly or boring, but instead enrich our sense of the possibilities of this venerable genre. Conversely, Gothic tragedy is typically defined by a narrow set of clichéd Gothic motifs, but when seen in the broader context of Romantic self-deformation, it becomes clear that Gothic tragedy raises some of the deepest possible questions about the nature of the self. Perhaps we find these plays bombastic or overblown because these questions are so frightening.

These texts don't just raise literary issues, about what kind of books the Romantics wrote. They also raise deep and pertinent questions about the fragility of our personal identity. The dichotomy of Victor and his Creature, of the arrogant individual deformed from within, and the stigmatised victim deformed from without, recurs again and again in these texts. But because these texts all draw on different generic conventions to explore these issues, they explore them in very different ways. Opie and Edgeworth explore the fragility of the social self, the self of work and love and friendship. Smith and Clare explore the fragility of the natural self, the self of meditation and introspection. Moore explores the fragility of the historical self, the real person who has to grapple with the particular circumstances of his world and his epoch. Baillie and Harpur explore the fragility of a self that many claim no longer exists in the modern world—the metaphysical self, the soul caught on the threshold of another world. These texts confront us with a sad and difficult image of our nature. It is my aim to describe and to understand this image.

CHAPTER 1

PHILOSOPHY: SELF- DEFORMATION IN EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY THOUGHT



THE SELF—or the soul, as it once was known—is one of the most intractable problems in world philosophy. There are those for whom the self is the central concept of human life, and those who contend that the self does not exist. There are those for whom the self is singular, indivisible, and irreducible, and those for whom it is a compound of different traits, ideas and activities all stuffed into the same container of the body. There are those who think the soul more valuable than the body, those who think “the soul is the prison of the body,”¹ and those who think there is no distinction between soul and body at all. Into this hazy realm of dispute and confusion steps Anna Barbauld with her habitual clarity of thought and imagery:

Life! I know not what thou art,
But know that thou and I must part;
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.
But this I know, when thou art fled,
Where'er they lay these limbs, this head,
No clod so valueless shall be,
As all that then remains of me.
O whither, whither dost thou fly,
Where bend unseen thy trackless course,

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Allan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 30.

SELF-DEFORMATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THOUGHT

And in this strange divorce,
Ah tell where I must seek this compound I?²

The poem may seem at first glance to be a common-sense musing on the mystery of death. But it is really a thoughtful inquiry into the form of the self, into the nature of “this compound I.” Barbauld finds that when she contemplates death she runs not simply into ignorance but into paradox. Are she and her Life one and the same entity, or are they two different ones? At first the answer seems simple. Life and she are “thou and I,” and at death these two friends will “part.” Life (“thou”) will “fly” away, leaving “these limbs, this head” (“me”) behind. But as the poem continues, the pronouns start to become confused. In the final line of the first stanza, “I” takes on two contradictory meanings. The first “I” is Barbauld, addressing “Life,” but the second is “this compound I,” a mysterious unity that is her and her Life in one. In the next stanza, “thou” becomes equally confused:

Yet canst thou without thought or feeling be?
O say what art thou, when no more thou’rt thee?³

Life is now “thought or feeling”—that is, it is the very mind or consciousness that is asking these questions. It becomes difficult to distinguish the poem’s “I” from its “thee.” When Barbauld dies, her Life will cease to be itself because she will cease to think. But does this not imply she *is* her Life? Who is addressing whom when Barbauld asks “what art thou”?

Barbauld neatly illustrates the connection between the two key concepts of this study, “self” and “form.” In this little poem, she attempts to discern the form of her self. How does it fit together? What are its components, and what makes them into a single entity? She fails to answer these questions. Her self is deformed, in the

² Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Works*, ed. Lucy Aikin, 2 vols. (London: Longman et al, 1825), 1.262.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.263.

sense that it has no form, or at least none she can know. There is a link between this self-deformity and the form of Barbauld's poem. The poem is structured around a series of apostrophes to "Life," but as we have seen, these apostrophes become paradoxical when Barbauld fails to sort out what "I" and "thou" mean. A tortured and confused form of poetic language corresponds to this tortured and confused form of self. In the end, Barbauld tires of self-inquiry, and resigns herself to ignorance. "Choose thine own time," she tells Life, and hopes for a pleasant death. Coleridge reaches an analogous conclusion in "E Caelo Descendit, Γνωθι Σεαυτον:"

What hast thou, Man, that thou dar'st call thine own?—
 What is there in thee, Man, that can be known?—
 Dark fluxion, all unfixable by thought,
 A phantom dim of past and future wrought,
 Vain sister of the worm,—life, death, soul, clod—
 Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God!⁴

We may want the self to have a form, but it is "unfixable." And again this sense of deformed selfhood results in an intriguingly deformed poem. Coleridge describes the self in visceral detail, its "fluxion," its "phantom," its vulnerability to the "worm" in the grave—and then abruptly tells us to "ignore" everything he has just written.

Barbauld and Coleridge may be surprised to learn that in fact they and their contemporaries developed a coherent account of the form and significance of the self. In his influential *Sources of the Self* (1989), Charles Taylor argues that three strands came together in eighteenth-century literature and philosophy to create the "modern identity:" (1) the discovery of "inner depths" in the human mind, (2) the "affirmation of ordinary life" and (3) the idea of "nature as a source" of meaning. These three strands, he claims, were apparent in the writings of the "philosophical

⁴ The title is from Juvenal, and means "It came from heaven, 'Know thyself.'" Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 16 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971-2001), XVI.1154. All future references to Coleridge will be to this edition, indicated by the abbreviation *CW*.

and spiritual elite” of Western Europe by the beginning of the eighteenth century,⁵ and reached their culmination in “the expressivist turn” of the Romantic period at its end.⁶ In *The Making of the Modern Self* (2006), Dror Wahrman comes to a similar conclusion. The eighteenth century had a playful attitude towards selfhood, when suddenly, in the 1780s, ideas about the self became “essentialised.”⁷ The eighteenth century had felt there were flexible and blurry boundaries between genders, races, classes and sexualities. Now these boundaries hardened and became set in stone. The idea arose that we each have an inner, true self, a “stable inner core of meaning.”⁸ Jerrold Seigel focusses less on the deep aspects of the modern self, and more on the developmental ones. In the past, people viewed the self as a “cosmic given,” a soul implanted in the body from birth; but modern thinkers believe that people must “participate in forming their selves.”⁹ Roy Porter agrees. The soul was “naturalised” by the end of the eighteenth century, being replaced by the concept of the mind.¹⁰ The link between soul and body had hitherto been a hot topic, but now it was irrelevant because only the mind mattered: “In many departments of life, emphasis was shifted from the physical to the psychological. The true object of the perfection of man became the cultivation of mind or sensibility.”¹¹

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 185.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 21.

⁷ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), see especially chap. 6. Among others, Lionel Trilling and Deidre Lynch make similar points, Trilling with his argument that Romanticism replaced an older ideal of “sincerity” with a new ideal of “authenticity,” Lynch with her argument that Romantic novelists replaced the older “typographical” style of characterisation with one based on representing the “inner depths” of their fictional creations: Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); Lynch, *Economy of Character*, esp. 5-6.

⁸ Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 161.

⁹ Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43.

¹⁰ Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 471. See also Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), esp. chap. 5.

¹¹ Porter, 472. See also *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2000), 70-71.

A shadow lies on all these scholars, the shadow of Michel Foucault. In several of his works, but most particularly in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault challenged the classic liberal interpretation of Romantic or Enlightenment culture. He argued that there was indeed a decisive break between the “Classic” mode of selfhood which predominated at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the “Modern” mode of selfhood which predominated by the end. Taylor, Wahrman and Seigel all take issue with Foucault in various ways, because all three argue that in some way the modern self is free.¹² Indeed, the ability to form or make yourself in accordance with your inner natural impulses can seem to be the very definition of freedom. In *Discipline and Punish*, however, Foucault argues that this new ability to make ourselves is not a liberation, but a new kind of enslavement. Romantic self-making is really a kind of “discipline,” a “specific technique of power” by which society dominates people.¹³ Romantics may dream they are turning themselves into free “individuals,” but really the “individual” is a “fictitious atom” fabricated by society.¹⁴ Romantics may promote individualism and the free development of personality, but really self-formation “normalises” people, making everybody conform to a prefabricated model of the properly-formed person.¹⁵ These disagreements about the moral value of Romantic self-formation mask a deeper agreement, however. Both Foucault and his liberal opponents agree that there was a great shift in ideas of the self sometime in the eighteenth century. Gone was the idea that the individual was defined by their position in a social or cosmic hierarchy, and in was the new idea that each person was an individual, with their own mind that could develop in its own way.

¹² See especially Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (1984).

¹³ *Discipline and Punish*, 170.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 194.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 183.

Thus we arrive at the classic notion of the form of the Romantic self. The self is the mind, and it is part of nature. It is structured according to two principles: depth and development. Your identity is a secret, spontaneous impulse hidden deep within you, and it is something won, through the struggle to form yourself. You should make this struggle because your earthly happiness depends on it, not because it will get you into heaven. And since your self is natural, and nature is good, the proper attitude is to affirm, celebrate, and express your self once you have successfully found it. For many of these scholars, Wahrman and Foucault in particular, there was a hard break somewhere at the end of the eighteenth century, when suddenly the old views of the self were replaced with this new one. We will see whether such a hard break occurred in ideas about self-deformation.

It was not only the self that the Romantics interpreted as a natural, rooted, growing thing. They “interpret[ed] ... everything as being only a stage of some further development,” argues Arendt.¹⁶ She cites Marxist economics and Darwinian biology as examples. Foucault agrees, adding the third example of linguistics.¹⁷ Erich Auerbach claims that “historism” is the defining feature of Romantic discourse,¹⁸ and scholars continue to demonstrate that things like childbirth,¹⁹ life,²⁰ and aesthetics²¹ all came to be viewed in historicist or developmental terms during the

¹⁶ Arendt, 464.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002). Hans Aarsleff also argues that the Romantics historicised linguistics in *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), esp. 127ff.

¹⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 17. See also James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Henderson, chap. 1.

²⁰ Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

²¹ Nicholas Halmi, “Romanticism, the Temporalization of History, and the Historicization of Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 74 (2013).

period. It was an age, it seems, when everyone felt that everything was changing through time, and they simply extended this feeling of change to the self.

This theory of self-formation would seem to imply a certain theory of self-deformation.²² A person might fail to discover their inner depths, or they may succeed, but find something repulsive at their core instead of attractive. A person's self-cultivation might be stunted, or go in the wrong direction and lead to a malformed rather than a well-formed self. But our standard histories of the self do not describe this implicit theory of self-deformation in any great detail. This is not surprising. Our language lacks obvious antonyms for "self-development," "self-cultivation" or "self-formation," hence my introduction of the neologism "self-deformation."²³ It is difficult to tell the history of something for which we have no name.

This points to a deeper philosophical problem with the notion of form itself. When we describe the form of something, we nearly always describe that form as a positive ideal. Plato held that the form of a thing is what defines it—something is beautiful because it "shares in" Beauty²⁴—but this form is also a perfect ideal to which particular things can only aspire. Aristotle also held that a thing's form is its "essence," and stressed that an essential part of each form's definition is its purpose.²⁵ The self is the form of the person. It is what makes a person a person, as

²² As Erving Goffman puts it: "... identity norms breed deviations as well as conformance." Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin, 1963), 154.

²³ The situation is better in German, where the common word for self-formation, *Bildung*, has an obvious antonym, *Verbildung*. See Chapter 2.

²⁴ Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2002), 137.

²⁵ Aristotle's most famous statement of this doctrine is in Book 2 of his *Physics*: Aristotle, *Physics, Books I and II*, trans. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 28-29. The equivalence of form and function permeates his whole philosophy, however. Caroline Levine has brilliantly revived an Aristotelian account of form with her notion of "affordances." A form is a particular way of organising things so that they "afford" certain capabilities. Shaping metal into a screw, for example, affords the ability to affix one piece of wood to another. See Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), chap. 1.

opposed to a tree, and what makes this person *this* person, rather than another one. The self is an ideal: each person ought to have one. It has a purpose: providing unity and meaning to our lives.²⁶ Now, we know that different cultures have understood selfhood differently. If we want to describe a particular culture's view of the self, it makes sense to do so by describing the ideal self against which people measured themselves in that time and place. This is exactly what Foucault, Taylor, Wahrman, Seigel and Porter have done. And it is what our literary historians do when they define Romantic literature as particular form of literature which portrays a particular form of self.

In what follows, I take a different approach. I survey some of the major eighteenth-century philosophers of self—John Locke, Mary Astell, David Hume, Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant—and compare their ideas about what makes the self fragile or malign. What did it mean to lack a self, or to have the wrong kind of self? What were the forces that could corrupt the self, or destroy it? In each case I demonstrate how these thinkers raised anxieties about deformed selfhood which continued to plague Romantic novelists and poets at the end of the century. In the final section of the chapter, I arrive at the Romantic period itself, and examine the range of ideas about self-deformation in the writings of Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Hazlitt. Seen this way, the self is not an ideal form but a set of anxieties about possible personal failures. Many of these anxieties persisted from the beginning of the century right into the Romantic period, suggesting there was no sudden revolution when a new kind of selfhood

²⁶ This even applies to those, like Buddha or Derek Parfit, who hold that the self doesn't actually exist. If there is actually no self, then ideally no-one would have a concept of their self, and it provides meaning to our lives by being denied.

emerged. And it becomes clear that great Romantic writers were not only inspired by a creed of self-affirmation, but also by fears of the malignity or fragility of the self.

1.1 Locke and Astell: When Reason Sleeps

For John Locke and Mary Astell, a person was essentially a rational creature. Locke imagined the self as consciousness. We are like roaming film cameras, our minds flooded with images from the outside world, and it is the task of reason to impose order and connect these images into a logical whole. If we form ourselves correctly, then we obtain absolute rational control of our own minds:²⁷

... at the last [a man] may have a full power over his own mind, and be so fully master of his own thoughts as to be able to transfer them from one subject to another, with the same ease that he can lay by anything he has in his hand, and take something else that he has a mind to in the room of it.²⁸

But everywhere he saw people whose understandings were ill-developed, and whose powers of mental control were weak. Astell saw the self as a soul, implanted by God with an innate “desire to advance and perfect its Being.”²⁹ We are like flowers, destined to unfold ourselves from the seed and drink the sunlight. But everywhere she saw women with “deformed Souls,”³⁰ who had failed to achieve the rational self-control, the “Empire of our Passions,” which God intended for them.³¹ Locke and Astell shared a conception of the deformed self: we are deformed if we are not governed by reason. But they had different ideas about the causes of self-deformation. Locke thought the only cure for self-deformation was wide experience and open-mindedness about the world. Astell thought worldly experience was the

²⁷ See Taylor on Locke’s ethic of “disengagement:” Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 166-67. See also Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, 91-92.

²⁸ John Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 259-60.

²⁹ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest. In Two Parts*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (London: Richard Wilkin, 1701), I.20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I.4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I.34.

most likely thing of all to denude one's reason, and promoted a monastic course of self-reflection.

Locke propounded most of his ideas about self-deformation in the posthumously published *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706). He had intended to make this work into Book V of his famous *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694), to illustrate how his abstruse philosophy applied to everyday life. *Conduct* is a self-help book, describing the errors people make when they think, and suggesting practical remedies. Astell described self-deformation at length in both of her major works: *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694-97) and *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700). These were feminist tracts, designed to describe the various causes of women's "non-Improvement" and to suggest a cure.³²

In *Conduct*, Locke lays out five major kinds of self-deformation. First, people can deform themselves by lacking "determined ideas."³³ Since all knowledge is simply "*the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas,*" if our ideas are unclear, we will be unable to connect them properly with our reason.³⁴ In the *Essay*, Locke describes many ways we can obtain woolly notions,³⁵ but the worst way of all is "the Association of *Ideas,*" which is indeed "a sort of Madness."³⁶ Such "Association" occurs when the mind incorrectly glues two or more ideas together, and reason is powerless to separate them. It is the main source of the prejudices that warp our judgment.³⁷ Locke worried that falsely associated ideas could proliferate among children and the ill-educated, maddening the population. In *Harrington* (1817), Maria Edgeworth

³² Ibid., 1.30.

³³ Locke, *Educational Writings*, 184.

³⁴ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 525.

³⁵ In Book II, Chap. 29, "Of Clear and Obscure, Distinct and Confused *Ideas.*" Ibid., 362-72.

³⁶ Ibid., 394-401. He discussed it again in the *Conduct: Educational Writings*, 252-54.

³⁷ *Educational Writings*, 205.

confronted just this fear, drawing on Locke to attack anti-Semitic stereotypes. Locke had used the example of a servant telling a child stories of “*Goblins and Sprights*,” which become so associated with the ideas of “Darkness and Light” in the child’s mind that they can never see a sunset without a shudder of fear.³⁸ This is exactly what happens to Harrington, when his nurse tries to put him to bed one night:

“If you don’t come quietly this minute, Master Harrington,” said she, “I’ll call to Simon the Jew there,” pointing to him, “and he shall come up and carry you away in his great bag.”

The old man’s eyes were upon me; to my fancy the look of his eyes and his whole face had changed in an instant. I was struck with terror—³⁹

Harrington’s false notions make him querulous and irrational, and they point to wider social ills. While the child Harrington is quivering at the mere sight of Jews, Parliament is passing anti-Semitic legislation. As an adult, when he has recovered his reason, he witnesses terrible anti-Semitic violence during the Gordon Riots. For Edgeworth as for Locke, prejudices can indeed be a kind of madness.

Astell also feared that prejudices weakened the power of reason, though her theory of their operation was different: prejudices “Contract our Souls and shorten our views, hinder the free range of our Thoughts and confine them only to that particular track which these have been taken; and in a word, erect a Tyranny over our free born Souls.”⁴⁰ Locke feared that prejudices trigger mad behaviour. Astell feared that they make people into dull non-entities, unable to perform anything beyond a narrow range of action. The final symptom of prejudice, for Astell, was cynicism. Once the victim of prejudice realises how hollow their ideas are, they are likely to conclude that all ideas are prejudices, and turn atheist.⁴¹ William

³⁸ *Essay*, 387-98.

³⁹ Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington, a Tale; and Ormond, a Tale*, 3 vols. (London: R. Hunter, 1817), I.3.

⁴⁰ Astell, *Serious Proposal*, II.41-42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II.42.

Wordsworth had similar anxieties, when he complained that “The world is too much with us,” that the bustling world of everyday opinion had made us “out of tune” with nature.⁴² Percy Shelley meanwhile condemned the “man of ease” who “confines | The struggling nature of his human heart” to the “bare fulfilment of the common laws | Of decency and prejudice ...”⁴³ For Astell, Shelley and Wordsworth, false ideas reduce, rather than enrage us.

Prejudice is not Astell’s greatest enemy, however. “Custom” was the real “Tyrant,” the “grand motive to all those irrational choices we daily see made in the World[.]”⁴⁴ It arises because of our natural tendency to imitate one another: “As Prejudice fetters the Understanding so does Custom manacle the Will, which scarce knows how to divert from a Track which the generality around it take, and to which it has it self been habituated.”⁴⁵ It is customary for men to flatter women that they are perfect and divine, for instance, and this saps women’s will to improve.⁴⁶ The dead hand of custom is everywhere in Romantic literature. It lies on the child in Wordsworth’s great ode: “Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly fright, | And custom like upon thee with a weight | Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!” (WW, 461) It lies on Mr and Mrs Elton in *Emma* (1816), and on Lady Clonbrony in *The Absentee* (1812), characters who are anxious simply to act as others do, and make themselves absurd.

Locke also feared the power of mere imitation. Some people are afflicted with “implicit faith” that leads them to “do and think according to the example of others”

⁴² William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 206. All future references to Wordsworth’s poetry will be to this edition, unless otherwise specified.

⁴³ *Queen Mab* v, ll. 103-07, in Percy Shelley, *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 780. All future references to Shelley’s poetry will be to this edition, indicated by SW.

⁴⁴ Astell, *Serious Proposal*, I.28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II.54.

⁴⁶ *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, 2nd ed. (London: Richard Wilkin, 1703), 23-24.

instead of deciding for themselves.⁴⁷ Locke's main example is the person of a "school," "party" or "sect," who implicitly believes that their team is the right one. Such people "perplex themselves with words, according to the way of speaking to the several schools or sects they have been bred up in," involving themselves in "endless dispute, wrangling, and jargon."⁴⁸ The canting party-man became a stock figure of Jacobin fiction in the 1790s, exemplified by figures like Dr Blick, "a man perfectly orthodox in matters of church and state."⁴⁹ Perhaps the classic Romantic example of a person deformed by imitated speech is Mary Bennet, from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), who is cramped and made shallow by the words she has absorbed from conduct books, applying sententious phrases with comic ineptitude to real situations. The brilliant satires of Thomas Love Peacock are filled with Dr Blinks and Mary Bennets. William Keach has also shown how Coleridge, Wordsworth and Percy Shelley shared Locke's anxiety about customary speech, fearing that it would make poetry impossible.⁵⁰ Custom remained a fearful adversary in the Romantic period.

Locke's third class of deformed self is the person who has clear enough ideas, but lacks "sagacity and exercise in finding out and laying in order intermediate ideas."⁵¹ Locke held that mental faculties are like muscles. We are all born with them, and if ours are weak it is simply due to lack of exercise.⁵² He criticised the idea of natural genius, and claimed that the dull-witted are usually deformed simply by lack of practice: "Many a good poetic vein is buried under a trade, and never

⁴⁷ Locke, *Educational Writings*, 184.

⁴⁸ *Essay*, 180.

⁴⁹ Robert Bage, *Hermsprong; or, Man as He Is Not*, 3 vols. (London: William Lane, 1796), 1.42.

⁵⁰ William Keach, "Romanticism and Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Hans Aarsleff, "Wordsworth, Language, and Romanticism," in *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (London: Athlone, 1982).

⁵¹ Locke, *Educational Writings*, 184.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 189-90.

produces anything for want of improvement.”⁵³ The eighteenth century gave rise to a cult of genius rather at odds with Locke’s notion. Labouring-class poets like Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley, Robert Burns and John Clare were celebrated as natural geniuses. James Beattie mythologised such poets in his influential *The Minstrel* (1771-74). But there was a contradiction at the heart of this cult, as Alan Richardson shows. Labouring-class poets were seen as intuitive and irrational, and their middle-class readers held that education, while bestowing them with reason, also destroyed the particular beauties of their primitive verse.⁵⁴ Locke’s notion of the ill-exercised mind survived in a more straightforward way in fiction—witness Mr Woodhouse, who “without activity of mind or body” has prematurely aged himself.⁵⁵ He is a rather different person from his active and intelligent daughter Emma. Astell agreed with Locke that many people deform themselves by failing to exercise their reason, though she also argued that a person’s individual “Genius” played a role in limiting the “Capacity of the Understanding.”⁵⁶

The self-deformation of ill-exercise was closely related to Locke’s fourth type of self-deformation: the self-deformation of narrow experience. A person may have great powers of reasoning, yet lack the “large, sound, roundabout sense,” of things that wide experience gives you.⁵⁷ Reasoning requires ideas, and for Locke ideas could only come from experience. The narrower the range of a person’s experience, therefore, the narrower their store of ideas and the poorer their thinking.⁵⁸ Locke

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵⁴ Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, 247-59. See also Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 57-58.

⁵⁵ Jane Austen, *Emma: A Novel*, 3 vols. (London: Murray, 1816), I.6.

⁵⁶ Astell, *Serious Proposal*, II.87.

⁵⁷ Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, 184.

⁵⁸ As Etienne Balibar puts it, Locke felt that the key activity of the mind was “to extend and increase the diversity of its perception of the world.” Etienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness*, trans. Warren Montag (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 54. Tuveson argues that while earlier Western philosophers had described knowledge as “an ascent into the spiritual realm,” Locke described it as “a movement in breadth rather than height.” Ernest

gives a range of examples, from the “day-labourer,” with his “small pittance of knowledge” at the bottom, to the truly wise and tolerant gentleman at the top.⁵⁹ Again, it may seem like later writers rejected Locke’s theory in favour of the cult of natural genius. But it is striking how the “natural” heroes of novels like Robert Bage’s *Hermesprong* (1796) and Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* (1796) gain their natural genius by extensive travel in Africa or the Americas, while their civilised adversaries never leave the sheltered confines of polite society. Likewise the wise peasants of Edgeworth, Walter Scott, Lady Morgan and Wordsworth are nearly always observed through the eyes of a better-travelled, more sophisticated consciousness. In *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge re-stated Locke’s arguments about ill-exercise and narrow experience with forceful concision:

... the rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of their cultivation, aims almost solely to convey *insulated facts*, either those of his scanty experience or his traditional belief; while the educated man chiefly seeks to discover and express those *connections* of things, or those relative *bearings* of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deducible. (*CW*, VII.52-53)

No amount of genius could make up for scanty experience or the imperfect development of the faculties.

Astell flatly contradicted Locke’s arguments about breadth of experience. The most important ideas came not from the senses, but from self-reflection. The real problem was that people have too much experience of the world. Obsessed with the ideas they derived from “sensation,” people were neglecting “those more excellent ones which arise from [the mind’s] own operations and a serious reflection on them, and which are necessary to correct the mistakes and supply the defects of

Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (New York: Gordian Press, 1974), 24.

⁵⁹ Locke, *Educational Writings*, 187-88.

[sensation].”⁶⁰ The world was busy, rushing people from place to place without giving them time for introspection, and dazzling them with appearances when they should be inquiring into the essence of things. Gothic writers would draw on this anxiety, in novels where appearances are deceptive and the senses delusive. As we will see in Chapter 5, Joanna Baillie’s *Orra* is driven incurably insane by the appearance of a man dressed as a ghost. Ann Radcliffe’s heroines also faint and tremble at sights and sounds they wrongly deem supernatural. The villain of James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), meanwhile, is driven to murder when he sees and hears a divine messenger command him to evil. For Locke, the active life of seeing the world was essential. For Astell, as for these Gothic writers, sound self-reflection was the only guard against the delusion of the senses.

Astell and Locke’s final fear was that passion would usurp reason. There are those, says Locke, “who put passion in the place of reason.”⁶¹ There was really no place for the emotions in Locke’s theory of mind, since for him the “mind” and the “understanding” were virtually synonymous.⁶² Passions came from somewhere else. They might motivate us, but they could also “[possess] the whole Mind,” and enslave us.⁶³ In the *Essay*, he gives a vivid example of a person whose mind is overborne: the “enthusiast,” whose “warmed or over-weening Brain” deceives them into thinking they are divinely inspired.⁶⁴ Such passionate people think they are “above” reason: “they see the Light infused into their Understandings, and cannot be mistaken.”⁶⁵ The “enthusiast” continued to worry writers throughout the Romantic

⁶⁰ Astell, *Serious Proposal*, 1.65-66.

⁶¹ Locke, *Educational Writings*, 184.

⁶² Balibar, 67-68; Tuveson, 54.

⁶³ Locke, *Essay*, 267; *Educational Writings*, 261-65.

⁶⁴ *Essay*, 699.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 700.

period. In her anti-Jacobin novel, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), Elizabeth Hamilton condemns Mr Myope's conversion to the "new philosophy" of the French Revolution as a species of "enthusiasm."⁶⁶ Meanwhile Victor Frankenstein is driven "by an almost supernatural enthusiasm,"⁶⁷ and the heroine of Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) is destroyed by her enthusiastic love for an uninterested man. As we will see in Chapter 5, enthusiastic passions blast the destinies of many a tragic hero on the Romantic stage, from Friedrich Schiller's Karl Moor and Baillie's Count Osterloo to Byron's Manfred and Adam Mickiewicz's Konrad.

In *Some Thoughts Upon Marriage*, Astell gives a different example of the slave of passion. The ill-educated Madam Mazarine is no enthusiast, but is rendered capricious and imprudent by her emotions:

Had Madam *Mazarine's* Education made a right improvement of her Wit and Sense, we should not have found her seeking Relief by such imprudent, not to say Scandalous Methods, as the running away in Disguise with a spruce Cavalier, and rambling to so many Courts and Places, nor diverting her self with such Childish, Ridiculous or Ill-natur'd Amusements, as the greatest part of the Adventures of her Memoirs are made up of.⁶⁸

The miserable, ill-educated woman, blown about on the winds of desire, seeking consolation in scandal and riot, remained a crucial figure at the end of the century. The unreformed Lady Delacour, from Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), is a particularly resplendent example. She has her own "spruce Cavalier" to run away with, and is fond of such "Ill-natur'd Amusements" as duelling, visiting quack doctors, and purloining poor gardeners' precious aloes.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 3 vols. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1800), i.331-34. She presents this as the logical consequence of his prior religious enthusiasm.

⁶⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1.82.

⁶⁸ Astell, *Reflections*, 5.

For Locke and Astell, the self was essentially the understanding. We are born with the power of reason, and we deform ourselves when we fail to exercise and expand this power, allowing half-baked ideas or mere emotions to govern our actions. The world is populated by thoughtless peasants, flattered women, sectarian men, violent enthusiasts and cynical atheists who have failed to realise their innate capabilities. Locke thought the main problem was that people lacked an active life of broad experience. Astell thought the main problem was that people lacked a contemplative life of self-examination. But their anxieties were fundamentally similar, and Romantic writers continued to worry about weakness of the understanding even as reason ceased to be the uncontested emperor of the self. By then, a new generation of philosophers, who believed in the “centrality of sentiment and pathos,” had contributed a new set of anxieties.⁶⁹ Locke and Astell, for all their fears, had felt that the self was simple, indivisible, and innate. We all had reason and self-reflection, and self-formation was simply a matter of realising what we are already capable of doing. For the new philosophers, the very idea of an integral self, governed by any conscious faculty, would begin to seem like a vanishing dream.

1.2 Hume and Smith: When the Wolf Eats the Dove

For David Hume and Adam Smith, a person was essentially a creature of emotion. Unlike reason, which is singular and binds things together, emotions are diffuse and contradictory. Neither Hume nor Smith was fully convinced that we have a singular self. For Hume, the self was a sea of thoughts and feelings on which the boat of reason tossed. When he looked within, he could never “catch” his self, but only a “bundle or collection of different perceptions.”⁷⁰ For Smith, the self was a hall of

⁶⁹ Todd, *Sensibility*, 3.

⁷⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 252.

mirrors, in which we see our own feelings reflected in the feelings of other people, and begin to develop an image of who we are. The self was accordingly split: “When I endeavour to examine my own conduct ... I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and ... I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of.”⁷¹ Astell and Locke had seen the self as integral and individual. For Hume and Smith, the self was porous. Humans were social creatures, bound to one another by the feelings that rushed between them.

Hume and Smith were therefore optimists about human nature. Benevolence was an inherent part of our being. There is “some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and serpent,” wrote Hume.⁷² Smith, meanwhile, was sure “that man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made.”⁷³ Even the most selfish person feels the tug of sympathy.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, there were forces that they feared could pervert our natural social impulses. Three of these forces were anti-social behaviour, self-love, and the structure of society itself.

For the sociable Hume and Smith, solitude was a sure road to self-deformation. Smith feared that solitude only led to melancholy self-loathing:

Are you in adversity? Do not mourn in the darkness of solitude, do not regulate your sorrow according to the indulgent sympathy of your intimate friends; return, as soon as possible, to the daylight of the world and of society.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), 135-36.

⁷² David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3 ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 271.

⁷³ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 103.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

Hume agreed. In a marvellous passage from *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), he introduced a classic example of solitary self-deformation, the monk:

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. ... A gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in the calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself.⁷⁶

Like Astell and Locke, Hume and Smith recalled the religious violence of the seventeenth century with dread, and thought enthusiasm was largely to blame. But they had a new conception of the problem. Astell had thought that the passions must be controlled, and had advocated a monastery in which women might learn to deny them. Locke had thought that enthusiasm was due to excessive self-affirmation, the "Conceit" of an "over-weening brain." For Hume and Smith it was not the indulgence of feelings which led to dangerous enthusiasm, but the denial of them. The fanatic was deformed not by conceit but by "humility."

Readers of Gothic fiction must find Hume's description familiar. There are only too many self-denying, self-mortifying monks driven to fanaticism in classic Gothic novels: the self-loathing Father Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1795) was perhaps the most infamous example. Ambrosio himself argues that "Man was born for society," and condemns the misanthropic "Hermit," who "buries himself in the cavern of some gloomy rock."⁷⁷ He is joined by Father Schedoni, from

⁷⁶ Hume, *Enquiries*, 270.

⁷⁷ Matthew Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance*, 2 ed., 3 vols. (London: J. Bell, 1796), i.96.

The Italian (1796), the evil monks who oppress Alonzo Monçada in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), and the hypocritical bishop Hexulf in Joanna Baillie's play *Ethwald* (1802). Looking further afield, we can find a similar image in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head* (1807), where she imagines the defeated Spanish "wrapp'd in Superstition's monkish weed."⁷⁸ William Blake, meanwhile, castigated monkish self-denial throughout his writings, from the "Priests in Black Gowns" in "The Garden of Love" (1789), who are "binding with briars, my joys & desires," through to Theotormon, in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), who sits alone on a "desart shore" weeping in jealousy and "hypocrite modesty."⁷⁹ (It is surprising to find Blake agreeing with Hume on this front. Elsewhere he condemned Hume's "all-unhinging wit," and could not conceive "how a Monk or a Methodist either, can be a Hypocrite.")⁸⁰ If our feelings are fundamentally good and social, as Hume and Smith suppose, we deform ourselves to deny them in solitude. As the century wore on, arguments like this became more persuasive, until in the Romantic period, a certain kind of enthusiast was seen as virtuous. Even the conservative Elizabeth Hamilton, who had condemned left-wing enthusiasm in her character of Mr Myope, wrote that there was a second kind of enthusiasm, "born of reason and directed by judgment," which is "noble, discriminating, and effective."⁸¹

The second force of self-deformation in Hume and Smith is selfishness. This was a complex area of their thought, for they both famously held that certain kinds of self-interest were good and important. As Smith explained, we only sympathise with others because we understand their self-interest, and when we feel self-

⁷⁸ Charlotte Smith, *The Poems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 223. All future references to Smith's poetry will be to this edition, indicated by the abbreviation *SP*.

⁷⁹ William Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, newly revised ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 26, 46, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 595, 201.

⁸¹ Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 1.332.

interest, we likewise crave their sympathy.⁸² Nonetheless, both Hume and Smith imagined that self-interest (or “self-love”) could overcome sympathy, and stunt moral development. Smith gives a surprising example in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), which is usually remembered as a defence of selfish individualism. The merchant class, he claims, is driven by the “spirit of monopoly,” the desire to acquire wealth by squeezing out their competitors. For Smith, this spirit was the source of Britain’s protectionist trade system, with its bounties, drawbacks, tariffs and embargos, as well as the mercantilist theory of political economy that justified it.⁸³ He contrasts Merchants with “Country gentlemen, and farmers [who] are, to their great honour, of all people the least subject to the wretched spirit of monopoly.”⁸⁴ Merchants are rootless traders chasing gold across the seas, heedless of the people they trample. Farmers, rooted to their land and countrymen, are less likely to lose their innate sociable instincts. Smith was reviving an ancient idea about the virtues of rural life, but one that was absent from Astell and Locke’s more individualistic outlook.⁸⁵ The narrow-minded city-dweller, deformed by their self-interest, was a staple of Romantic fiction and poetry. The Crawfords in *Mansfield Park* (1814) and Jason Quirk in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) betray family ties and the agrarian social order under the influence of the new selfish ideology. Wordsworth also excoriated the commercial worldview: “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers” (*WW*, 206). Hume and Smith’s moral psychology gave a sound philosophical basis to this old fear of heartless urban life.

⁸² Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 27. See also Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 141.

⁸³ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776), II.83. See also Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 153-54.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, II.42.

⁸⁵ Raymond Williams traces this notion back to the pastoral poetry of antiquity in *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973).

The final key force of self-deformation in Hume and Smith is the social order. Since we are inherently social, we will absorb whatever is good or whatever is evil in the atmosphere of society. Hume suggested that societies achieve their greatest culture and science when the right “spirit” is “diffused throughout the people.” This spirit is not “supernatural.” It is a feeling, “caught from one breast to another.”⁸⁶ A free and lawful society is essential to the diffusion of such a spirit: “From law arises security; from security curiosity; and from curiosity knowledge.”⁸⁷ By making us insecure, therefore, a tyrannical government inevitably debases us all. Smith made a similar argument about economic inequality. Smith showed how “wealth and greatness” could delude the mind into thinking wealth was happiness, and pervert our moral instincts.⁸⁸ At the other end of the scale, he argued that the increasing division of labour would degrade the minds of the labouring classes if they were not educated: a labourer reduced to one or two simple tasks in a factory “generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.”⁸⁹ Locke and Astell had commented on how fashions and customs might pervert us, but Hume and Smith took a sociological approach. Each society had an overarching order, a particular spirit or structure, and had predictable—often negative—effects on the cultivation of each individual’s moral sensibility. Romantic novels like *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) painted a vivid picture of a malign social order twisting and perverting good human nature. Society in these novels is represented as a giant prison enforcing an unjust law, imagery Beethoven would draw on in his liberal opera *Fidelio* (1805). Less radically, the novels of Sir Walter Scott are littered with figures like Flora MacIvor and Rob Roy who, however

⁸⁶ “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” in David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 115.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 70-71, 74.

⁸⁹ *Wealth of Nations*, II.366.

admirable they are, have been formed under an antiquated social order and are unfit for the new conditions of life. As we will see in Chapter 2, the risk of social self-deformation was perhaps the major anxiety of realist novelists in the Romantic period. It was thinkers like Smith, Hume and their contemporaries Montesquieu and Adam Ferguson who provided the theoretical basis for this anxiety.⁹⁰

Smith and Hume were content with their porous social selves, however anxious they were about self-denial, self-love and the social order. But as these new ideas about our feelings began to circulate, they generated other anxieties. Medical and literary writers feared that “sensibility” could easily morph into “melancholy,” “hypochondria” or “hysteria.”⁹¹ Novels, poems and plays began to depict characters of such exquisite sensibility they were virtually debilitated by life. Perhaps the most famous of these was Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771). The novel’s title character, Harley, weeps and blushes his way to London, weeps over injured soldiers, virtuous prostitutes, conniving wretches and the tortured inmates of Bedlam, weeps as he loves, and finally weeps himself to death. His problem is not the energetic enthusiasm castigated by Locke and cautiously endorsed by Hamilton. Harley’s problem is the opposite: he is far too “susceptible,” his mind too open to external influence.⁹² However much we admire his sympathy for others, his excessive sensitivity to everything going on around him prevents him from acting

⁹⁰ Montesquieu distinguished three kinds of states, republics, monarchies and despotisms, arguing that each had a particular “spirit” that was its “principle” or “spring.” Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Collier, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 21-30. He goes on to speculate about how law, commerce and climate might affect the development of a political order. Ferguson argued that “in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual,” and described various ways modern society might help or hamper human moral development: Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10. He feared that foreign conquest, the desire for riches and the division of labour might endanger the free spirit.

⁹¹ See generally John Mullan, “Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians,” *The Eighteenth Century* 25, no. 2 (1984).

⁹² Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (London: T. Cadell, 1771), 261. Both Todd and Mullan describe eighteenth-century sensibility as a kind of “susceptibility”: Mullan, “Hypochondria and Hysteria,” 146, 56; Todd, *Sensibility*, 28. See also Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 186.

and ends his life before he can achieve any of his aspirations. It is left to a fictional editor to patch together his story from the fragmented manuscript. Characters like Harley seem to confirm Hume's doubts about the existence of the self. If we are really just a bundle of perceptions and the feelings they provoke, what is the difference between our mind and the world that floods into it through the senses?

As we will see, some Romantic writers like John Clare (Chapter 3) and Thomas Moore (Chapter 4) actually embraced this extremely porous kind of selfhood. But these anxieties eventually produced a backlash against the moral psychology of writers like Smith and Hume, at least in its extremer forms. Such tragic sentimental figures went out of fashion in the 1780s and '90s, and political pamphleteers on the right and left began to accuse their opponents of being misled by extreme sensibility.⁹³ The sentimental hero or heroine became more obviously a figure of parody, ridicule or panic. Harley himself, so admired when he appeared in 1771, was a laughing-stock by the end of the century, as Walter Scott among others attested.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, a good but hapless character like Sir Condy in *Castle Rackrent* has something of Harley about him. More commonly, however, Romantic writers attacked the extreme sensibility of a Harley as impossible and therefore inevitably insincere. Olivia in *Leonora* (1806), Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and the Countess de Villefort in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) might claim to have exquisite sensibilities but they are actually egoists. The Romantics were less likely than Hume to find absolute selflessness possible.

⁹³ Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27; Todd, *Sensibility*, chap. 8.

⁹⁴ Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 38-39.

Philosophers early in the century, like Locke and Astell, had proposed that the self was essentially rational. Reason and understanding were essential, and they feared anything that might endanger them. Mid-century philosophers like Smith and Hume had proposed that the self was essentially emotional. Sympathy was essential to our being, and they feared whatever would break the chains of feeling that bind us to one another, be it solitude, selfishness or the divisions of the social order. A third group of philosophers proposed that a different aspect of the self was most important: the will. We are by nature free, and these philosophers feared anything that would rob us of this freedom. The two most famous thinkers of this school are Rousseau and Immanuel Kant.

1.3 Rousseau and Kant: When the Will Is Shackled

Rousseau and his disciple Kant espoused a new kind of moral philosophy, based on fundamentally different premises to the thinkers we have considered so far. For Astell, Locke, Smith and Hume, the decisions we make were essentially the result of our thoughts and feelings. Locke, for instance, claimed that the will is determined by “some ... *uneasiness* a Man is at present under.”⁹⁵ An idea enters the mind, and if it succeeds in making us uneasy, it prompts us to act. Thus it is our ideas (which for Locke included perceptions, thoughts and feelings) which are the root causes of self-deformation, not a bad will. For Rousseau and Kant, this was putting the cart before the horse. What makes each of us a person is our freedom. Before we can think and feel correctly, we must have the courage and independence to act, think and feel for ourselves alone. Kant and Rousseau shared a “will to the ‘unconditioned’.”⁹⁶ The self was like a monarch, which must rule its country without

⁹⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 250-51.

⁹⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau-Kant-Goethe: Two Essays*, trans. James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 17.

conditions imposed from outside. The deformed self was like a slave, under external control. Rousseau's impact on the politics and culture of the later eighteenth century was enormous. Kant's direct influence in Britain during the Romantic period was minute, though several of his disciples, including Goethe and Schiller, were well known there.⁹⁷ It is worth considering him anyhow, because of the radical way he developed and clarified Rousseau's conception of the will.

If the will is the main principle of selfhood, then there are two main ways you can deform yourself: by willing a contradiction, or by submitting to be ruled by someone else. Willing a contradiction deforms us because it makes the notion of freedom absurd, argued Kant. If we have free will, this must mean that our will determines itself, rather than being determined by an external force. If one thing determines another, it always does so according to a law of causation. The earth makes the apple fall by the law of gravity. If all determination is lawful, and the will is self-determined, "what, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of being a law to itself?"⁹⁸ If we allow our will to be ruled by another other than its own consistent (or "categorical") laws, then we falsify our own freedom. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau described how self-contradiction arises in modern society. Society requires laws to regulate the conduct of its citizens, and when we become citizens we implicitly agree to obey these laws. In the ideal society, the "particular will" of each individual would coincide with the "general will" of society.⁹⁹ Seeing ourselves as citizens, we would perceive society's laws to be expressions of our own will. But we have split ourselves from one another:

⁹⁷ See René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793-1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), chap. 4.

⁹⁸ "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94.

⁹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract; and the Discourses*, Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1955), 17-18.

“An individual may be a devout priest, a brave soldier, or a zealous senator, and yet a bad citizen.”¹⁰⁰ We identify more with our particular “association” than with society as a whole. So do our rulers, who are “seduced by private interests” and impose their particular wills upon the rest of the population.¹⁰¹ We contradict ourselves. We simultaneously resolve to form a society and to pursue our factional interests. We come to see society’s dictates as foreign commands, and turn ourselves into “debased slaves.”¹⁰² Kant gives a stark example of the person who chooses to contradict their own freedom in his provocative essay, “On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy” (1797). Some argue that if a murderer were to knock at your door and ask if their potential victim were within, then it would be morally correct to lie. Kant disagrees. It may be permissible to “evade” the question,¹⁰³ but an active lie would undermine one of the key foundations of our freedom. By lying, “I bring it about, as far as I can, that statements ... in general are not believed, and so too that all rights which are based on contracts come to nothing and lose their force ...”¹⁰⁴ It is only possible to enter a contract if you believe what your counterparty promises you. By choosing to lie to the murderer, we chip away at this belief, and so remove our own freedom to associate with other people.

Romantic writers were fascinated by people with a will to self-contradiction. In Chapter 2, we will meet Amelia Opie’s Adeline Mowbray, who chooses to be free from marriage, and so enslaves herself to the prejudices of her conservative compatriots. In Chapter 5, we will meet Charles Harpur’s antiheroic bushranger, Stalwart, who chooses freedom in exile at the price of his humanity: “I cursed my

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁰³ Kant, 611.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 612.

kind—and fled, | Outlawed but free, into the woods ...”¹⁰⁵ They are joined by figures like Byron’s Manfred, Felicia Hemans’s Count di Procida, and Alfred de Musset’s Lorenzaccio. An oppressive society may drive some characters like these to revolt, but their will to liberation strikes the ground out from under them, bringing only the liberty of death.

We can deform ourselves by willing a contradiction, but we can also deform ourselves by lacking a will. Kant argued that the masses are in a state of “*self-incurred minority*” because they lack the “resolution and courage” to think and act for themselves.¹⁰⁶ In his educational *magnum opus*, *Émile* (1761), Rousseau revived Locke and Astell’s arguments about custom, showing how “dispositions,” “habits” and “opinions” rob us of willpower.¹⁰⁷ We contract habits through our innate “laziness.”¹⁰⁸ We talk endlessly, parroting the words of authority figures, when we should be freely engaging with the reality of things: “Things, things! I shall never repeat enough that we attribute too much power to words. With our babbling education we produce only babblers.”¹⁰⁹ We are enslaved by *amour-propre*, our desire to compete with our fellows, to beat them and to stand high in their opinion.¹¹⁰ By relying on the words of others for our thoughts, and on the opinions of others for our own self-esteem, we become weak and dependent. This is the root of evil, for “All wickedness comes from weakness.”¹¹¹ Unable to fulfil our own desires, we come

¹⁰⁵ Charles Harpur, *The Bushrangers; a Play in Five Acts, and Other Poems* (Sydney: Piddington, 1853), 20.

¹⁰⁶ “An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?,” in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or, on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1991), 39.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹¹⁰ See especially *ibid.*, 213-14. See also Ferguson, *Essay*, 54-55.

¹¹¹ *Emile*, 67.

to see other people as our tools, envy the wealthy and crave power. It is these *Willenlose*, these “will-less” people, who paradoxically cause greatest havoc.

Later Romantics agreed that moral weakness was a crucial cause of self-deformation. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis’s protagonist learns that “Es gibt nur *eine* Ursache des Übels—die allgemeine Schwäche—und diese Schwäche ist nichts als geringe Sittliche Empfänglichkeit und Mangel an Reiz der Freiheit.”¹¹²

Percy Shelley conjured the figure of the will-less tyrant in *The Triumph of Life* (1822). He imagines standing by Rousseau, while the great philosopher describes

The great, the unforgotten,—they who wore
Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreathes of light,
Signs of thought’s empire over thought—their lore

Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might
Could not repress the mystery within,
And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night

Caught them ere evening. (*SW*, 512, ll. 209-15)

Here is Rousseau’s critique of modern society in compact, poetic form: conventional forms of life alienate people. Thoughts rule over thoughts, the powerful know not themselves, and life is ultimately “feigned.” In Chapter 2, we will encounter Edgeworth’s Vivian, a man whose mind is filled with others’ words, and whose resultant will-less-ness robs him of love and life. He is like De Quincey’s opium-eater, who can still think and feel, but loses the power “even of proposing or willing.”¹¹³ In Chapter 3, in the sonnets of Charlotte Smith, we will see the problem

¹¹² “There is only *one* cause of evil—general weakness—and this weakness is nothing but a low level of moral sensitivity and a lack of enthusiasm for freedom.” Novalis, *Heinrich Von Ofterdingen, Hymnen an Die Nacht Und Geistliche Lieder*, ed. James Boyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), 167.

¹¹³ Thomas De Quincey, *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London and New York: Dent and Dutton, 1907), 232.

turned on its head. Society takes her freedom from her, and this tyranny inflicts on her the gravest mental anguish.

There is a painful footnote to Rousseau's theory of the dignity of man: the theory of women's freedom he presented in Book 5 of *Émile*. He argued that women obtain freedom of the will not through pride, courage, and resolution, as men do, but through guile and deceit: "... her orders are caresses, her threats are tears. She ought to reign in the home as the minister does in a state—by getting herself commanded to do what she wants to do."¹¹⁴ A woman should dress with virginal seductiveness: "... one would say that all this very simple attire was put on only to be taken off piece by piece in the imagination."¹¹⁵ She should not show off any intellectual abilities, for "[a] brilliant wife is a plague to her husband."¹¹⁶ Her freedom is a "species of dissimulation."¹¹⁷ He seemed to think that this course of action would make women more free. Others have not been so sure.

There were some in Romantic Britain who agreed with Rousseau that a courageously enlightened woman is a deformed self. In *Adeline Mowbray*, as we shall see, the opinionated Editha Mowbray is a good philosopher but a bad mother. But others resisted his claim, arguing that his ideas about male freedom applied equally to women. Edgeworth lampooned his arguments about women's education in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795).¹¹⁸ Her novels teem with characters, like Mrs

¹¹⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, 408.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹¹⁸ This was based on a real exchange of letters between Edgeworth's father and Thomas Day. See Marilyn Butler, "Edgeworth's Stern Father: Escaping Thomas Day, 1795-1801," in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro S. J. Ribeiro and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); and Mitzi Myers, "My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority," in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. Paula Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Beaumont, Mrs Falconer or Cecilia Davenant, whose guile, however well- or ill-meant, explodes in their faces, while her rational and sincere heroines succeed in finding happiness. Austen's scheming Emma Woodhouse seems to cut both ways. Her guile is her bane, but her brilliance, on several occasions, also brings her to grief. A more forthright critic was Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued that "all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters than they would otherwise have been."¹¹⁹ Astell had long before posed the question, "since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?"¹²⁰ Rousseau and Kant developed a new and powerful notion of the "intelligent Soul," and many of Rousseau's British disciples insisted that this intelligence be extended to women.

By the end of the century, these philosophers from Locke to Rousseau had been fused into a new philosophical canon, sometimes called the "new philosophy" or "modern philosophy." Together they provoked a set of anxieties about the fragility or dissolution of the self, and provided a set of tools for thinking about them. There were three weak points in the self. The first was reason (or understanding), which could be weak, deluded, overborne by emotions or clouded with foggy notions. The second was sensibility, which could be strangled by solitude or perverted by an unjust society. Finally there was the will, vulnerable to tyranny, cowardice or self-contradiction. These thinkers not only introduced new concepts of the ideal self—they also introduced a range of deformed selves, from the capricious woman of the world to the masochistic monk to the liar who beggars his own freedom. This

¹¹⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792), 38.

¹²⁰ Astell, *Serious Proposal*, I.47.

tradition continued to develop among Romantic-era philosophers themselves, as we will see in the final section of this chapter.

1.4 Three Romantic Thinkers

We have now seen how the anxieties of Locke, Astell, Hume, Smith, Rousseau and Kant made their way into British Romantic literature, belying those historians who claim that there was a clean break between eighteenth-century and Romantic notions of the self. From this perspective, it seems absurd to claim that the eighteenth-century self was “a well-tuned, visible mechanism,” while the Romantics “granted space to mystery and imbalance.”¹²¹ It is true, however, that many British Romantic philosophers did consider the mysterious and imbalanced aspects of the self, and made original contributions to the theory of self-deformation. Three of the greatest were Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Hazlitt. Each of them responded to their eighteenth-century inheritance in a different way, demonstrating the variety of Romantic approaches to self-deformation.

Burke’s central contribution was to propose an historical, cultural self. All the philosophers we have considered so far fretted about the relationship between human nature and human society. Burke flipped the debate by proposing that our self is “second nature,” a set of ideas we inherit from our forebears.¹²² Far from limiting our freedom, custom defines our “rights and franchises,” therefore enabling us to be free at all.¹²³ We deform ourselves when we fail to revere our inheritance. If we prefer reason to custom, we may lose our sense of self, becoming prey to

¹²¹ Cardinal, “Romantic Travel,” 135.

¹²² See James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chap. 4.

¹²³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (London: Penguin, 1983), 118.

“inconstancy and versatility.”¹²⁴ If we fall prey to the “disorderly appetites” that haunt the human frame, then we may cease to really understand our customs, turning them into “*pretexts*” for violence and fanaticism.¹²⁵ Burke’s greatest example of the deformed self was the quixotic young intellectual, equipped with “the metaphysics of an undergraduate, and the mathematics and arithmetic of an exciseman,” who eschews custom, arrogantly measuring the world according to his own simplistic ideas.¹²⁶ This self-deformity was brilliantly depicted by William Blake in his image of Newton on the sea-floor, trying to measure the universe with a pair of compasses.

Of these three writers, Wollstonecraft is the one who most obviously fits the classic mould of the Romantic thinker. In her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), she presented herself as a quest-hero in the dark hallways of the self, eradicating her prejudices by observing men and manners, feeling superior to her ill-educated Scandinavian contemporaries, and discovering the movements of her soul through deep communion with nature. Like Burke, she argued that people can only improve as part of a shared culture that improves, and that abstract reason and utopian schemes are bound to fail.¹²⁷ She is most famous, however, for her scathing critique of inequality, the way it deforms women and the poor. Astell had argued that women are degraded by misogynistic customs, but Wollstonecraft drew on eighteenth-century social theory to make a more radical point: it is “the very constitution of civil society” that makes women “weak, if not vicious.”¹²⁸ Astell thought that reforms to

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 247-48.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹²⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1796), 264.

¹²⁸ *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 96.

women's education would allow them to cultivate their virtue and learn to weather the hardihood of a woman's fate. Wollstonecraft despaired that no education could form a woman for morality or happiness till society is transformed:

I feel more than a mother's fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of [her daughter Fanny's] sex. I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. With trembling hand I shall cultivate sensibility, and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, whilst I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast I would fain guard—I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit—Hapless woman! what a fate is thine!¹²⁹

Either Fanny will be deformed by the necessity to seduce a husband for herself, or she will achieve self-formation at the cost of alienation. This second fear is a new anxiety among our philosophers. Our other thinkers held that proper self-cultivation allows the individual to achieve happiness, but Wollstonecraft feared that for a woman, forming a perfect self might make you miserably “unfit” for the world as it is.¹³⁰ We will see how similar feminist anxieties run through the works of Opie and Smith.

Hazlitt has come to be recognised in recent years as one of the great philosophers of self, credited with propounding a novel theory of developmental psychology.¹³¹ He is unique among the thinkers in this chapter, because he is the only one to argue that we actually deform ourselves by forming a sense of self. He propounded this idea in his first major work, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), whose poor sales led him to give up on philosophy and become a literary critic. He begins by distinguishing our past, present and future selves. We know our past experience through memory, and are aware of our present self at any

¹²⁹ *Scandinavian Letters*, 66.

¹³⁰ Fanny would later commit suicide.

¹³¹ See Martin and Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul*, 138-48; Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 369-71; Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 273.

moment. But our future self is something we can only ever imagine. Of course, we can also imagine other people's future selves, and this leads Hazlitt to make a startling claim: when we consider future events, they "must naturally affect [the imagination] in the same manner, whether they are thought of in connection with our own future being, or that of others."¹³² We are born benevolent, drawing no distinction between our own future selves and those of other people. But we gradually construct an "imaginary" or "ideal" self in our own mind, and become habituated to thinking that our own future is the most important one:

Every sensation that I feel, or that afterwards recurs vividly to my memory strengthens the sense of self, which increased strength in the mechanical feeling is transferred to the general idea, and to my remote, future, imaginary interest: whereas our sympathy with the feelings of others being always imaginary, ... the interest we take in their welfare seems to be something foreign to our own bosoms, to be transient, arbitrary, and directly opposite to the necessary, absolute, permanent interest which we have in the pursuit of our own welfare.¹³³

Self-formation narrows the mind. As we form a self, we fall away from the beauty of our nature, becoming selfish and cruel. For Hazlitt, explains Jacques Khalip, we are really "nonpersons," and the very idea of self-formation (or "self-induced *Bildung*") is merely an "inspired fantasy."¹³⁴ Hazlitt implicitly argues that we should extinguish or abolish ourselves, and we will see in Chapters 3 and 4 how Clare and Moore largely agree with him.

The self was a fearful thing for all these thinkers. Any attempt to define it inevitably conjured images of its destruction or malformation. These images provoked anxiety because they threatened to bring ethics and society tumbling down. Society is made of selves. Acts are performed by selves. We have seen what a

¹³² Hazlitt, *Works*, I.7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³⁴ Khalip, *Anonymous Life*, 34, 37.

store of deformed selves Romantic writers had to pick from. We have seen how each proposed principle of selfhood—reason, sensibility, will, culture, and imagination—bred its own anxieties. We have seen how Wollstonecraft and Hazlitt raised serious questions about the merits of self-formation, blurring the distinction between a well-formed and a deformed self. The idea that the Romantics celebrated a new kind of deep and developmental self has become harder to sustain. Instead, two questions present themselves, which the following chapters will attempt to answer: (1) How did Romantic writers understand the process of self-deformation? What were its nature and causes? (2) What attitude did they take to self-deformation? Was it right or wrong to make yourself “unfit”? Was losing your sense of self desirable or undesirable? We will see how, by posing these questions, our writers transformed every genre they touched.

CHAPTER 2

FICTION: MARIA EDGEWORTH'S AND AMELIA OPIE'S ANTI- BILDUNGSROMANE



“And the marriage was solemnized with much pomp and magnificence, and every demonstration of joy.”——

Novellists and novel readers are usually satisfied when they arrive at this happy catastrophe; their interest and curiosity seldom go any farther: but in real life marriage is but the beginning of domestic happiness or misery.¹

SO WRITES Maria Edgeworth, at the beginning of Chapter 14 of *Vivian*, quoting the final sentence of her previous chapter with sly irony. Perhaps those “demonstrations of joy” weren’t as authentic as they appeared. Perhaps this marriage was not a “happy” catastrophe but an actual one. There is no *perhaps* about how the reader should feel. Whatever satisfaction they hoped for, they must postpone. There are two more chapters to go, and Charles Vivian’s marriage to Lady Sarah Lidhurst will not survive them.

Readers are in fact quite well prepared for Vivian’s shameful death and the stillbirth of his son. In preceding chapters, he has beggared himself on garish renovations and contested elections, destroyed his engagement to the virtuous Selina Sidney by running off with a married woman, and ruined his friendship with

¹ Maria Edgeworth, *Tales of Fashionable Life*, 6 vols. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1809-12), IV.371. *Vivian* was published as volume 4 of this series in 1812. All future references will be to this edition unless otherwise specified.

dear Mr Russell by impulsively divulging important secrets. He is one of the many self-annihilating youths of Romantic fiction, joining other tragic figures like the suicidal hero of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the ill-educated Miss Milner of *A Simple Story* (1791), the self-loathing Coke Clifton of *Anna St. Ives* (1792), the deranged Falkland of *Caleb Williams* (1793), the lonely and forlorn protagonist of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), the shattered *Maria* (1798), the feckless owners of *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the short-lived exile *René* (1802), the diminished *Corinne* (1807), the dismal Lucy and Edgar of *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and the sad lonely poet whose mind is unspooled in *Lenz* (1836), not to mention the host of ill-married or vicious characters in Austen's famous novels, from Isabella Thorpe and the Eltons to the Wickhams and Lucy Crawford. Vivian's starkest contemporary is *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), the other major case study in this chapter, who has the singular distinction of destroying her marriage and her life by choosing on principle to abjure the institution of marriage altogether.

Despite the popularity of such characters from the beginning of the Romantic period to its end, Edgeworth was right to predict that readers might not be "satisfied" by Vivian's tragic fate. Both Vivian and Adeline attempt to form themselves, and fail. Readers have often found these protagonists deform not only themselves, but the novels in which they appear. Marilyn Butler, Edgeworth's greatest modern critic, finds *Vivian* wanting, because a novel whose protagonist fails to learn is inevitably "repetitive and discontinuous."² Since then, it appears that the book has been the subject of only a single academic article.³ Interest in *Adeline Mowbray* is increasing as feminist scholars have taught us to see its complexities,

² Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 333.

³ Kate Etheridge, "Beyond the Didactic Theme: Public and Private Space in Maria Edgeworth's *Vivian*," *English: The Journal of the English Association* 46, no. 185 (1997). A melancholy note to the article indicates that its author was a PhD student who died some years before its publication.

but it was not long ago that one critic dismissed it as a “travesty,” since it depicts Adeline’s attempted self-formation in such a negative light.⁴ For such a critic, Adeline starts out with the noble impulse to live according to her conscience, but her slow passage towards self-condemnation and an ecstatic early death is an ugly affirmation of repressive ideas about women’s conduct. To their detractors, *Vivian* is formless, while *Adeline Mowbray* is a malformed piece of conservative propaganda.

If critics find these novels difficult, they do so for good reason. In most accounts of Romantic-era fiction, the *Bildungsroman* is the central genre. The *Bildungsroman*, at least in its “classical” or Romantic form, is the novel of successful self-formation. We have constructed a canon around a core of optimistic novels—*Belinda* (1801), *The Absentee* (1812), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), *Waverley* (1814), *Ivanhoe* (1820)—whose protagonists successfully form themselves. They curb their enthusiasm without losing it, marry the right person, and find a way to maintain their freedom while being part of society. The protagonist’s successful self-formation is what makes these novels beautiful. “[S]olving problems is useful and sweet,” argues Franco Moretti. Such novels fill us with “aesthetic pleasure” because they solve the problem of fitting in.⁵ Neither *Vivian* nor *Adeline Mowbray* can offer us this pleasure. Not only does this make these texts seem deformed, it makes it difficult even to say what sort of novels they are. They aren’t gothic novels, despite their tragedy, because they lack the requisite dungeons, forests, castles and bandits. They aren’t “Jacobin” novels, despite their interest in the failure of education, because the last one of those was Thomas

⁴ Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974), 236.

⁵ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 244.

Holcroft's *Bryan Perdue* (1805).⁶ Opie's novel has been called "anti-Jacobin,"⁷ but anti-Jacobin fiction is defined by its political conservatism, and we will see that the novel's apparent conservatism is only a part of the picture. They don't fit easily into the fictional genres of the later Romantic period either, lacking the harp-strumming bards and non-British cultural politics of the National Tale or the small-scale settings and clear conservative didacticism of the Evangelical Novel.⁸

Like Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*, these novels are "nameless and horrible." There are two obvious ways we could incorporate them into our histories of the period. We could define a new genre, the anti-*Bildungsroman*, which would include them, along with most Jacobin, anti-Jacobin and gothic novels. We could create a new German word for this genre, "*Verbildungsroman*," from the German *Verbildung* ("deformity," "miseducation"), *Bildung*'s antonym. Or we could widen our definition of the *Bildungsroman* to include all novels that explore social self-formation, whether it succeeds or fails. In either case, as I hope to show in this chapter, these pessimistic novels explore the same themes of self-cultivation and social integration as the classical *Bildungsroman*. To prove this, I use text analysis to compare *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* to a set of other Romantic novels, revealing new aspects of their shared vocabulary and plot structures. These are confronting novels, which put the progressive ideal of the *Bildungsroman* under stress, asking difficult and disturbing questions about the possibility of individual fulfilment in modern society. Claudia Johnson suggests that the novels of the early nineteenth century were "novels of crisis," complex books that breathed the febrile

⁶ Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 167ff.

⁷ M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 106.

⁸ See Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 23-24, 102, 141-52.

and paranoid atmosphere of wartime Britain.⁹ In this context, the discontinuous or oppressive aspects of *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* may seem less like aesthetic flaws, and more like artistic triumphs.

I have claimed there is a scholarly consensus that the *Bildungsroman* was the central genre of realist fiction in the Romantic period, but there are three big objections to such a claim. First objection: scholars have argued that many other genres were more central, including the “historical novel,”¹⁰ the “domestic novel,”¹¹ and the “novel of manners, sentiment, and emulation.”¹² Second objection: different scholars argue that the *Bildungsroman* was invented long before or long after the period. Was *David Copperfield* (1850) the first *Bildungsroman* in English?¹³ Was it *Pride and Prejudice*?¹⁴ Was it “Rosamond” (1796-1821)?¹⁵ Was it *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751)?¹⁶ Or was it *Tom Jones* (1749)?¹⁷ Third objection: some scholars argue that there was no central genre at all. Romantic novelists had no “unifying artistic sensibility,” argue the editors of the recent *Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period* (2010). Instead there was simply “a spirit of experimentation,” perhaps fostered by the persistent “civic unrest.”¹⁸ These disagreements are more

⁹ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chap. 1.

¹⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

¹¹ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Kindle edition, chap. 3.

¹² Gary Kelly, “Romantic Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 191.

¹³ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), chaps. 1 and 2; Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), chap. 3.

¹⁴ Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, chap. 1.

¹⁵ Mitzi Myers, “The Dilemmas of Gender as Double-Voiced Narrative; or, Maria Edgeworth Mothers the *Bildungsroman*,” in *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing: Colleagues, 1988).

¹⁶ Lorna Ellis, *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1999), 71-87.

¹⁷ J. F. Burrows, *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 209.

¹⁸ Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge

apparent than real. Literary historians tell a substantially similar story about the evolution of the realist novel between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a story with the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* at its core. There are four key strands to the narrative:

1. *The reconciliation of individual and society.* When Karl Morgenstern coined the term *Bildungsroman* in 1820, he argued that the goal of the protagonist's education "ist ein vollendetes Gleichgewicht, Harmonie mit Freyheit."¹⁹ Since then, nearly every scholar has agreed that the *Bildungsroman* portrays a protagonist who manages to reconcile their individual freedom with the dictates of society.²⁰ Historians of the novel have often argued that Romantic novelists—particularly Austen—were the first to portray such reconciliation. In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt argues that at the end of the eighteenth century, Austen synthesised the psychological realism of Samuel Richardson with the social realism of Henry Fielding, giving "a sense of the social order which is not achieved at the expense of the individuality of her characters."²¹ In one stroke, Austen reconciled not only the individual and society, but the whole tradition of English fiction, setting the course for the great classics of the nineteenth century. Marilyn Butler argues that Austen's novels culminate in "a moment of self-discovery that is the necessary condition for [the protagonist's] maturity and happiness."²² Johnson agrees, but stresses the

University Press, 2007), 1. See also Behrendt, "Questioning the Romantic Novel."

¹⁹ "... is a fulfilled balance, harmony with freedom." Karl Morgenstern, "Ueber Das Wesen Des Bildungsromane (1820)," in *Zur Geschichte Des Deutschen Bildungsromane*, ed. Rolf Selbmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 66.

²⁰ Susanne Howe, *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), 4; Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1963), 133; Buckley, *Seasons of Youth*, 17-18; Marianne Hirsch, "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between *Great Expectations* and *Lost Illusions*," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 12 (1979): 297; Ellis, *Appearing to Diminish*, 25; Jeffers, *Apprenticeships*, 3.

²¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 297.

²² Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 300.

freedom Austen's protagonists achieve.²³ Gary Kelly broadens the focus from Austen, arguing that nearly all Romantic novels are "manuals for the formation of self-identity," in which "subjective merit and social status ... become congruent."²⁴

2. *Psychological depth and free indirect discourse.* Another key feature of the *Bildungsroman* is psychological depth, or a "tendency toward the inner life," to cite one critic's understatement.²⁵ A crucial technique for portraying this inner life is free indirect discourse, which allows the novelist to shuttle between the minds of the narrator and characters, helping to create the genre's characteristic irony. It is no surprise that Goethe and Austen, often seen as the genre's inventors, are often also seen as the inventors of free indirect discourse.²⁶ Scholars of Romantic fiction have often seen psychological depth and free indirect discourse as key trends in the period. Deidre Lynch argues that "literature took an inward turn at the close of the eighteenth century: that is how it got 'romantic'."²⁷ The turning point came with the publication of Frances Burney's *Evelina* in 1778.²⁸ Burney and her followers created characters from the same social class as their readers: the gentry, the lower aristocracy, the professional middle classes. This made it easier for readers to identify with characters, and think of them as "real" people with complex minds.²⁹ Meanwhile, narratologists like Roy Pascal, Dorrit Cohn, Alan Palmer and Monika Fludernik have shown how Romantic novelists used vastly more "psycho-narration"

²³ Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 164.

²⁴ Kelly, "Romantic Fiction," 192.

²⁵ Randolph P. Shaffner, *The Apprenticeship Novel: A Study of the 'Bildungsroman' as a Regulative Type in Western Literature with a Focus on Three Classic Representatives by Goethe, Maugham, and Mann* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 17.

²⁶ By, for example, Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). Fludernik's vast researches have somewhat complicated this picture: Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), passim.

²⁷ Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹ Lynch's argument seems indebted to Leavis's: F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), 4.

than their forebears,³⁰ and developed free indirect discourse from a tool for portraying speech into one for portraying thought.³¹

3. *Ordinary or domestic setting.* Classic theories of the *Bildungsroman* often stress the genre's focus on "ordinary" domestic life, and note the importance of the marriages. When Goethe wrote *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, writes Moretti, he "activated"—made narratively interesting—the bland rhythm of everyday reality."³² In the classical *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist undergoes self-formation simply by having ordinary experiences with the right attitude. It is a commonplace of literary history that English novelists became more interested in ordinary, domestic life as the eighteenth-century wore on. Walter Scott himself felt that a new kind of novel had arisen since 1800, describing the "common walks of life," and that Austen excelled even Edgeworth in her description "of such common occurrences as may fall under the observation of most folks."³³ In the last century, Watt argued that novelists' increasing interest in private life was linked to their increasing interest in psychological depth.³⁴ Nancy Armstrong agrees. As domestic fiction started to predominate, novelists became more interested in their characters' "qualities of mind."³⁵ It was only by restricting their narratives to the "private framework" of ordinary life that novelists could credibly show their characters achieving happiness despite the "vast inequities of the age."³⁶ Butler also argues that it was the very "small scale and intimacy" of Austen's novels that allowed them to "reach from the

³⁰ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 21-25; Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 75-86.

³¹ The literature on this topic is enormous. But see in particular Pascal, *Dual Voice*; Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 107-16; Fludernik, *Languages of Fiction*, esp. 69-106.

³² Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, vi.

³³ Walter Scott, "Emma; a Novel," *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 27 (1815): 193.

³⁴ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, chap. 6.

³⁵ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

commonplace to high and permanent moral concerns.”³⁷ Really, the “domestic novel” described by Armstrong and the *Bildungsroman* of Moretti are synonymous, both being novels where the protagonist discovers inner qualities through ordinary experience, capping off their self-formation with an ideal marriage.

4. *Historical consciousness.* In the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist’s self-formation is a symbol of the progress or reformation of their society. As Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, in the *Bildungsroman* “human emergence is ... no longer man’s own private affair. [The protagonist] emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself.”³⁸ When they marry at the novel’s end, it represents not just a private contract between husband and wife, but a new “social contract” that will ensure peaceful progress.³⁹ There is a historical dimension to the *Bildungsroman*. It is not surprising to find that many scholars argue that the Romantic period gave rise to the first true “historical novels.” According to György Lukács, Scott turned his characters into historical “types,” whose speech, manners and actions “always represent social trends and historical forces.”⁴⁰ Kelly argues that the Jacobin novelists, in particular Robert Bage, Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald and William Godwin, introduced a new kind of “psychological realism” into the novel.⁴¹ Believing strongly in the philosophical doctrine of “necessity,” they portrayed their characters as the product of social forces, pawns in the service of history.⁴² Walter Allen argues that *Castle Rackrent* was the watershed novel in

³⁷ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 300.

³⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 23.

³⁹ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 22.

⁴⁰ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 33.

⁴¹ Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805*, 17. In her much-neglected survey of 1932, Tompkins made much the same point: J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), chap. 5.

⁴² Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805*, 15-16.

which characters were first shown to be products of their societies.⁴³ Butler argues that in Edgeworth and Scott, “[a]n individual grows from irresponsibility to a sense of himself as Civil Man, just as a community has advanced from barbarous disunity to its modern ordered complexity.”⁴⁴ The progress of one is the progress of all. The *Bildungsroman* and historical novel are essentially identical. And if, like Erich Auerbach or Michel Foucault, you believe that “historism” or “historicity” is the defining feature of Romanticism, then the *Bildungsroman* must be its defining fictional genre.

Anglo-American scholars all tell a similar story about modern fiction. By the end of the eighteenth century, a new form of fiction had emerged and come to predominate. The new novels portrayed young protagonists, who sought and found a place in society. They portrayed characters of psychological depth, whose experiences were of ordinary life, and who formed themselves at the same time a new society was forming around them. For some critics, in fact, the story of the novel is itself a *Bildungsroman*: according to James Raven, in 1800 the English novel finally “came of age.”⁴⁵

It should now be clear why *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* have not been seen as part of this “coming of age.” They are the black sheep of the novel family. In some respects, it must be said, they meet the criteria of the classical *Bildungsroman*. Both portray young protagonists trying to form themselves, both are full of psychological depths and free indirect discourse, both take place largely in domestic settings, and

⁴³ Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), 103.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 486.

⁴⁵ James Raven, “Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age,” in *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Richard Barney attacks this kind of argument in his *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 31.

both have a strong sense of history, of how things have changed now “our feudal times are done away with” (*Vivian*, 364), of what “hope” we may have “to see society enlightened and improved” in the future (*Adeline Mowbray*, 127). But in crucial respects they challenge the received model of the *Bildungsroman*. Here there is no reconciliation of individual and society. The protagonists’ minds may occasionally be deep, but if so they are incoherent. They may live in a domestic setting, but the wide world keeps bursting in, as Vivian’s political career wraps its tentacles around his family life, and a prejudiced public keeps invading Adeline’s privacy. And history in these novels is a bleak process, which shatters individuals rather than reforming society to accommodate them.

In what follows, I show how Opie and Edgeworth achieved this tragic vision in their novels. In §2.1, I compare their implicit theories of self-deformation. In some ways, they are starkly opposed: Vivian is weak and easily led, where Adeline is stubborn. But both Opie and Edgeworth were avid Rousseauans, and see an imperfection of the will as the source of their protagonist’s downfall. To put their ideas in context, I use collocation analysis to compare their vocabulary with that of other canonical novels of the period. Romantic novelists had a shared arsenal of keywords, such as “honour,” “virtue” and “character,” which they deployed in subtly different ways to reveal different aspects of self-formation and deformation. In §2.2, I compare the plot structures of the two books. Both Edgeworth and Opie rewrite the traditional marriage plot to show how difficult it can be to create a truly private space. Digital text analysis allows us to see how their plot structures resemble or depart from those of canonical *Bildungsromane*. Finally, in §2.3, I discuss one of the most striking aesthetic deformities of these novels. Both Vivian and Adeline become aware that language is conventional, entwining or imprisoning the mind.

By questioning language's power to communicate truth, they undermine the language of the novels in which they appear. Readers have often claimed that these novels have simplistic morals. But it is not clear that either of them has a moral at all.

2.1 Defects of the Will

Why are Vivian and Adeline such failures? At the beginning of each novel, we discover that their education was defective. Vivian's mother, Lady Mary, was an "over-anxious" parent (2). She never gave him a chance to work things out for himself, says Vivian, so he "grew up seeing with her eyes, hearing with her ears, and judging with her understanding, till, at length, it was found out that I had not eyes, ears, or understanding of my own." (4) Unable to judge or decide for himself, he is easily corrupted by the wiles of London when he comes of age and enters parliament. His debts pile up. He becomes a party-man, the lover of his friend's wife, the subject of oppressive rumours and ultimately the dead victim of a duel. Adeline was also a victim of early education, though she suffered the opposite problem. Her philosophical mother spent so much time concocting utopian schemes of education, she never got around to giving one to her daughter:

But while Mrs Mowbray was busying herself in plans for Adeline's education, she reached the age of fifteen, and was in a manner educated; not, however, by her,— though Mrs Mowbray would, no doubt, have been surprised to have heard this assertion. (8)

Left to her own devices, the intelligent Adeline becomes far too enamoured of her own judgment. Wanting to be a "genius" like her mother (14), she imbibes radical philosophy, becomes convinced that marriage is a contemptible and antiquated practice, and makes the fatal decision to live with her partner unmarried. Eventually she realises her arrogance, and dies hoping that her daughter will be taught to be

more “humble” and “slow to call the experience of ages contemptible prejudices.”
(259)

These novels thus appear to be morally rather simple. They are cautionary tales to parents and young people: don't be weak and irresolute, don't be arrogant and presumptuous. The implication seems to be that if Vivian and Adeline were properly educated, or had made a concerted early effort to remedy the defects of their education, they might never have destroyed themselves. It was a hallmark of conservative fiction in this period to blame social ills on dangerous individuals, rather than on the institutions of society.⁴⁶ We could interpret these as comforting, conservative novels. Parliamentary corruption is the fault of a few feckless Vivians, rather than a problem with the institution itself: “Weakness, weakness of mind! the cause of all my errors!” Vivian cries on his deathbed (457-58). The terrible things Adeline suffers at the hands of her compatriots are her own fault, not the fault of widespread prejudice: “society was right,” she says, “in making, and in seeing, no distinction between me and any other woman living in an unsanctioned connection.” (239) These novels are comforting because they absolve us of responsibility for people like Adeline and Vivian. *We* don't need to change, *they* do.

The more we dig into these novels, however, the less and less comforting they seem to be. Neither Vivian nor Adeline is cruel or stupid. Vivian makes many of his mistakes by obeying the impulses of his “good nature” (313, 375). He is intelligent. His friend Russell can find “no fault either with the logical or the mathematical part of [his] understanding” (1), and when he does pull it together, he becomes one of parliament's best debaters (182-83, 386-87). Vivian's earnest desire to do good sets him apart from the rest of the political class. All the other politicians in the novel—

⁴⁶ Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 163.

Lord Glistonbury, Mr Wharton and Marmaduke Lidhurst—are in it purely for themselves. Adeline is likewise intelligent and virtuous, impressing every character who isn't already prejudiced against her. In one chapter, she meets the mean and jealous Maynards, who are all-too-pleased to call her a harlot. In the next, she meets the virtuous Douglasses, who “admire” her despite her “ill-judging” ways, and desire to know her better (83, 79). When Adeline finally decides that “society was right” to be prejudiced against her, she is mistaken. At the time, she believes that her example corrupted her erstwhile servant, Mary Warner, into becoming a prostitute. Her foolish philosophy was helping vice spread through society. It later transpires that Adeline's example did *not* corrupt Mary. The virtuous Mrs Beauclerc and Rachel Pemberton insist that Adeline's story could do nothing but inculcate virtue, and they condemn society for shutting her out (see §2.3). Shelley King is quite right to say that Adeline “poses a challenge for the conservative reader.”⁴⁷ She is the very model of conservative femininity—meek, selfless, dedicated to serving her lover and later her husband in the household—but she disagrees with a core plank of conservative philosophy, the sanctity of marriage.

Like Kant and Rousseau, Edgeworth and Opie think that neither reason nor sensibility are enough to ensure proper self-formation. Both Adeline and Vivian have great powers of reason and sensibility, but to no avail. Their real problem is a defect of the will, as Vivian himself notes with an apt quotation from Rousseau's *Émile*: “And how true it is, Russell, that ‘all wickedness is weakness!’” (163) As we saw in chapter 1, for Kant and Rousseau the will is only perfect when it determines itself. It can only be perfect if it is free, and it can only be free if it binds itself by the correct principles, principles which are themselves the foundations of freedom. In

⁴⁷ Shelley King and John B. Pierce, “Introduction,” in *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xvi.

the classical *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist is supposed to reach a moment of decision, where they make the right choice, and do so for the right reasons: “It is indeed the paradigm of modern socialization: I desire to do what in any case I should have done.”⁴⁸ Or as Vivian’s tutor Russell puts it: “there are not two honours—two honesties—it is all one virtue—integrity!” (168) Neither Vivian nor Adeline achieves integrity, the set of principles that would enable them to act for society and for themselves at the same time.

Vivian often makes the right decision, but on the wrong principles. One reason he marries Lady Sarah is that he fears her mother will have a second stroke if he turns her down. In the event, her mother is so joyful at the wedding that it brings on the deadly palsy, and “the very event, which Vivian had dreaded, as the probable consequence of his refusal to marry her daughter, was, in fact, accelerated by the full accomplishment of her wishes.” (371-72) Adeline has the opposite problem, making the wrong decision on the right principles. Her disastrous marriage with Berrendale is a good example. Her lover Glenmurray has died, and she has been resisting Berrendale’s proposals for years. She is frequently accosted on the street by lecherous men, when one day, to escape them, she says she has a fiancé. The ploy works, and the men immediately back down. Adeline finds that her integrity leaves her only one option: “the die is cast;—I have used the sacred name of wife to shield me from insult; and I am therefore pledged to assume it directly.” (179) She accepts Berrendale’s proposal. She converts her lie about being engaged into a truth. She turns society’s command—get married!—into a self-command. She maintains her self-respect. But the marriage is catastrophic. Berrendale turns out to be a narcissist, misogynist and bigamist.

⁴⁸ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 21.

Examples like these raise a crucial question. Vivian and Adeline see the consequences of their mistakes, so why do they not learn from them? Many a *Bildungsroman*-protagonist overcomes a defective early education. All of Austen's heroines have hopeless parents. Edgeworth's own *Ormond* (1817) is an impulsive orphan brought up by a corrupt MP, who nonetheless manages to become happy and moral. Experience is a good tutor in the classical *Bildungsroman*, but not for Vivian and Adeline. "My experience can be of no use to me," laments Vivian on his deathbed (458). Adeline has learnt nothing from her "own experience," she says, "for the painful situations in which I have been placed, I might attribute, not to the *fallacy* of the system on which I have acted, but to those existing prejudices in society which I wish to see destroyed." (217) There is some difference in the structure of Vivian and Adeline's experience, which means they cannot learn from it as Emma Woodhouse, Harry Ormond or Wilhelm Meister do.

Digital humanities offers a powerful tool to uncover this difference: collocation analysis. Collocation analysis rests on a fundamental observation that words are never used in isolation. Roland Barthes explains the basic idea:

... reading is absorbed in a kind of metonymic skid, each synonym adding to its neighbor some new trait, some new departure: the old man who was first connoted as *fragile* is soon said to be 'of glass': an image containing signifieds of rigidity, immobility, and dry, cutting frangibility. This expansion is the very movement of meaning: the meaning skids, recovers itself, and advances simultaneously; far from analyzing it, we should rather describe it through its expansions, lexical transcendence, the generic word it continually attempts to join ...⁴⁹

The old man in *Sarrasine* (the story Barthes is analysing) is said to be "fragile," and a few words later he is "of glass." These words are "neighbours." They form part of a cluster of related words that hover around a central concept, or "generic word." The

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 92.

point is that words with related meanings tend to appear near one another in the text. They are collocates. Collocates let us work backwards. By seeing which words collocate with one another, we can reconstruct the central concept that lies behind them.

I focus on two keywords, “character” and “society.” As we will see, these keywords and their collocates were crucial for Edgeworth, Opie and their contemporaries when they set out to describe self-formation or deformation. To see how Edgeworth and Opie used these words in comparison to their contemporaries, I have assembled a corpus of 54 other Romantic-era realist novels.⁵⁰ These texts have been accessed on widely-available databases, like the Chadwyck-Healey collection, Oxford Text Archive and Project Gutenberg. They are high-quality digital texts, which scholars have taken the effort to correct by hand. They thus give a good sense of what specialists consider to be the major novels of the period. Most portray successful self-formation (or purport to), though several, such as *Caleb Williams*, *A Simple Story* and *The Banished Man* are sad tales of self-deformation, while others, like *Annals of the Parish* and *Castle Rackrent* barely focus on the individual self at

⁵⁰ These are: Jane Austen's *Lady Susan* (1794), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818); Robert Bage's *Man As He Is* (1792) and *Hermsprong* (1796); Eaton Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813); Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814); Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1772), *Cecilia* (1782), *Camilla* (1798) and *The Wanderer* (1814); Richard Cumberland's *Henry* (1795); Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806), *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), *Patronage* (1814), *Harrington* (1817) and *Ormond* (1817); Susan Ferrier's *Marriage* (1818); John Galt's *The Ayreshire Legatees* (1820), *Annals of the Parish* (1822), *The Provost* (1822) and *The Entail* (1823); William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1793); Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796); Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and *Hugh Trevor* (1797); Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796); Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816); Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806); Mary Robinson's *Walsingham* (1797); Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and *Ivanhoe* (1820); Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), *Celestina* (1791), *The Old Manor House* (1793) and *The Banished Man* (1794); Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* (1790); and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) and *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798).

all. This mixture of novels provides a rich linguistic context for *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray*.

Since we are trying to reconstruct the central concepts shared by these novelists, two kinds of words need to be excluded from the analysis. The 150 most common words in the corpus as a whole are excluded. These words, such as “to,” “with” or “Lord,” are so common that they collocate with every other word. This clouds the results, when what we seek are the words which collocate especially with “character” and “society.” Likewise, the 30 most distinctive word of each novel, as measured by tf-idf, have been removed.⁵¹ These words include the names of characters and locations, and quirky technical or dialect words that mark the language of a particular novel. Since we want to find the concepts these novelists share with one another, these highly individual words are a distraction. Such removal of “stopwords” is standard practice in text analysis.

None of these novelists ever writes of “self-formation.” But they do describe formation of “character.” “[T]hat sentiment formed my character,” writes Emma Courtney, “and, but for the obstacles which gave it force, though I might have suffered less misery, I should, I suspect, have gained less improvement ...”⁵² The ingenuous Harry Ormond has many experiences that help in “forming his character.”⁵³ Character is a fiendish concept in these novels. On the one hand, you have your private character, your personality. This is partly unique, made up of your particular traits, and partly generic—a moral person must have traits of consistency, integrity, self-command. On the other hand, you have your public character, which

⁵¹ See above, n. 11.

⁵² Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 2 vols. (London: G.G. and J.J. Robinson, 1796), II.87-88.

⁵³ Edgeworth, *Harrington, a Tale; and Ormond, a Tale*, II.264, 327.

is what people perceive you to be. It is your reputation, the figure you cut in the world. Vivian and Adeline both suffer from a split between their private and public characters. Vivian acquires a great reputation for political integrity, despite his inherent fecklessness. Before she suffers the stigma of being Glenmurray's mistress, Adeline is "not aware how much the perfection of the female character depends on respect even to what may be called the prejudices of others." (78) One aspect of Vivian and Adeline's self-deformation is their inability to bring these two characters into alignment.

Table 2.1 shows the collocates for "character" in *Vivian, Adeline Mowbray* and the corpus as a whole. Collocates have been calculated within a 20-word window—these are the most frequent terms 10 words either side of the word "character," after stopwords have been removed. There are some crucial themes that link *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* to all the other novels of the corpus. Self-knowledge is one: "knew" and "known" are key words in the table. The people in these novels are constantly trying to know their own characters and the characters of others. It is no easy task. At the time of his proposal to Selina Sidney, Vivian "had laid open his whole character to her, as far as he knew it himself ..." (34). It turns out later that he did not know his mercurial temper well enough. A subtler problem is the relationship between mind and body, between our character and our "manner" (behaviour) or "person" (appearance). There is also the grave problem of gender. Even in *Vivian*, with its male hero, "woman" is a stronger collocate for "character" than "men." Adeline's terrible death is proof of the power of reputation—or its lack—to destroy a woman's life.

Table 2.1
Collocations for “character”

<i>Vivian</i>	<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	Corpus
Frequency of “character” per 1000 words (2 d.p.)		
3.38	0.86	1.23
Top 20 collocates (20-word window)		
love	replied	whose
mother	age	person
public	indeed	indeed
woman	known	seemed
manner	long	love
affection	brother	general
hope	conduct	world
wife	gone	woman
knew	knew	knew
disposition	mistaken	once
son	nor	opinion
two	real	manner
feel	surely	nor
hear	terms	manners
just	truth	part
ladies	attribute	many
men	call	cannot
others	candid	known
power	capable	therefore
proper	consistency	long

Looking now at the differences between the lists, we can get some insight into what causes Vivian and Adeline to deform rather than form their characters. Adeline lives in a world where the individual has little control over their own character. The close collocates of “character” in the novel fall roughly into two groups: terms for strength of character, like “candid,” “capable” and “consistency,” and terms

indicating the way people talk about the characters of others, like “replied,” “indeed,” “surely” and “mistaken.” *Adeline Mowbray* is the only novel in the corpus where “gone” is a top collocate with “character.” This is due to only two scenes in the novel, but crucial ones:

“Surely, surely,” cried the kind and candid Emma Douglas, “I must grossly have mistaken Miss Mowbray’s character, if she was capable of the conduct which you attribute to her!”

“My dear creature!” replied Mrs Wallington, “how should you know any thing of her character, when it was gone long before you knew her?—*Character*, indeed! you remind me of my brother... Mr Davenport,” continued she to a gentleman present, “did you ever hear the story of my brother and an angel of purity whom he met with abroad?” (p. 229)

This passage contains three of the novel’s 34 instances of the word “character.” It illustrates one quirk of the method of collocation analysis. Since there are three “characters” in quick succession in the passage, many of these words have been counted three times as collocates of the word. This is appropriate, however, since the repetition of “character” in this scene is emphatic and intentional. Emma and Mrs Wallington disagree utterly as to the meaning of the word, and it affects the meaning of all the other words in the passage. Emma thinks she must have “mistaken” Adeline’s private, or real character, while Mrs Wallington thinks she mistook Adeline’s character as a kept woman. Emma thinks that character is an innate quality of the soul, Mrs Wallington something that can be lost—“gone”—due to one scandalous decision. The meek and virtuous Emma is powerless to hold Mrs Wallington’s tongue, and the older lady immediately grabs a new conversational partner to tell Adeline’s story and assert her own definition of character. We will see how brilliantly Opie explores this social aspect of language below (§2.3).

The other instance of “gone” and “character” in close proximity in the novel is also instructive. Sitting one evening in Lisbon, Adeline and Glenmurray meet “Mr

Maynard, an amiable man, who had gone to seek his fortune in India, and was returned a nabob, but with an irreproachable character.” (67) His situation is the opposite of Adeline’s. His public character as an English gentleman is gone, as is Adeline’s public character as a virtuous woman. But Mr Maynard’s new public character—“nabob”—has not robbed him of respect for his “irreproachable” private character. Opie’s narrator clearly agrees with Emma Douglas that it is the private character that counts, though Mr Maynard is also a man, so he doesn’t suffer the burden of gossip and repressive expectations that Adeline does.⁵⁴

Adeline Mowbray might be the only novel in the corpus where “character” and “gone” are collocates, but in *Vivian* we also encounter a protagonist who loses their character. It is the Della Cruscan wit, Rosamunda, who accuses him of being characterless, when he arrives at a masquerade with no costume:

“Such a capital Tancred as you would have made! And now you are no character at all! But then, you are only on a par with certain ladies. Comfort yourself with the great Pope’s (I fear, too true,) reflection, that—

‘Most women have no characters at all.’” (238)

This short speech is coiled round with ironies. Ranting Rosamunda is the most superficial person in the novel, and she is accusing Vivian of lacking character because he has appeared as his own true self. His decision to appear without a costume was one of his rare good ones. The plan had been for he and Lady Julia to appear as Tancred and Sigismunda, lovers from a tale in *The Decameron*, but they decided against it when Lady Julia was struck with fear of the gossips’ tongues. The scene thus plays again on anxieties about women’s public character, and also plays on stereotypes about women’s lack of inner, private character. It is of course

⁵⁴ See Shelley King, “The ‘Double Sense’ of Honor: Revising Gendered Social Codes in Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*,” in *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832*, ed. Miriam L. Wallace (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

Rosamunda, the terrible poet and over-applier of makeup, who lives up to Pope's misogynistic witticism—but she is nonetheless right that lack of character is precisely Vivian's problem.

Vivian is one of the three novels in the corpus where “public” is among the top collocates with “character.” The others are Edgeworth's own *Patronage* and John Galt's *The Provost*. All these novels are about ambitious political men trying to win themselves a public eminence. In *Vivian*—as in *Patronage*—parliament is portrayed as a sink of corruption, but nonetheless Edgeworth suggests that Vivian's ambition is one of the few forces that lend him some integrity. After running off with Mrs Wharton and destroying his engagement, he remorsefully hopes that “if he distinguished himself in public life, and if he there displayed steadiness of character, he might win back Selina's esteem and affection.” (182) Later, after his loveless marriage to Lady Sarah, he finds solace in the thought of his reputation:

In this wreck of his happiness, one saving chance, however, yet remained. He had still a public character; he was conscious of having preserved unblemished integrity, as a member of the senate; and this integrity, still more than his oratorical talents, raised him far above most of his competitors, and preserved him not only in the opinion of others, but in his own. (385)

As we saw in Chapter 1, Hazlitt argued that we form an imaginary or ideal self by constantly noticing our own thoughts, feelings and perceptions, and that developing this sense of self reduces our natural disinterestedness. Edgeworth suggests just the opposite. Vivian derives his ideal self in large part from other people—he is “conscious” of their opinions. And this sense of self does not make him self-interested, but instead raises him to meet his duties on behalf of the public. Those critics who claim that Vivian does not change or develop over the course of the novel have not noticed this element of his self-conception. At first, he has political

integrity because he desires Selina's esteem; in the end, his integrity is based on the sounder Rousseauan footing of his citizenship.

But in the end Vivian, like Adeline, has a fatal flaw at the foundation of his selfhood. Since his self-respect is built on his reputation, when he loses his reputation he loses his identity. His father-in-law and patron Lord Glistonbury makes a corrupt deal which Vivian feels powerless to reject, and the dishonour leads directly to the duel that ends his life. Like Adeline's, Vivian's destiny rests on other people, on the society that discusses and defines who he is.

This brings us to the second key term of our discussion, "society." Table 2.2 shows the collocations for the word. *Vivian*, as we have seen, swirls ironically around the word "character"—it has the highest frequency of the word in the corpus. *Adeline Mowbray*'s keyword is "society," of which it has the third-highest frequency after Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman* and Edgeworth's *Leonora*, two other tales of sexually free women battling against a prejudiced world. Strangely, many novels we might think of as social rather than psychological, such as *Castle Rackrent*, *Old Mortality*, and *Annals of the Parish*, have very low frequencies of the word "society" (0.10, 0.09 and 0.04 per 1000 words respectively). Table 2.2 helps us to explain this fact. In *Vivian*, as in the corpus as a whole, "society" has predominately positive collocations: "pleasure," "company," "happiness," "consolation." For the poor rebel Adeline, society is a bleak world of relentless opposition. It is not made up of "company" or "people," as in *Vivian*, but of "opinions," "prejudices" and "painful" "things." In novels of rebellion, like *Maria*, *Leonora* and *Adeline Mowbray*, society solidifies, becomes a single forceful entity, crushing the will of the reprobate woman who refuses to obey. In a more social

novel, like *Annals of the Parish*, society is not a named entity, but a tissue of social relations permeating the novel as a whole.

Table 2.2
Collocations for “society”

<i>Vivian</i>	<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	Corpus
Frequency of “society” per 1000 words (2 d.p.)		
0.70	1.54	0.50
Top 20 collocates (20-word window)		
company	opinions	world
people	mother	pleasure
son	replied	found
felt	few	men
hero	happiness	happiness
justice	prejudices	therefore
often	act	perhaps
pleasure	example	general
proof	knew	whose
saw	lived	felt
actually	order	rank
agreeable	wife	woman
cannot	women	family
certain	world	nor
college	become	company
common	found	same
conceal	general	find
consolation	nor	manners
continuing	painful	always
country	things	many

Vivian and Adeline experience society very differently, and their self-deformation therefore comes about differently. Vivian is constantly rushed into

society, absorbing its prejudices unthinkingly. When he first visits Glistonbury Castle, he finds himself afflicted with the Rousseauan disease of *amour-propre*: "... now that he was a possessor of an estate in the vicinity, he considered Glistonbury Castle as a point of comparison, which made him dissatisfied with his own mansion." (38) The moment he has property, is of age, and sees himself as a man of the world, he begins to compare and compete with the rich and powerful. Wanting to have a great castle instead of his comfortable modern house, he involves himself in expensive renovations which will later make him vulnerable to the financial temptations that destroy his honour. Society acts on him "insensibly" (80, 121, 126), robbing him of self-consciousness—we will see in §2.3 how subtly its conventional language penetrates his mind.

Adeline's combat with society could not be more different. She is acutely conscious of its opinions and prejudices, as are many of the other characters. The fact that "replied" is a top collocate of "society" indicates how thoroughly the characters debate these opinions. Everything is debatable in the novel. Johnson finds it "positively dizzying in the degree to which it invalidates all answers, conservative and radical."⁵⁵ It is this "dizzying" atmosphere of debate that presents the gravest challenge to Adeline's moral will. If we cannot agree on the proper principles of action, how can I know which principles it is proper to enact? At one extreme is Adeline's mother, who argues that rational principles should have no place in moral action: "Little did I think that you were so romantic as to see no difference between amusing one's imagination with new theories and new systems, and acting upon them in defiance of common custom ..." (40-41). Glenmurray offers a more moderate point of view. Rebels like he and Adeline ought to make a little pact

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 22.

with the devil for the sake of their own happiness: even if their radical principles are “right in theory,” since

the mass of society could never at *once* adopt them, they had better remain unacted upon, than that a few lonely individuals should expose themselves to certain distress, by making them the rules of their conduct. (150)

The most contradictory solution of all is offered by Rachel Pemberton, the virtuous Quaker. At first she lashes Adeline for enacting her sincerely-held principles:

Thou art one of the enlightened, as they call themselves—Thou art one of those wise in their own conceit, who, disregarding the customs of ages, and the dictates of experience, set up their own opinions against the hallowed institutions of men and the will of the Most High. (122)

But later in the novel we find her arguing exactly the opposite point. Adeline is a hero, who “set ... the virtuous example of acting up to the dictates of conscience.” (252) Adeline herself never forsakes her right to act exclusively according to her own conscience, only obeying society if her reason enjoins it. When her reason finally sanctions marriage, however, it leads her to marry the vicious Berrendale, and she is filled with a powerful self-loathing that seems to cause her premature death. Society is a swirling tempest of opinions and prejudices, and the poor lonely individual seems powerless to hold back the storm by any effort of will.

This discussion gives us a new sense of the *Bildungsroman*. Its fundamental theme is the perfection of the will, or to use Romantic language, the formation of a character consistent with itself and with society. Table 2.3 demonstrates how central is the will in this corpus. The ultimate aim in these novels is “self-command,” which is both freedom—the sovereignty of the will—and conformity—the self-denial necessary to living in society.

Table 2.3**Top 20 “self-” words, whole corpus**

Word	Number in corpus
self-command	83
self-denial	79
self-reproach	75
self-love	60
self-possession	59
self-complacency	41
self-approbation	30
self-importance	25
self-willed	21
self-interest	20
self-defence	17
self-denying	17
self-evident	16
self-examination	16
self-reproaches	16
self-consequence	15
self-same	15
self-conceit	14
self-indulgence	14
self-respect	12

Vivian and *Adeline Mowbray* are central examples of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*, because they are profound explorations of this central theme of self-command. *Adeline's* self-command is perfect, but her will is mired in the insuperable contradictions of society. *Vivian's* nature is good, his aims good, his reason good, his friends good, but his will is undermined by society's insidious temptations and his all-too-human weakness. Both novels bring the very ideal of self-command into disrepute. The ideal's victims, *Adeline* and *Vivian*, are punished

far beyond their deserts. Its main spokespeople, the self-contradicting Rachel Pemberton and the ineffectual Mr Russell, are inadequate. The narrators blame Lady Mary and Mrs Mowbray for educating their children ill, but neither of these poor bereft widows is a villain either. The free will of Kant and Rousseau might be beautiful, even necessary. These novels suggest it is impossible.

Thus Vivian and Adeline question the *Bildungsroman*'s core ideal. It remains to be seen how they alter its form. Novels are prose narratives, and we will see how Edgeworth and Opie deform their narratives by reworking the traditional marriage plot (§2.2), and deform the prose in which they write, by suggesting that the English language itself has been debased by society (§2.3).

2.2 Deforming the Marriage Plot

To portray the perfection of the will, Romantic novelists drew on the ancient conventions of the marriage plot. Marilyn Butler gives a vivid description of the typical narrative of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*:

A young woman is to marry ... and the whole action impels her towards that marriage as apparently the fulfillment of her own desire, certainly the enactment of her social destiny. Wedding bells resolve all the difficulties raised in the plot, with a degree of completeness attainable not in the life of outward event but in the life of fantasy. And yet the long series of obstacles, trials, and perhaps terrors the heroine confronts on the road to marriage also suggests contrarily that permanent happiness is not so easily attained.⁵⁶

It isn't always a young woman—in *Hugh Trevor*, *The Old Manor House* and *Ormond* it's a young man. But Butler nonetheless makes some crucial observations. The "whole action" of the plot heads towards marriage. The whole action is a courtship, or series of courtships, which lead eventually to a final decision and a good marriage. The action raises contradictions that the wedding bells "resolve."

⁵⁶ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, xxxii.

Self-deformation is a constant risk. Those “obstacles, trials and perhaps terrors” threaten to turn the Elizabeth Bennets and Wilhelm Meisters of the world into Adelines and Vivians. Numerous scholars, from Watt to Ruth Perry, have agreed with Butler that the marriage plot was the central trope of Romantic fiction, offering various sociological explanations for why this should be so.⁵⁷

Edgeworth and Opie deform the marriage plot. They compress and reorder their protagonists' courtships, so there is no obvious marriage the whole action heads for. They indeed throw obstacles, trials and terrors in the way of their protagonists, but Vivian and Adeline cannot overcome them, and when the wedding bells ring, the contradictions remain unresolved. Adeline's legal husband, Berrendale, is vicious, selfish, narcissistic, and a bigamist. Vivian's wife, Lady Sarah, is a good person—“There cannot be a better woman!” (453)—but he neither loves nor listens to her, and she cannot arrest his decline. It is not merely the case that Vivian and Adeline are individual failures. These novels bring the very idea of a free, companionate, all-resolving marriage into question.

In both novels, the traditional courtship plot is compressed into the first few chapters. In *Vivian* the compression is particularly extreme. In Chapter 1, Vivian returns home from Oxford with his new friend Russell. His mother, Lady Mary, is initially delighted with the “improvements” of his character (10-11), and there is an

⁵⁷ Watt and Lawrence Stone argue that the rise of “companionate marriage” was an essential component of the rise of individualism, which is the novel's core ideology: Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977); Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 135-51. Perry criticises Watt and Stone's argument that love-marriage made women more free, but agrees it was the central trope of late eighteenth-century fiction: Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 5, passim and esp. 193, n. 8. Armstrong and Moretti agree that the rise of individualism meant that novelists preferred to write about political issues in terms of the individual. These marriages are thus both “personal” or “sexual” contracts, and “social” ones: Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, chap. 1; Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 22. See above, n. 39.

“accord of reason and *will*” between them (12). But then comes the first obstacle and the first contradiction: Vivian falls in love with Selina Sidney, his mother’s financially inadequate young friend, and his “romantic” will crosses his mother’s “worldly” one (27). After several arguments, and the intervention of the reasonable Mr Russell, a compromise is finally reached. If Vivian will travel for a year, and prove his constancy to Selina, his mother will yield her consent. Vivian travels. He returns. His constancy is proved—he appears to have overcome his congenital weakness of will—and by the end of Chapter 1, a whole year of dissension and strife and struggle for self-worth has ended. The happy characters wait only the wedding bells that will ring in their marital felicity. The entire action of *Emma* takes nine months, the time of Mrs Weston’s pregnancy. Here a similar history of perplexity and self-examination takes place over 35 pacy octavo pages. Vivian’s engagement solves nothing. A year’s travel has *not* been enough to cure his infirmity of will, and his wedding is delayed and delayed by his political career and financial shenanigans, until in Chapter 5 he lets slip that he’s been flirting with a friend’s wife and Selina calls the whole thing off. He still has 10 more chapters and two more courtships to stumble through before tumbling into his early grave.

Adeline’s courtship is not as compressed as Vivian’s, but she still enters the world, meets and “marries” her ideal spouse sometime before the end of Volume 1. By the end of Chapter 3, Adeline has completed her education. Despite her quixotism, she “unite[s] various and opposing excellencies” (17)—reason, imagination, usefulness—and she seems, like Vivian, ready to take on the world. That she accordingly does in Chapter 4, when she and her mother go to Bath. There she is first attracted to the rakish Colonel Mordaunt, who despite his cultivated mind is not a “*marrying man*” (21). Then she meets Frederic Glenmurray, “a man of

family, and of a small independent fortune" (20), a man of sublime virtue, and a man who quickly falls passionately in love with her. Like Lady Mary, Mrs Mowbray opposes this "romantic" match (40), though it is not romantic in the same way as Vivian's. Glenmurray does not share Selina's poverty and low station, as he points out to Mrs Mowbray in a letter (45-56). The problem is, of course, Adeline's "romantic" resolution to live with him unmarried. When her new father-in-law, Sir Patrick O'Carrol, tries to rape her (60), she runs away and enacts this resolution, though Glenmurray hopes he can persuade her to marry down the track (62). It takes Emma an entire novel to reject Mr Elton and Frank Churchill, and to unite herself to Mr Knightley. It takes Adeline only nine chapters to reject the wrong man and choose the right, and the ensuing two volumes of the novel reveal how utterly her union with Glenmurray fails to secure her happiness.

The compression of the marriage plot breaks the link between courtship and self-formation. In most canonical Romantic novels, to use Magee's attractive phrase, courtship is an "instrument of growth."⁵⁸ The protagonist forms their self by meeting a series of flawed suitors, judging their moral failings, and finally choosing the suitor whose character is ideal. In Bage's *Hermsprong* (1796), Caroline must choose between the mysterious outsider Hermsprong and the tubercular insider Sir Phillip Chestrum. Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* has to choose between the talented but depraved Coke Clifton and the poor but sturdy Frank Henley. Even when there is only one suitor, the protagonist must still form their self by working through the contradictions of their love. In Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*, Orlando and Monimia are certain of their love for one another, but if Orlando marries her, he will lose all chance of inheriting Rayland Hall (the house of the title),

⁵⁸ William H. Magee, "Instrument of Growth: The Courtship and Marriage Plot in Jane Austen's Novels," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 17, no. 2 (1987).

and will cross his parents' wishes. He endlessly deprecates these "distracting contests between love and duty."⁵⁹ It is only after a long odyssey across England and revolutionary America that he can resolve this conflict, marrying Monimia and converting the Rayland Hall into a symbol of continuity and progress: "... without spoiling that look of venerable antiquity for which it was so remarkable, he collected within it every comfort and every elegance of modern life."⁶⁰ Edgeworth and Opie bring this whole "instrument of growth" idea into question. Vivian and Adeline choose the correct spouses. Vivian works through the conflicts of love and duty. Adeline rejects the morally inadequate suitors. But both of their courtships are so compressed that they become empty and artificial conventions. Emma's nine-month courtship might seem a compelling symbol of her moral growth when it is narrated in detail over three volumes. Reduced to a few chapters, like Vivian's or Adeline's, it would seem totally unreal.

This time-compression continues throughout *Vivian and Adeline Mowbray*. Time flies by in these novels. Vivian travels for a year in Chapter 1. By Chapter 5, another year has passed. By Chapter 13, another year has elapsed, and he finds himself espousing Lady Sarah Glistonbury. Their marriage may not last quite nine months, but long enough for Lady Sarah to deliver a stillborn child in the novel's penultimate paragraph (460). *Adeline Mowbray* has an even longer timespan. Time is vague before she leaves with Glenmurray, but by the beginning of Volume 2, they have spent some months on the continent and the pregnant Adeline is showing. Three chapters later, and three months have passed. Adeline miscarries, and Glenmurray dies. By the beginning of Volume 3, she has experienced two years of solitude and persecution. She finally accedes to Glenmurray's dying wish and

⁵⁹ Charlotte Turner Smith, *The Old Manor House*, 4 vols. (London: J. Bell, 1793), III.226.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.359.

marries Berrendale. By the next chapter, nearly three years have passed (their daughter, Editha, is two), and Berrendale departs for the West Indies, where he will contract another marriage and die in the tortures of remorse. Nearly another year elapses before the final chapter of the novel, and Adeline's tearful death in the bosom of her estranged mother.

It is not simply that a great quantity of time passes. Time itself has a peculiar quality in these novels. Moretti claims that time is pleasant in the *Bildungsroman*: "It is an elastic, elusive present, the exact opposite of the definitive 'here and now' of tragedy."⁶¹ It is malleable: "... there is no irreversible moment in which everything, in one fell swoop, is decided."⁶² In this elastic, elusive, reversible time, each moment is "a sort of 'experiment' performed with one's self."⁶³ The protagonist tries out different ideas and behaviours, and doesn't settle on a final course of action until the final decision, the marriage that completes their self-formation. This is Wordsworth's "fair seed-time" (*WW*, 498). It is the "evolutive" time Foucault says is essential to modern self-discipline.⁶⁴ It is the time Clarence Harvey experiences in *Belinda*, when he argues that the unthinking masses "must depend for their progress on the experiments that we brave volunteers, at whose expense they are to live and learn, are pleased to try."⁶⁵

This is not Adeline's time. At first she agrees with Clarence Harvey: "We are answerable to no one for our conduct; and we can make any experiments in morals that we choose." (112) Almost immediately after saying this, however, she goes for a

⁶¹ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 44.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 160.

⁶⁵ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 276. See James Chandler, "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011), 100-01.

walk and finds it is not the case. Colonel Mordaunt appears, and having heard she is now Glenmurray's mistress, treats her as a woman open to seduction:

“And suppose I am *not* his wife,” cried Adeline, “is it then given to a wife only to be secure from being insulted by offers horrible to the delicacy, and wounding to the sensibility, like those which I have heard from you?” (115)

Cruel time is irreversible. Even after she becomes Berrendale's wife, she finds that the stain of her life with Glenmurray will not be erased. Berrendale finds it all too easy to persuade the world they are not really married, exposing Adeline to the insults of Mr Langley, an unscrupulous lawyer. Colonel Mordaunt, by this time a reformed libertine, cannot forget Adeline's past behaviour, however much he admires her character: “... nor could he for a moment hesitate to prefer as a wife, Emma Douglas who had never erred, to Adeline who had.” (235) Time in *Adeline Mowbray* is not elastic, elusive and reversible. It is quite brutally the opposite.

Vivian weaves subtler nets of time for himself. To some extent, indeed, he finds time reversible. When he elopes with Mrs Wharton to the continent, he finds he can return to London with his character unimpeached. It was all a stitch-up. Mr and Mrs Wharton had conspired to seduce him and elope so they could divorce. Russell writes Vivian a glowing letter to assure him he can reverse everything: “Return to your country, your friends, and yourself, Vivian! Your day is not yet over! Your sun is not yet set!” (167) Gender must play a role here: Colonel Mordaunt can also reverse his libertine past in a way that Adeline cannot. Russell and Lady Mary in fact spend most of the novel assuring Vivian that if he only shows a little spine, he can turn back the clock. Their advice is disproven by events, however. Selina assures him that she will never change her mind about their blasted engagement: “the possibility of my being united to you is past” (179). He makes mistakes from the first that haunt him to the end of the novel. He begins his quixotic home renovations

in Chapter 2, and when costs start to balloon, finds he cannot go back: "... but now, as lady Mary observed, it was too late to repent; and it was, at any rate, best to go on and finish it with spirit—since it was impossible (nobody knows why) to stop." (54) The debts he incurs to pay for these renovations, and for his two contested elections, ultimately pressurise him to make the shameful political compromise that ends his life, as we saw in §2.1. Likewise, when he starts to spend time with the Glistonburys, rumours immediately begin to swirl that an engagement between him and Lady Sarah is imminent. Russell warns him that if he does not cease his visits and kill the rumours, it will become dishonourable for him *not* to marry the lady (83-84). Two years later, the rumours are still circulating, and when the crunch point comes, Vivian feels he no longer has a choice (367; see §2.3). For Adeline, the past is a sledgehammer, crushing her every time she tries to rise. For Vivian, it is a spider's web, entangling and finally suffocating him. Perversely, though much more time passes in these novels than in *Emma*, much less changes.

In a sick irony, Adeline winds up defending the irreversibility of experience. After being persecuted unfairly for her choices for years, her character maligned, her virtue misjudged, she decides that "society was right in making, and in seeing, no distinction between me and any other woman living in an unsanctioned connexion."

(239) She also claims divorce is wrong:

To BEAR and FOREBEAR I believe to be the grand secret of happiness ... therefore, whatever would enable married persons to separate on the slightest quarrel or disgust, would make it so much the less necessary for us to learn this important lesson ...

(217)

We should not be able to reverse miserable decisions, because only if we live with our misery can we be happy. Adeline's opinions are not necessarily Opie's, of course. Numerous virtuous characters disagree with Adeline, and find that society was wrong to shun her: Savanna, Glenmurray, Emma Douglas, Mrs Beauclerc, Rachel

Pemberton, Dr Norberry. And for all Adeline's high-minded talk about divorce, Opie is quite happy to use her power as a novelist to break up a marriage. Adeline, twice widowed (if we count Glenmurray), dies in the company of her four best friends: her mother (twice widowed), Rachel Pemberton and Savanna (each once a widow), and Dr Norberry (who has just come from burying his wife). It seems that, even without divorce, one only has to "BEAR and FORBEAR" for so long.

Vivian and Adeline develop different senses of time in response to the irreversibility of experience. As we saw in the *Old Manor House*, in the classical *Bildungsroman* the protagonist discovers a way to shape time into a whole, weaving past, present and future together. Orlando inherits Rayland Hall, full of gothic features, heraldry and Civil War memorabilia. He makes tasteful renovations to bring it into the present, and hopes for children to secure its future. Vivian's solution to the crueller time of his world is to forget past and future. Having found that "the present, the vulgar present" constantly intrudes to derail his life plans (327), he ceases to try and shape his life, and finally thinks "only of avoiding to give or to feel present pain" (385). Adeline develops a more tragic sense of time as ineluctable fate: "She fancied all the sufferings she underwent were trials which she was doomed to undergo, as punishments for the crime she had committed in leaving her mother and living with Glenmurray; and expiations also." (185) Neither Vivian's nor Adeline's attempts to escape social time succeed. In other novels of the period, like Smith's *The Banished Man* or Inchbald's *Nature and Art*, rebellious characters end up forming utopian communities far from English society. Vivian tries to escape by relinquishing agency and going with the flow, but this only allows London's tentacular corruption to drag him down faster. Adeline's Keatsian sense of social time as a vale of soul-making seems to bring on the mysterious disease that kills her,

orphaning her daughter and killing her mother's only child at the very moment when the reconciliation of her shattered family is finally possible.

There is one respect in which Adeline and Vivian's compressed courtships resemble those of their luckier contemporaries. Like Edward Waverley or Orlando Somerive, Vivian and Adeline are youths, and time turns them into adults. For Romantic writers, the distinguishing feature of youth was enthusiasm, that bugbear of eighteenth-century thought. Growing up is largely a matter of moderating one's "Great Expectations" (1861) and accumulating "Lost Illusions" (1843). Figure 2.1 shows the uses of "enthusiasm," "enthusiast" and "enthusiastic" in seven novels from our corpus. In both *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray*, these words appear more often in the first half of the novel than the second, suggesting its slow decline through painful experience. The pattern in *Vivian* is particularly subtle. The six uses of "enthusias*"⁶⁶ in the first quarter of the novel all refer to Vivian, fired up with his high ideals. But as the first year of his adult life draws to a close, he is already chastened. The next six uses of the term (mostly around the halfway mark) refer not to Vivian but to the vivacious Lady Julia Glistonbury, a far more impressive young person than our hero. She deforms herself in Adeline's, rather than Vivian's, way:

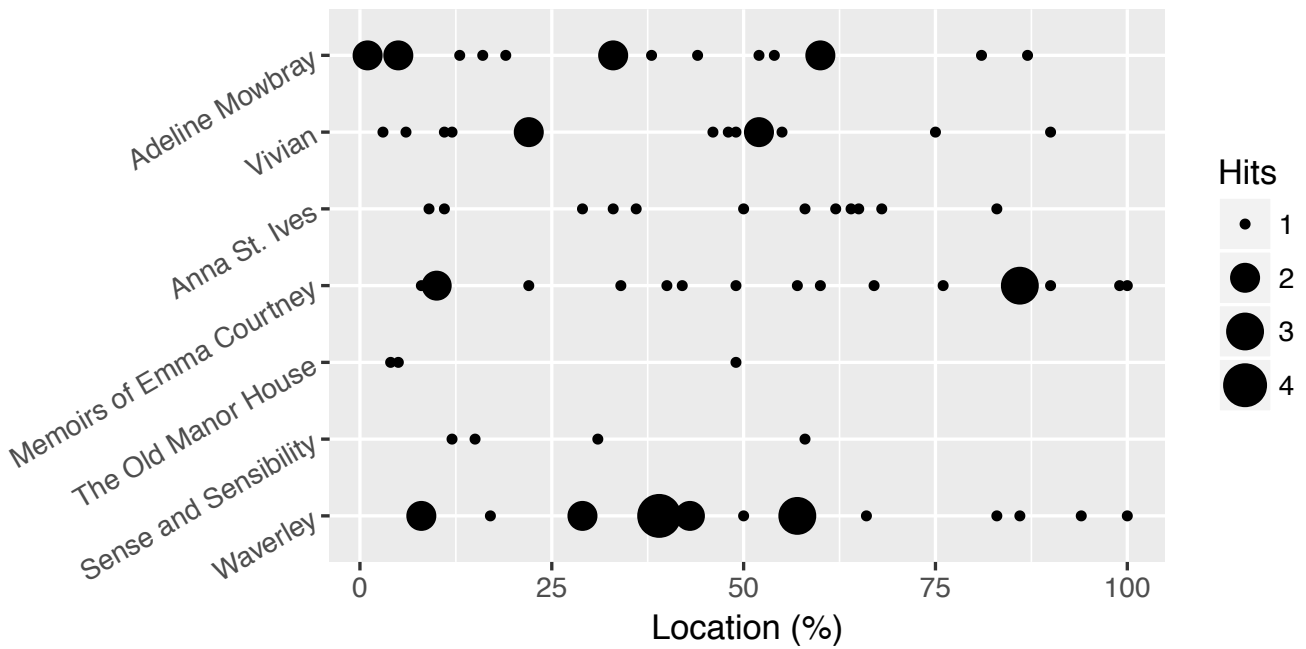
It has been my misfortune, that the very desire I felt to improve myself; the best dispositions of my heart; the perception of what was excellent; the enthusiasm for all that was wise and good, from the circumstances in which I was placed, and from the errors of my education, operated against me—decided and accelerated my ruin—Ruin?—Yes! (292)

The final use of "enthusiasm" in the novel is tragic. When Vivian ponders the political deal that will wreck his honour, "the enthusiasm of his patriotism [is] appalled" (414)—but as we already know, he succumbs nonetheless.

⁶⁶ The asterisk is a wild-card, indicating that any of the endings, "-m," "-t" and "-tic" are acceptable.

Figure 2.1

“Enthusias*” in seven Romantic novels



Various characters are enthusiastic in *Adeline Mowbray*, but it is Adeline, the “enthusiast for virtue” (119), who incarnates the quality. She loses it at the end of Volume 2, the last time the narrator mentions her “enthusiasm” (162). The two final uses of the term refer not to her, but to the reformed Colonel Mordaunt, when he falls in love first with Adeline (216) and then with Emma Douglas (233).

As Figure 2.1 shows, there are various patterns of enthusiasm in these Romantic novels. Enthusiasm runs all the way through *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, a novel of self-deformation with a failed courtship plot. *Waverley*’s enthusiasm peaks a third of the way in, when he is deep in the highlands. *Sense and Sensibility* and *The Old Manor House* barely feature the term, despite the manifest enthusiasm of their central characters. In fact, the three Austen novels whose protagonists are arguably the most enthusiastic are also the three in which she never once uses the word: *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*. As Table 2.4 shows, however, it is fair to say that declining enthusiasm is a paradigm in the

novels of our corpus. In the corpus of 56, there are 27 where “enthusias*” is more frequent in the first half of the book, and only 15 where it is more frequent in the second. There are 8 novels that do not use the word, and 6 where the first and second half are equal.

Table 2.4

Frequency of “enthusias*”, whole corpus

Title	First Half	Second Half
<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	12	6
<i>Vivian</i>	10	5
<i>The Absentee</i>	6	3
<i>Annals of the Parish</i>	0	0
<i>Anna St. Ives</i>	6	6
<i>The Antiquary</i>	4	0
<i>The Ayreshire Legatees</i>	2	1
<i>The Banished Man</i>	2	5
<i>Belinda</i>	7	15
<i>The Bride of Lammermoor</i>	5	3
<i>Caleb Williams</i>	6	4
<i>Camilla</i>	7	7
<i>Castle Rackrent</i>	0	0
<i>Cecilia</i>	2	6
<i>Celestina</i>	3	3
<i>Discipline</i>	5	8
<i>Emma</i>	0	0
<i>Emmeline</i>	3	2
<i>Ennui</i>	2	1
<i>The Entail</i>	3	8
<i>Evelina</i>	2	0
<i>Glenarvon</i>	28	7
<i>Guy Mannering</i>	6	3
<i>Harrington</i>	32	7
<i>Henry</i>	10	4
<i>Hermesprong</i>	1	0
<i>The Heroine</i>	2	3
<i>The Adventures of Hugh Trevor</i>	8	3
<i>Ivanhoe</i>	1	1
<i>Julia</i>	8	3

Title	First Half	Second Half
<i>Lady Susan</i>	0	0
<i>Leonora</i>	8	4
<i>Man As He Is</i>	1	2
<i>Mansfield Park</i>	1	3
<i>Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman</i>	4	0
<i>Marriage</i>	3	7
<i>Mary, A Fiction</i>	1	4
<i>Memoirs of Emma Courtney</i>	9	10
<i>The Heart of Mid-Lothian</i>	13	3
<i>Nature and Art</i>	1	0
<i>Northanger Abbey</i>	0	0
<i>The Old Manor House</i>	3	0
<i>Old Mortality</i>	19	23
<i>Ormond</i>	4	11
<i>Patronage</i>	11	19
<i>Persuasion</i>	1	3
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	0	0
<i>The Provost</i>	0	0
<i>Rob Roy</i>	4	4
<i>Self-Control</i>	14	4
<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	3	1
<i>A Simple Story</i>	0	0
<i>Walsingham</i>	12	7
<i>The Wanderer</i>	14	6
<i>Waverley</i>	15	8
<i>The Wild Irish Girl</i>	12	12

We saw in §2.1 how *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* share a fundamental theme with the other novels of the corpus: the perfection of the will. Here we can see that they also share a structure: the protagonist enters the world, and is chastened by the process of trying to find a partner. Edgeworth and Opie twist and contort this plot, however, undermining the idea that courtship leads to successful self-formation. *Vivian* himself has little to say in favour of prevailing modes of courtship. If he cannot spend time with a lady without being suspected of being engaged to her, it

“must absolutely preclude one sex from obtaining any real knowledge of the characters and dispositions of the other” (86). Russell agrees. It should then be no surprise that in the end, not only Vivian misjudges the wisdom of marrying Lady Sarah, but so do Russell, Lady Mary and Sarah’s own sister Julia. The classic novel of courtship makes little sense when prevailing modes of courtship virtually forbid learning. And indeed, a cursory reflection on any of Austen’s novels reveals how extremely lucky the heroines are to know a thing about their future husbands. If Lydia Bennet had never eloped, if the Crofts had never leased Kellynch, if Knightley had not been her brother-in-law and neighbour, then Elizabeth, Anne and Emma would have had virtually no chance to see and decide for themselves.

Edgeworth and Opie’s experiments with plot and time reveal new and disturbing potentialities of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*. It is simply not true to argue, as Foucault, Armstrong and Moretti do in their various ways, that Romantic writers had a complacent attitude towards the emerging ideas of self-discipline or socialisation. Even Edgeworth, who wrote many optimistic novels, could produce pessimistic books like *Vivian*, *Castle Rackrent*, *Patronage* and *Helen* (1834). Moreover, as Moretti himself observes, even the period’s most optimistic novels of self-formation are littered with minor characters who deform or destroy themselves. When he claims it is “most uncommon” for the protagonist to do so, however, we must demur.⁶⁷ Vivian and Adeline’s fatal courtships are not the only ones, even in our little corpus of 56 relatively well-known novels of the period. Those critics we met in the Introduction, who claim that books like *Vivian* or *Adeline Mowbray* are somehow “secondary” or “negative,” must confront the fact that extremely compressed or extremely drawn-out courtships narrated in tragic time were a

⁶⁷ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 47.

feature of Romantic fiction from the start—unless we simply choose to ignore *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, *Mary; A Fiction* and *Corinne*. Novels like *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* reveal how anxious and uncertain Romantic readers and writers were about courtship and self-formation. And they might just help us to explain those novels, like *Cecilia*, *Belinda* and *Sense and Sensibility*, whose supposedly neat-and-tidy marriage plots invariably strike readers as either disappointing or unreal.⁶⁸ Edgeworth and Opie were not the only ones wondering what took place after THE END. As we will now see, their sense of the artificiality of the courtship plot is only one part of a broader phenomenon: their sense of the artificiality of all things in society, particularly its language.

2.3 The Prison-House of Language

The *Bildungsroman* does not only have a characteristic theme and story: self-formation and the marriage plot. It has a characteristic language. Gary Kelly argues that Romantic writers were anxious about national identity, and used standard English as a way of presenting a standard British identity in their novels:

... the fact that the 'serious' characters in such novels tend to 'speak' in the same standard English used by the narrator only reinforces the implicit argument of such novels: full selfhood is shown in standard written English; marginal or merely social selfhood is shown in non-standard or 'deviant' forms of English.⁶⁹

Part of self-formation is learning to speak properly. At the end of the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist and the narrator should speak the same language. The protagonist will have acquired the correct self-definition, a way of describing themselves which is true to their identity. In his brilliant stylometric study of Austen, John Burrows presents some compelling evidence that this is exactly what happens

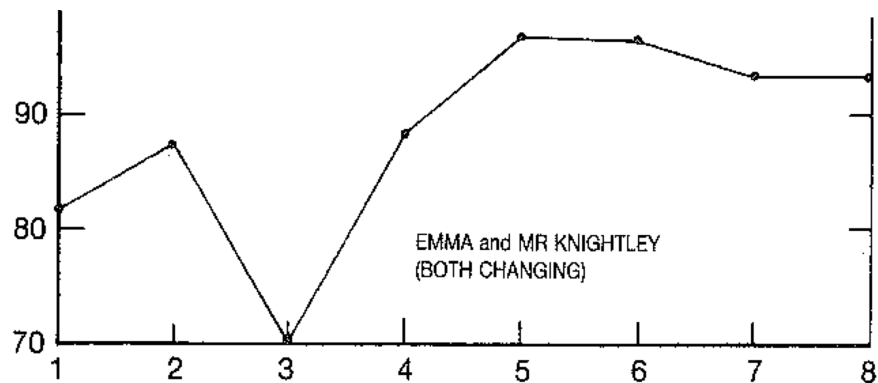
⁶⁸ Perry gives a nice analysis of the "ambivalence" of *Cecilia* in Perry, *Novel Relations*, 235.

⁶⁹ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 17.

in her novels. He carefully tagged all the words in every Austen novel, marking whether they were uttered by the narrator or a particular character, and then performed statistical analysis on the most common words in her vocabulary—the sort of words we excluded from the analysis in §2.1. As Burrows has shown in his work on authorship attribution, each individual has a kind of stylistic fingerprint inscribed in these invisible common words.⁷⁰ So, it turns out, do Austen's characters. In a remarkable analysis of *Emma*, he shows how Emma's distinctive speech and Knightley's become more similar over the course of the novel (Figure 2.2). He concludes that both Emma and Knightley end the novel “rather more ‘like themselves’ than they were at the beginning.”⁷¹ This is of course exactly what doesn't happen to Vivian and Adeline. Both of them speak the “standard” English which Kelly claims was the vehicle of “full selfhood” in novels of the period. But both end up defining themselves inadequately, resulting in their tragic deaths.

Figure 2.2

The similarity of Emma and Knightley's language⁷²



In Volume 3, Chapter 8, Adeline makes her final confession, her final attempt to define herself. She regrets her life, in which she “became in the eyes of the world

⁷⁰ John Burrows, “Delta’: A Measure of Stylistic Difference and a Guide to Likely Authorship,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 17, no. 3 (2002).

⁷¹ Burrows, 192.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 196.

an example of vice, when I believed myself the champion of virtue.” (238) With this realisation, she longs for her onrushing death. In a particularly heartrending moment, she decides it would be better for her daughter Editha if she died:

... if I lived, I should be most probably a dangerous example to her; for I should be (on my death-bed I think I may be allowed to boast) respected and esteemed; while the society around me would forget my past errors, in the sincerity of my repentance. If then a strong temptation should assail my child, might she not yield to it from an idea that ‘one false step may be retrieved’, and cite her mother as an example of this truth? (238-39)

As Meghan Hattaway observes, the problem with Adeline’s self-description is that it is incorrect. At no point in the novel is she an “example of vice” who corrupts those around her. She nurses Glenmurray during his final illness. She keeps Berrendale in control (his extra-marital affairs only occur when he is apart from her). She reforms the profligate Colonel Mordaunt of his bad habits.⁷³ She saves Savanna and her son from penury (135-37). She keeps two pensioners in Richmond (266). She might think that her example corrupted Mary Warner, but Rachel Pemberton assures her it did not (*ibid.*). Indeed, the corruption runs the other way—at one point, Mary infects Adeline with smallpox (206).⁷⁴ To cap it off, Adeline is an exemplary schoolmistress after Glenmurray dies, and her students’ “improvement [is] rapid in proportion to the love which they b[ear] her.” (165) Adeline may or may not be right to decide that marriage is an important institution. She is certainly wrong to define herself as an “example of vice” and long for her own death.

Vivian also allows the “eyes of the world” to define him, precipitating his own death. We have already seen (§2.1) how after his marriage to Lady Sarah, he lets his self-worth rest on his reputation for integrity. This is what makes his final political

⁷³ Meghan Burke Hattaway, “Amelia Opie's Fiction: Contagious and Recuperative Texts,” *European Romantic Review* 24, no. 5 (2013): 562-64.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 564-65.

deal such a calamity. Lord Glistonbury has been angling for a marquissate his entire political career. He has been in the opposition for some years, believing he could thus pressure the government to make terms with him. Vivian's great eloquence for the opposition has made the government keener to bring Glistonbury's men to their side, and they finally offer him the new rank on condition that Vivian come over as well. Vivian will be offered a lucrative ministerial place—something the impecunious young man could well afford. After a miserable internal struggle, Vivian succumbs. The next day in parliament, he is accosted by his quondam friend Wharton, who is enraged that Glistonbury misled him over the deal—something of which Vivian was unaware. Despite his true innocence, Vivian is stung by Wharton's insults:

“*Public vice!*—we all know where *that* would end, in these days—in public honours; but none of you would believe me, when I told you that *public virtue* would end—in *private treachery!*—”

“That's neat!—that's strong!—faith, that's home!” whispered someone. (434)

Vivian agrees it's “home,” and issues the challenge that will lodge a bullet in his chest. Like Adeline, he has allowed others to define who and what he is. The irony is that Wharton does not insult Vivian for what he has actually done—betray his principles—but for what he actually has not—betray Wharton in the back-room negotiations. As always in these novels, things are irreversible. Wharton also allows his honour to be defined by society, and will not forsake “the glorious name of COURAGE” he has obtained by “*taking up the matter immediately in such a spirited way*” (435-46). He refuses to parley, and the duel must go ahead. One of Vivian's last acts before the duel is to “[execute] his will” (453). This is his first successful exertion of will—and like Adeline's final exertion, it is a will to self-destruction.

Vivian and Adeline's self-deformations culminate in the same way. They allow others to define them according to the standard language of society, and these

definitions result in their premature deaths. Kelly argues that Romantic novels erect a barrier between the narrator's proper language and the "sociolect," "jargon" or "cant" of flawed minor characters.⁷⁵ In *Vivian and Adeline Mowbray*, this barrier is constantly breaking down, and it becomes unclear whether there is any language that is not a debased sociolect. Edgeworth and Opie worry, much like Astell or Rousseau before them, that society as a whole is ensnared in customary language.

In *Adeline Mowbray*, for example, Adeline, Glenmurray and Sir Patrick debate the meaning of the "life of honour:"

"... the life of honour appears to me a very excellent name for the pure and honourable union which it is my wish to form; and—"

"There; I told you so;" triumphantly interrupted Sir Patrick: "and I never was better pleased in life:—sweet creature! at once so lovely, so wise, and so liberal!"

"Sir," cried Glenmurray, "this is a mistake: your life of honour and Miss Mowbray's are as different as possible; you are talking of what you are grossly ignorant of."

"Ignorant! I ignorant! Look you, Mr Glenmurray, do you pretend to tell me I know not what the life of honour is, when I have led it so many times with so many different women?"

"How, Sir!" replied Adeline: "many times? and with many different women? My life of honour can be led with one only."

"Well, my dear soul, I only led it with one at a time." (29)

The same problem of self-expression occurs later in the novel, when Adeline is speaking with Mary about her situation with Glenmurray. Mary calls her a "kept lady." Adeline finds this offensive, and asks Mary to define such a person:

"Why, a lady who lives with a man without being married to him, I take it; and that I take to be your case, an't it, I pray?"

Adeline blushed and was silent:—it certainly was her case. (117)

⁷⁵ Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, 15.

Adeline tries another tack. She sees herself as Glenmurray's "wife in the sight of God." He would marry her in a moment if she chose. Mary cannot understand Adeline's position:

"Well, if master is inclined to make an honest woman of you, you had better take him at his word, I think."

"Gracious heaven!" cried Adeline, "what an expression!" (ibid.)

Adeline is crushed by the weight of the dictionary: she does not get to choose the definitions of words. It is not the virtuous, educated, thoughtful Adeline whose language prevails. It is the simple-minded, ill-educated Mary whose words have power. When Adeline is working as a schoolmistress in a small village, all it takes is for Mary to claim she once was "kept," and she loses her job (166). If Adeline wishes to express herself, she must use a language that has no good words for her.

Vivian's actions are also misconstrued according to a debased language, and he quite rightly resents the "Absurd, troublesome, ridiculous signs" by which society interprets his actions (85). But the novel also makes a subtler point about the conventionality of language. The language of society is constantly creeping into Vivian's mind, robbing him of volition and self-consciousness. Mrs Wharton, for example, seduces him by appealing to his vanity: he is "*the only man in the world to whom she would open her heart*" (117). His mother tries to tell him to stop seeing her so often, but he has grown "ashamed of being *kept in awe by his mamma*," and has come to resent "*female government*" (125). He thus rejects her "*lecture*" (130). Edgeworth fills the novel with such italicised phrases, or what Bakhtin calls "intonational quotation marks."⁷⁶ Quite often, Vivian will hear some italics, only for them to reappear later in his internal monologue. Lady Mary tells him he must

⁷⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 76.

marry for “connexion” (25), he hears the word whispered when the rumours about Lady Sarah first start to circulate (79), Lady Mary uses the word with him twice more (343-44), and it is no surprise to find it rushing to mind when Lord Glistonbury proposes that he marry Lady Sarah to protect their political alliance:

Whilst his lordship had been speaking, palsy, compassion, gratitude, vanity, rivalry, honour, lady Mary Vivian's conversation, lady Julia's letter, then again the *connexion*, the earldom in future, the present triumph or disappointment about the election, the insolent intrusion of Mr. Lidhurst, the cruelty of abandoning a lady, who was in love with him, the dishonour, the impossibility of receding after *certain reports*; all these ideas, in rapid succession, pressed on Vivian's mind: and his decision was in consequence of the feelings and of the embarrassment of the moment. (367)

The narrator is unduly harsh to Vivian in this paragraph. These ideas in his mind are not “of the moment.” They have been weaving themselves slowly into his consciousness over the last 350 pages.

Some characters, like Wharton and Selina, are clearly aware of language's power. When Vivian fears that he is acting like a “villain,” Wharton convinces him the word is merely conventional: “... *villains*, though they were very common in the time of Clarissa Harlowe, and of all the tragedy queens of the last century, are not to be heard of these days” (143). Later, when Vivian writes a desperate letter to Selina, who has just terminated their engagement, she responds in muted tones: “In spite of the word *adored*, which has usually such power to confound female judgment, Selina perceived, that all he said was merely a repetition of his former arguments...” (181). Wharton manipulates conventional language. Selina is immune to it. When Vivian's mother tries to persuade Vivian that language has such power, he refuses to accept it. All this talk of “*Platonics*,” she says, is dangerous: “Many a married woman, who would have started with horror at the idea of beginning an intrigue, has been drawn in to admit of a Platonic attachment.” (128) It is just an “expression,” replies Vivian, mere pages before his “Platonic attachment” to Mrs

Wharton turns sexual. "But you know language is conventional," says Russell elsewhere (85).

Ultimately, these supposedly realist novels are sceptical of reality. After Vivian's death, the narrator tells us, "lady Sarah survived, but has never since appeared in what is called the WORLD." (460) What does it mean to say she merely "survived"? What is the difference between the world and "what is called the WORLD"? Edgeworth implies answers to these questions, but it is not clear whether the story we have just read took place in the real or the artificial world, or whether Vivian was living or merely surviving in it. Adeline's existence in the world is also complicated. The narrator says that when she reads Glenmurray's radical essays on marriage, she is "conveyed by his bewitching pen from the world as it is, into a world as it *ought* to be." (14) But as we have seen, no-one in the novel can agree how "is" and "ought" fit together. Adeline, we have seen, claims that her experience has only taught her that society is prejudiced. Prejudice, annoyingly, is both real and false at the same time, and if this is what the world is, it makes "is" and "ought" an intractable question. It is no wonder that when Adeline dies, her cheeks are "flushed" with "joy" (268). Her dying ecstasy suggests either that reality has driven her mad, or that the real reality lies beyond the grave. Like Frankenstein's monster, neither she nor Vivian in the end can be sure whether they are man or monster.

Scholars have become accustomed to a certain story of the realist novel in English, according to which, sometime in the late eighteenth century, novelists began to depict characters who grow and change. *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* challenge this story. For these protagonists, time does not always bring change, and what change does occur is not always growth. These are only two of the many tragic novels

of self-deformation penned in the period, and their aesthetic achievement should make us doubt whether all the great novels of the period were *Bildungsromane* in the usual sense.

We can expand the traditional definition of the *Bildungsroman* to accommodate novels like *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray*. They share a fundamental theme with classical *Bildungsromane*: the perfection or imperfection of the will in society. They share a set of tropes: courtship, the end of youthful enthusiasm. They share a concern with language: the search for a common tongue that can unite the community. If we define the *Bildungsroman* according to these shared themes, tropes and concerns, then *Vivian*, *Adeline Mowbray*, and indeed *The Bride of Lammermoor* or *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* will seem as central to prose fiction of the period as *Emma* or *Waverley*. Nonetheless, *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* only invoke these shared themes, tropes and concerns in order to question the possibility of self-formation in modern society. They suggest that the classical *Bildungsroman* as we usually understand it is an impossible ideal. Seen this way, their contortions and contradictions, *Vivian*'s shallowness and *Adeline*'s self-loathing, are not aesthetic flaws but artistic triumphs. These are difficult books because they succeed in posing difficult questions.

Vivian and *Adeline Mowbray* raise anxieties that go back to Locke and Astell, with their fear of jargon and the dead weight of custom. These anxieties continued to plague the Romantic generations. Several Romantic poets felt they had found a way out, by discovering a natural, poetic language that was closer to the truth. At one moment, it seems that *Vivian* is tantalisingly close to this poetical solution. When he first moves to London, he is caught by his new pals with pen, ink, parchment—and the draft of a sonnet to Selina Sidney:

“Poetry!” cried Wharton, carelessly looking at what he had been writing, “Poetry, I protest!—Aye, I know this poor fellow’s in love; and every man who is in love is a poet, ‘with a woeful ditty to his mistress’s eyebrow’. Pray, what colour may Miss Sidney’s eyebrows be? ...” (92)

To protect Vivian from the dangerous forces of love and nature, Wharton gives him an unconventional suit of armour:

“... Look! Here is an impenetrable shield!” added he, wrapping round him a thick printed copy of an act of parliament. “Come, Vivian, you must come along with us to the house,

‘And, mix’d with men, a man you must appear.’” (ibid.)

The sonnet is a powerful symbol for everything Vivian and Adeline fail to achieve. A sonnet is integral. The wills of Vivian and Adeline are hopelessly imperfect and contradictory. A sonnet imposes a 14-line form on experience, giving it order and meaning. Vivian and Adeline fail to form their lives into a proper courtship and marriage—the “form” of marriage is anyway “contemptible,” cries Adeline (28). A sonnet is poetry, the purest and most beautiful kind of language. Neither Vivian nor Adeline can find such a language. Instead, they find only the rough paper and black ink of an act of parliament, words imposed from above by a society that does not love them. If only things were so simple. As we will shortly discover, for some Romantic poets, sonnets were bastards, or they had no form at all. Perhaps Vivian was not so wrong to wrap himself in legislation after all.

CHAPTER 3

POETRY: THE SELF-ABNEGATING SONNETS OF CHARLOTTE SMITH AND JOHN CLARE



The partial Muse, has from my earliest hours
Smiled on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread,
And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,
To weave fantastic garlands for my head:
But far, far happier is the lot of those
Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;
Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,
Reserves the thorn, to fester in the heart.
For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye
Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,
Points every pang, and deepens every sigh
Of mourning friendship, or unhappy love.
Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost,
*If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most!*¹

THUS BEGINS Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays* (1784), the book that kicked off the Romantic sonnet revival. The poem was a manifesto,² announcing a fresh approach to an old and often reviled form of lyric poetry. Samuel Johnson had defined the “sonnet” as a type of poetry “not very suitable to the English language,” and the “sonneteer” as “A small poet, in contempt.”³ But this sonneteer claimed to be no small poet. Her sonnets were the

¹ Charlotte Smith, “Sonnet I,” in Smith, *The Poems*, 13. All references to Smith's poetry will be to this edition, abbreviated CSP, indicated by sonnet and line numbers.

² See Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 327.

³ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: Knapton et al, 1755), II.

gift of the “Muse,” who had been especially “partial” to her since her birth, dooming her to a “rugged path” of poetic composition few others are forced to tread. Smith underscored her special identity as a great poet in the final line of her manifesto-sonnet, quoting the master-poet of eighteenth-century Britain, Alexander Pope. This was no arrogant ambition. *Elegiac Sonnets* opened the floodgates, and by the end of the 1790s, the bookshops and magazines of Britain were drowning in a sea of elegiac poems, 14 lines in length. Even Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a keen imitator of Smith, was provoked to pen weary parodies of the sonnets she had inspired:

Mine eye perus'd
 With tearful vacancy the *dampy* grass,
 Which wept and glitter'd in the paly ray:
 And I did pause me on my lonely way,
 And mused me on those wretched ones, who pass
 O'er the black heath of SORROW. (*CW*, XVI.356, ll. 4-9)

On closer inspection, however, Smith's poem is a strange manifesto. Despite claiming to be a great poet, she also seems to find poetry strange and alien. She claims that her poetry is the expression of her own emotions: she can “paint sorrow” because she feels it. These “elegiac” sonnets are confessions of her “every pang,” “mourning friendship” and “unhappy love.” But on the other hand, poetry is the “Muse,” whom Smith portrays as capricious and sadistic. It is “delusive” and “sportive,” evading Smith's attempts to control or understand it, and it appears to have cruel motives, heightening all Smith's woes and bathing her in tears rather than solving her problems. The “fantastic garlands” of the Muse may seem beautiful, but they are really a crown of thorns, bound about Smith's head without her will and pouring blood down her unhappy face. Smith has walked a rugged path to form herself into a poet. This has not given her a coherent sense of self, but instead the contradictory sense that however much she may be a poet, poetry and she are foes.

In the eighth edition, she added a frontispiece. Under her engraved portrait are the lines:

Oh! Time has Changed me since you saw me last,
And heavy Hours with Time's deforming Hand,
Have written strange Defeatures on my Face.⁴

Time may have made her a poet. It may have formed her experiences into beautiful sonnets. But she herself has only accumulated "Defeatures," deformities of emptiness.

Smith raises difficult questions about how the form of the sonnet relates to the form of her self. Some 30 years later, another poet, inspired by her example and penning sonnets of his own, would raise similar questions in a strikingly different way. John Clare claimed it was reading Smith that first made him think of publishing verse.⁵ In 638 sonnets of startling originality, he would break apart and reassemble this venerable genre of lyric poetry in an attempt to represent a distinctive kind of subjectivity. As in Smith's, in Clare's sonnets there is often a complicated relationship between the poet and the form of their poem:

Yon hall how fine that glorious long has been
Gilt wi' the spangles of declining day
That darkens as the suns beams leave the scene
Who like my sonnet slinks abrupt away⁶

Clare's sonnet is disobedient, fleeing the scene before he is done with it. If he was trying to form himself through experience, poetry has frustrated his aim. As we will

⁴ Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems*. 8th ed. 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1797), II.[frontispiece].

⁵ Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), 119.

⁶ John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), i.118, ll. 11-14. All other references will be to the Oxford editions of Clare's poetry, marked by volume and page numbers: *EP* for the *Early Poems*, *MP* for *The Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-2003), and *LP* for *The Later Poems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). I lightly regularise Clare's punctuation from time to time for readability. This is a controversial matter: see Bate, 563-76.

see, this is not the only sonnet of Clare's that ends abruptly, apparently contradicting the poet's intention. In other sonnets, he does not attempt to form himself at all, but instead aims to be formless, to dissolve his self into the chaos of reality:

The cowboys dog will bite his hide and lie
 For days and keep the herd from going by
 The crust of bread upon his nose is hid
 To cuck it up and catch it when he's bid (*MP* v.385, ll. 1-4)

In his later couplet-sonnets like this one, Clare would largely eliminate self-reference, and denude the structure of his poems by replacing the complex rhyme-schemes of traditional sonnets with simple rhyming couplets.

Literary historians now give Clare and Smith prominent roles in the story of the Romantic sonnet, but they still tend to put Wordsworth at the centre, and Smith and Clare on the margins. Some scholars, like Stuart Curran and Jacqueline Labbe, argue that Smith's sonnets are fully and typically Romantic, exemplifying central trends in the poetry of the era. But the most influential recent historians of the Romantic and nineteenth-century sonnet, Jenny Wagner and Joseph Phelan, both argue that Smith's "private" and "feminine" sonnets of "sensibility" are best understood as precursors to Wordsworth's "public" and "masculine" sonnets of Romanticism.⁷ Paula Backscheider has presented powerful arguments that Smith's sonnets do in fact have a "public" and political character,⁸ but there are deeper reasons to question Wagner and Phelan's arguments. Both are slaves to the self-formation idea. Wordsworth was the greater and more typical poet, they suggest, because his sonnets are well-formed and self-consistent. Each records a precious moment of self-formation, in which the "unitary" form of the sonnet exactly

⁷ Jennifer Ann Wagner, *A Moment's Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996); J. P. Phelan, *The Nineteenth-Century Sonnet* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2005).

⁸ Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 320-25.

replicates the “unitary” form of Wordsworth’s self.⁹ Smith might have revived the sonnet, and filled it with the high feeling and natural description we have come to associate with Romantic poetry, but her sonnets are studies in self-deformation. She uses them to describe irresolvable emotional contradictions, and uses strange and contradictory poetic forms.

Self-formation also thrusts Clare to the margins of the story. It is true that several scholars argue that Clare’s sonnets are central examples of the form in the Romantic period.¹⁰ But others more-or-less exclude him with a simple argument: “Clare’s later sonnets are, in some senses, not real sonnets at all.”¹¹ The problem is their lack of structure. They lack “reflexive moments” where they tie themselves together.¹² Without a sense of unfolding structure, Clare cannot portray the evolution of poetic consciousness in his sonnets. Clare’s champions typically respond to arguments like this in two ways. They either claim that the sonnets *are* structured, for instance by narrative,¹³ or they implicitly accept Phelan’s argument, and praise the very formlessness of the poems.¹⁴ William Kerrigan argues that Wordsworth’s great sonnets are about “building” a “home” in the world as well as in the “homely, rooted” form of the sonnet itself.¹⁵ Neither Smith nor Clare can build a

⁹ Wagner, *Moment’s Monument*, 13-16. Phelan says it was Wordsworth’s “masculine self-discipline” that allowed him to surpass earlier sonneteers like Smith: Phelan, *Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*, 12.

¹⁰ See Michael O’Neill, “The Romantic Sonnet,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, ed. A. D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 186-87; Sara Lodge, “Contested Bounds: John Clare, John Keats, and the Sonnet,” *Studies in Romanticism* 51, no. 4 (2012): 534-35; Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 51-56. His sonnets also appear in Paula R. Feldman and Daniel Robinson, eds., *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Phelan, 41.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Ben Hickman, “John Clare and the End of Description,” *John Clare Society Journal* (2011).

¹⁴ Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson, “Introduction,” in John Clare, *Northborough Sonnets* (Ashington and Manchester: Mid Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet, 1995), ix.

¹⁵ John Kerrigan, “Wordsworth and the Sonnet: Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” *Essays in Criticism* 35, no. 1 (1985): 57. It should be noted that nowhere does Kerrigan make a claim like Wagner or Phelan’s, that Wordsworthian and Romantic sonnets are one and the same.

home in the sonnet. Smith's sonnets are too rickety and misshapen to protect her from bad weather, and many of Clare's sonnets lack walls, roof and chimney.

These criticisms go back to the Romantic period itself. Smith was often accused of an Adeline-like excess of subjectivity. Anna Barbauld found that "Her later publications would have been more pleasing, if the author, in the exertions of fancy, could have forgotten herself ..." ¹⁶ Her endless inner torment could be tiring. By contrast, Clare's poems were sometimes derided for their Vivian-like lack of subjectivity. His publisher, John Taylor, once passed on a friendly piece of criticism from John Keats:

... [Keats] wishes to say to you that your Images from Nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular Sentiment. ... he feels as if the Description overlaid and stifled that which ought to be the prevailing Idea. ¹⁷

Keats only ever had the chance to read Clare's earlier, and comparatively more conventional poems. One can only imagine how he might have responded to the austere and experimental poems Clare wrote in the late 1820s and early '30s.

The sonnet is only one genre of lyric poetry, but Smith's and Clare's sonnets raise issues which go to the heart of Romantic poetry in general. Like the Romantic novel, the Romantic lyric has long been defined in terms of self-formation. In his influential study of *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), Curran argues that the central poem in British Romanticism is *The Prelude*, a composite text which mixes all the major poetic genres of the period. This "mixture of genres" is not merely a matter of style; it is the means by which Wordsworth represents "a dialectical progression towards a oneness of personality." ¹⁸ Percy Shelley's "Alastor"

¹⁶ Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Mrs Charlotte Smith," in *The British Novelists*, ed. Anna Letitia Barbauld (London: Rivington et al, 1810), XXXVI.viii.

¹⁷ Quoted in Bate, *John Clare*, 189.

¹⁸ Curran, *Poetic Form*, 190.

(1816), meanwhile, is the crucial romance of the period because it demonstrates that “the [Romantic] quest is always for a completed self.”¹⁹ These poems have a coherent literary form which expresses a coherent form of selfhood. This “oneness of personality” or “completed self” is different from the kind of self that characters strive for in the *Bildungsroman*. Vivian and Adeline tried to develop a social self with a place in a social world: to find a house, an income, a profession, a partner and a role. The self portrayed in Romantic poetry is typically more abstract, general and philosophical, even when it raises social issues. In his influential description of the “Greater Romantic Lyric,” M.H. Abrams argues that the Romantic lyric is typically a “meditation on a landscape.”²⁰ The poet gazes on nature, not society, and recognises deep facts about their own human nature, rather than about their social role. This generalisation may or may not be true for Romantic poetry as a whole, but it is accurate as regards Smith and Clare’s sonnets. Smith’s “painful consciousness” (XC, l. 3) and Clare’s absent consciousness typically appear in natural or abstract settings, and typically raise general philosophical problems of existence and cognition, rather than the more practical problems of money and happiness raised by Vivian and Adeline.

Smith and Clare raise profound questions about the nature of consciousness in their sonnets of self-deformation. Their approaches to the sonnet are often starkly opposed, but there are also striking similarities between them. To study their sonnets precisely and comprehensively, I have prepared a database of all 93 of Smith’s sonnets and all 638 of Clare’s. As a point of comparison, I have also included Wordsworth’s 514 sonnets. In §3.1 I use this database to compare Smith, Clare and

¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

²⁰ M.H. Abrams, “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), 223.

Wordsworth's use of rhyme and metre. Unlike Wordsworth, both Smith and Clare had a taste for loose, experimental rhyme-schemes, and tended to end their sonnets abruptly. Smith did this to give her poems a harsh and cruel sense of structure, treating the form of the sonnet like a prison.²¹ Clare, however, used his flexible rhyme and metre to strip his sonnets of any sense of structure at all. In §3.2, I consider a broader structuring principle of their sonnets: sequencing. Smith strung nearly all her sonnets into a continuous sequence of woeful poems, while Clare avoided sequences of more than a few sonnets in length. Smith carefully ordered her sonnets to construct a vast history of her own self-deformation, while Clare's short sequences avoid giving the sense of an unfolding self-narrative. In §3.3 I turn to the texture of Smith and Clare's language. Observing the frequency of basic words like "and," "this" and "that" reveals deep patterns in the way Smith, Clare and Wordsworth describe the natural world in their sonnets. Smith, like Wordsworth, tends to describe particular experiences in the history of her own self (though many of these experiences are fabricated), while Clare structures his poems to throw the emphasis on objective facts. But both Smith and Clare share a sense of nature's objectivity, which is linked to their sense of the self as small and impotent. Finally, in §3.4, I turn to the most crucial words of self-exploration: the first person pronouns. Surprising patterns emerge in the use of words like "I," "we" and "my," showing that although Smith, Clare and Wordsworth are all equally interested in the heart, they highlight strikingly different aspects of it when they write. They take different attitudes to the self. Smith longs to be rid of her malformed identity, Clare finds it easy and sweet to shuffle off his selfhood, and Wordsworth revels in his

²¹ Stokes puts this nicely: "...the very enunciation of feeling in [her] poetry seems to bind and imprison the self." Christopher Stokes, "Lorn Subjects: Haunting, Fracture and Asceticism in Charlotte Smith's Elegiac Sonnets," *Women's Writing* 16, no. 1 (2009): 146.

mind's great power. But all three use the sonnet to explore the complexities of the mind's experience of nature.

3.1 Enclosing the Self (1): Rhyme and Metre

In the Romantic period, there was heated debate about which kind of sonnet was superior: the Shakespearean or the Petrarchan.²² The perception was that the “illegitimate” Shakespearean sonnet was easier to write and therefore freer than the “legitimate” Petrarchan sonnet, which requires the poet to find more rhymes for each word. Not only this, but the Shakespearean sonnet was felt to be an English invention, cut off from the wider European tradition. Smith took on both these claims in the original preface to *Elegiac Sonnets*. Her sonnets all have either Shakespearean or experimental rhyme-schemes. They may have “no very just claim” to the title of sonnet, but “they consist of fourteen lines,” and anyway “the legitimate sonnet is ill-calculated for our language.” (*CSP*, 3) Even at this early stage, her defence of her poems was tinged with uncertainty. Later in life, she would express a deeper alienation from the form of poetry that made her name: “I am tired of Sonnets, & mine you know are almost all illegitimate and must go to the foundling Hospital.”²³ This was more than a joke. As we have already seen, one of the paradoxes of Smith's poems is the way they express her alienation from poetry itself.

Readers agreed with Smith that her sonnets were rule-breakers simply by being Shakespearean. For some, like the radical John Thelwall, this was a good thing:

... they are condemned, you know, by the critics as illegitimate: though, according to my opinion, they owe much of their beauty to the glorious crime—if such it be to

²² See Daniel Robinson, “Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim,” *European Romantic Review* 6, no. 1 (1995); Lodge, “Contested Bounds,” 533-35.

²³ To Sarah Rose, 26 April 1806, in *The Collected Letters*, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 731.

burst the unnatural fetters of arbitrary authority, and exert the free-born energies of the soul.²⁴

In an earlier essay, he had claimed that the freedom of Smith's form made her the greatest sonneteer in the language, "and I certainly do not mean to except the sonnets of Milton."²⁵ For Thelwall, Smith's free, English rhymes were an expression of political liberty. These sonnets were "free-born" rather than "illegitimate" offspring. Others attacked Smith's laxity. Two years after the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Henry Kirk White cried out that "Little elegies, consisting of [three] stanzas and a couplet, are no more Sonnets than they are Epic-poems. The sonnet partakes of a particular and *arbitrary* construction ..."²⁶ In the preface to her own brilliant *Original Sonnets* (1799), Anna Seward quoted White's argument in full, and claimed full Petrarchan legitimacy for her own properly-rhyming creations.²⁷ Her opening sonnet parodies Smith's great manifesto. The muse decks the poet with "the thornless rose," the poet walks "gay paths," and the "orient lamp" of "IMAGINATION" can "with recompensing ray, | Shine on the Mind, and pierce its gathering gloom, | With all the fires of intellectual Day!"²⁸ Seward paradoxically claims that adhering to old rules makes her sonnets *Original*, and feels that these rules give poetry the power to heal rather than aggravate her wounds. This is precisely what Wordsworth would claim in his own "Prefatory Sonnet" of 1807, the first of a great series of Petrarchan sonnets:²⁹ "In truth the prison, unto which we doom | Ourselves, no

²⁴ John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic; or, Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society; in a Series of Politico-Sentimental Journals, in Verse and Prose, of the Eccentric Excursions of Sylvanus Theophrastus; Supposed to Be Written by Himself*, 3 vols. (London: Thelwall, 1793), I.123.

²⁵ "An Essay on the English Sonnet; Illustrated by a Comparison between the Sonnets of Milton and Those of Charlotte Smith," *Universal Magazine* 91 (1792): 409.

²⁶ Henry Kirk White, "Letter," *Gentleman's Magazine* 56 (Supplement) (1786): 1110.

²⁷ Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects; and Odes Paraphrased from Horace* (London: Sael, 1799), iv-v.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ This sonnet later became the first sonnet in Part 1 of his *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, and had the title removed. Hence it is now usually known by its first line, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room."

prison is ..." (WW, 199). White, Seward and Wordsworth all felt at home in the legitimate sonnet. Smith wanted to break free, but could not feel fully at home even in her customised, illegitimate creations.

Clare, as Lodge argues, was thoroughly of Smith's mind when it came to the sonnet and its rules.³⁰ He was inspired by her to write his first sonnets.³¹ Like her and like Thelwall, he found the old rules of the Petrarchan sonnet repressive: if only "those cursd critics could be shovd out of the fashion wi their rule & compass & cease from making readers believe a Sonnet cannot be a Sonnet unless it be precisly 14 lines."³² As Figure 3.1 shows, he was even more of a rule-breaker than Smith: most of his sonnets are either couplet-sonnets or experimental hybrids.³³ But like Smith, if he did write a traditional sonnet, then it was nearly always Shakespearean. The graph classes all "other" sonnets together, but they are extremely various. They may have as few as four rhyme-sounds (*abaabaccacacdd*), or as many as nine (*ababcdedcfghih*). Even Wordsworth's stricter Petrarchan sonnets can range from four (*abbaabbaccdada*) to six (*abbaabbacdfdfc*). Thus it is also useful to consider the poets' average number of rhyme-sounds (Table 3.1). If we agree with the Romantics that you can measure the freedom of a sonnet by the number of its rhymes, then Smith and Clare are considerably "freer" than Wordsworth.

³⁰ Lodge, 537.

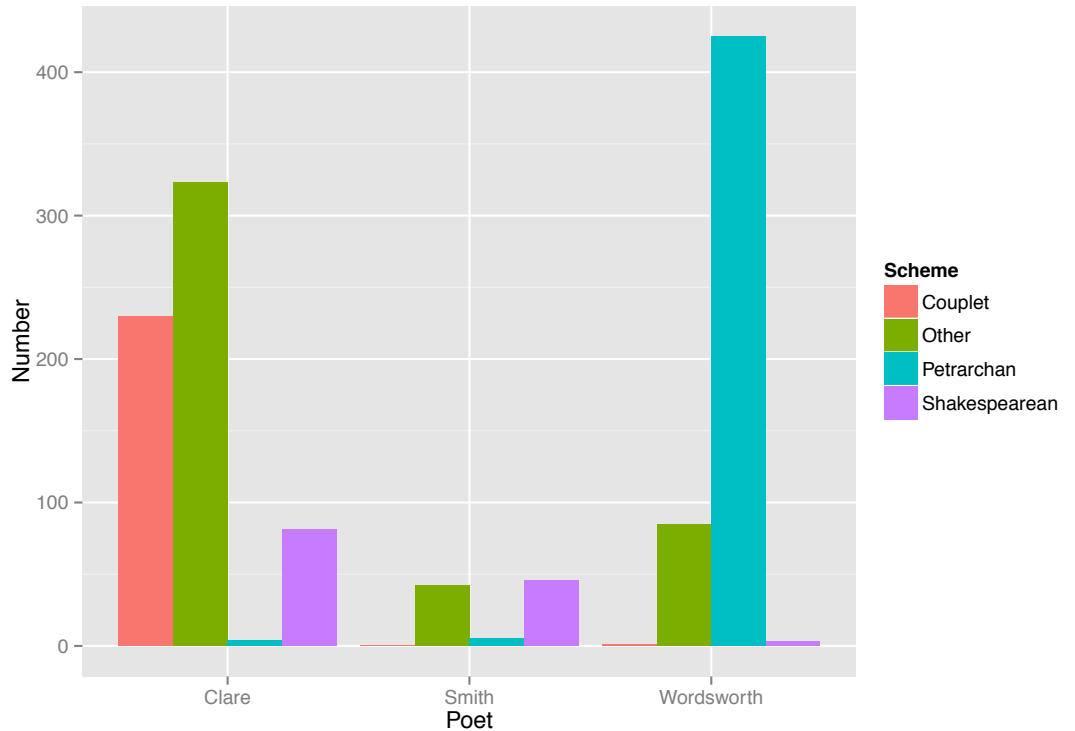
³¹ John Clare, *Autobiographical Writings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 103.

³² To James Augustus Hessey, 4 July 1820, in *The Letters of John Clare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 80.

³³ For clarity: I have classed sonnets as "couplet" sonnets only if they consist of seven couplets. I have classed them as "Shakespearean" only if they consist of three alternately-rhyming quatrains (*abab*) and end in a couplet. I have classed them as "Petrarchan" only if the octet consists of two envelope-rhymed quatrains (*abba abba*) containing no more than three rhyme-sounds (so, following Seward's dicta and Wordsworth's practice, *abba acca*, *abba bccb* and *abba cbbc* are also acceptable Petrarchan octets). I have allowed the re-use of rhyme-sounds, so *aaaabbccddeeff* is a good couplet-sonnet despite the repetition of the *a*-rhyme, and *abab cbc dede bb* is a good Shakespearean one despite the repetition of the *b*-rhyme.

Figure 3.1.

The Rhyme-Schemes of Clare, Smith and Wordsworth



Clare, $n=638$; Smith, $n=83$; Wordsworth, $n=514$.³⁴

Table 3.1

Mean No. of Rhyme-Sounds (2 d.p.)

Clare	Smith	Wordsworth
6.22	6.34	5.10

This debate is crucial to our understanding of selfhood in Smith and Clare’s sonnets, because the rhyme-scheme of the sonnet traditionally represents a structure of thought. The sonnet raises intellectual or emotional tensions in its opening lines, which are resolved after the *volta*, which can be placed either between octet and sestet of a Petrarchan sonnet or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean one. According to Wagner, Wordsworth avoided the *volta* because it smacked of

³⁴ The number of sonnets considered in each figure varies, depending on the analysis. Sometimes I consider all the sonnets, as here. At other times it is necessary to exclude certain classes of sonnet (e.g. Clare’s couplet-sonnets when considering the distribution of couplets generally). This is indicated at the base of each figure.

“self-division.”³⁵ Using extensive enjambment, he de-emphasised the divisions implied by the Petrarchan rhyme-scheme, and “offer[ed] the possibility of a unitary model that allows for an opposition or turn but subordinates that opposition to a final assertion of completeness.”³⁶ For Wordsworth, the interleaved rhymes of the sonnet represent the integrity of the self. When the final line ends, both the poem and the self ring with completion. This was the effect that Felicia Hemans aimed for in her Wordsworthian devotional sonnets, such as “Mountain Sanctuaries:”

No minsters rise
Like them in pure communion with the skies,
Vast, silent, open unto night and day;
So might the o'erburden'd Son of Man have felt,
When, turning where inviolate stillness dwelt,
He sought high mountains, there apart to pray.³⁷

Needless to say, this is not how all Romantic sonnets end. Wagner herself argues that Shelley saw “closure as form’s most tyrannical element,” and aimed for a radical “open-endedness.”³⁸ Keats meanwhile aimed not for “closure and repetition” in his sonnets, but “a principle of continuity.”³⁹ When the final rhyme chimes, it might symbolise an incomplete, future-oriented self:

O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (*SW*, 579, ll. 69-70)
He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.⁴⁰

Or the completion of the sonnet might represent the eradication of the lonely self altogether:

³⁵ Wagner, *Moment's Monument*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷ Felicia Hemans, *Works of Mrs Hemans, with a Memoir by Her Sister*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1839), VII.247.

³⁸ Wagner, *Moment's Monument*, 64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁰ John Keats, *The Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 45.

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... boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (*SW*, 550, ll. 13-14)

—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.⁴¹

The rhyme-scheme encloses the sonnet, defining its beginning and end. But Keats and Shelley demonstrate how right Barbara Herrnstein Smith is, when she argues that the completion of a poem may not necessarily betoken the completion of the self.⁴² The poem may end definitively, even though the poet has not achieved a complete and integrated sense of identity. Herrnstein Smith also makes a second, subtler point: “A poem may be gently though firmly closed, or slammed shut, locked, and bolted.”⁴³ Not only are poetic closure and psychological closure different, but poetic closure comes in a great variety of forms. This raises two questions about Smith and Clare’s sonnets: (1) How do they close their sonnets? (2) What is the relationship between this closure and the speaker’s self-deformation?

Smith felt that the last line of a sonnet should be “forcible and correct.”⁴⁴ Contemporary readers certainly found that Smith’s poems ended forcibly. In the preface to her *Sappho and Phaon: In a Series of Legitimate Sonnets* (1796), Mary Robinson argued that

the modern [i.e. Shakespearean] sonnet, concluding with two lines, winding up the sentiment of the whole, confines the poet’s fancy, and frequently occasions an abrupt termination of a beautiful and interesting picture ...⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁴² Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁴ To Thomas Cadell Snr., 22 Jun 1794, in Smith, *Letters*, 128.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Feldman and Robinson, *A Century of Sonnets*, 233.

Smith might have been quite pleased with this criticism: “abrupt termination” and “confinement of the fancy” were exactly what she was trying to achieve in her sonnets. Consider the ending of “Sonnet VIII. To Spring:”

Ah! season of delight!—could aught be found
 To sooth awhile the tortured bosom's pain,
 Of Sorrow's rankling shaft to cure the wound,
 And bring life's first delusions once again,
 'Twere surely met in thee!—thy prospect fair,
 Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,
 Have power to cure all sadness—but despair. (VIII, ll. 8-14)

Smith spends seven lines accumulating imagery of spring's beauty and restorative power. She apostrophises the spring at great length, unleashing some of her most fabulous syntactic music—a long, five-line sentence followed by three punchy invocations of spring's beauties, its “prospect fair,” “sounds of harmony” and “balmy air.” After the phrase “Have power to cure all sadness,” the iambic pentameter leaves us with the expectation of two more feet to complete the poem—and these two feet abruptly contradict all the beauties of the preceding lines. The severity of the ending is further enhanced by a common technique discussed by Herrnstein Smith: “unqualified assertion.”⁴⁶ Smith's final thought is general and grave: spring can cure *all* ailments, with only one exception. This thought brings the poem up short, confining Smith's imagination which had been revelling in the spring. The sonnet is like a prison cell, in which Smith can let her imagination loose but in which she is also inevitably reminded of her imprisonment in her own sad consciousness.

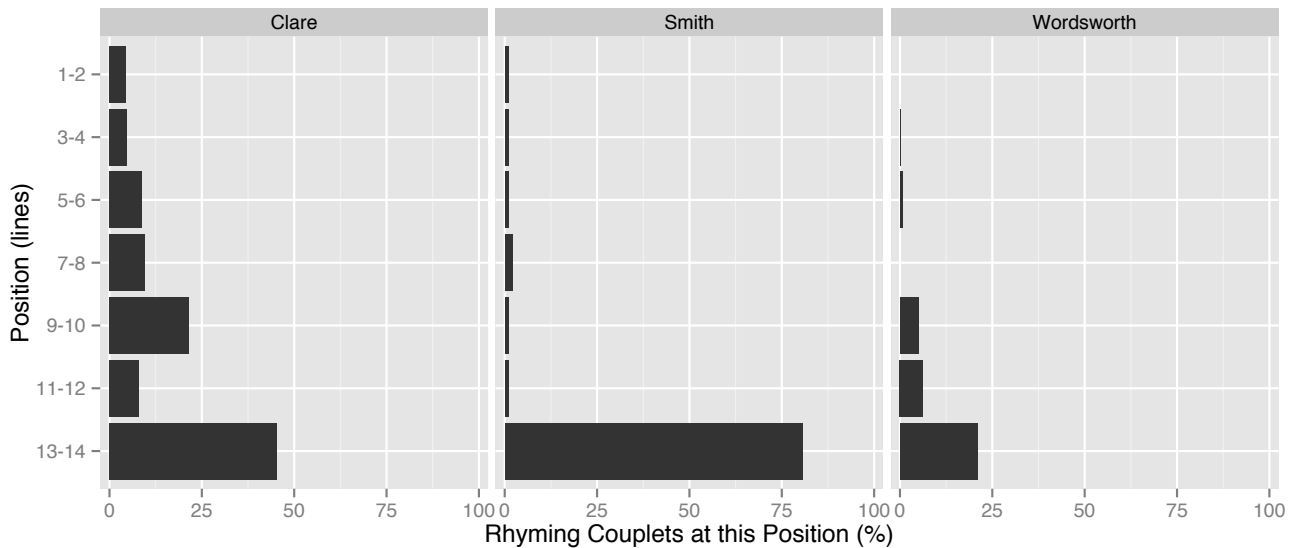
Clare takes the opposite approach. If Smith ends her sonnets as forcibly as possible, Clare does his utmost to blur the edges of his poems. One obvious difference between them lies in their use of couplets (Figure 3.2). Smith ends more

⁴⁶ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 182-86.

than three-quarters of her sonnets with a rhyming couplet. These final couplets are an example of what Herrnstein Smith calls “terminal modification.”⁴⁷ Since this couplet is the first in the poem, its appearance changes the sound of the rhymes and indicates that the poem is at an end. Wordsworth emphasizes his concluding sestet, by confining his rare couplets to the final six lines of his sonnets. Clare achieves a different effect by peppering his sonnets with couplets throughout. By “positioning the couplet(s) before the end of the poem,” observes Lodge, Clare “creat[es] a movement in the sonnet’s progression that breathes in and then out again.”⁴⁸ Smith prefers an abrupt final couplet, Wordsworth a concluding sestet and Clare a fuzzy border between the poem’s beginning and end.

Figure 3.2

Couplets in Clare, Smith and Wordsworth



Clare, *n*=401; Smith, *n*=93, Wordsworth, *n*=513.
 (Excluding couplet-sonnets, and sonnets of more or fewer than 14 lines)

Lodge is right to claim that in general Clare’s medial couplets reduce his sonnets’ sense of closure. In his early sonnets, such as “Day Break,” this was not always the case:

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁸ Lodge, “Contested Bounds,” 542.

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As thy first anthem breathes its melody
I've stood and paused the varied cloud to see
& warmed in extacy and looked and warmed
The far hill top when day's first rays 'gan dawning
& blue clouds fringed wi' gold—O doubly charmed
I hung in raptures on thee early morning (*EP*, 311-12, ll. 9-14)

In this case, the couplet at lines 9-10 demarcate the beginning of the sestet, and introduces the lesson he has learned from his experience. This sonnet is a little nugget of Wordsworthian self-formation. But Lodge's argument holds for the sonnets of Clare's maturity. In "Shepherd's Fire," for instance, he uses the couplet at lines 9-10 to break the flow of the sonnet, giving the sense that it fades away rather than ending conclusively:

On the rude heath yclad in furze and ling
& oddling thorn that thick and prickly grows
Shielding the shepherd when the rude wind blows
& boys that sit right merry in a ring
Round fires upon a molehill toasting sloes
& crabs that froth and frizzle on the coals
Loud is the gabble and the laughter loud.
The rabbits scarce dare peep from out their holes,
Unwont to mix with such a noisey crowd.
Some run to eke the fire—while many a cloud
Of smoke curls up. Some on their haunches squat
With mouth for bellows puffing till it flares,
Or if that fail one fans his napless hat
& when the feast is done they squabble for their shares (*MP*, IV.194-95)

The medial couplet coincides with a number of other techniques that break the flow of the poem. The couplet rhymes with the word "loud," the word in line seven that ends the poem's first long sentence. The couplet itself is split up by the poem's syntax. Its first line ends a sentence, while the next begins one. The second line contains the poem's first caesura, and its first enjambed line. The effect is to create a complicated pause in the centre of the poem when Clare introduces the rabbits, who stare at their human compatriots enigmatically. The poem is a film camera,

which slowly zooms in till it lingers on a hidden detail, then zooms out again till the scene loses focus. The final line of the poem is actually an alexandrine—we will see how effectively Smith used terminal alexandrines to enforce a sense of closure. But in this case, the final line gestures not towards the end of the action, or a lesson learnt, but simply towards a continuation. The feast may be “done,” but it is not eaten. There is no resolution, but instead the ordinary “squabbling” of a family meal. Clare gives no sense of an observing mind that processes or absorbs. This is raw experience, and the rhyme-scheme underscores the sense of its unending variety.

Smith uses couplets in a completely different way. Her final couplets are nearly always terse, aphoristic and decisive, full of caesurae and antitheses:

Another May new buds and flowers shall bring;
Ah! why has happiness—no second Spring? (II)

Ah! no!—when all, e'en Hope's last ray is gone,
There's no oblivion—but in death alone! (VI)

So round the flame the giddy insect flies,
And courts the fatal fire by which it dies! (XXII)

Ah! Reason little o'er the soul prevails,
When, from ideal ill, the enfeebled spirit fails! (LXI)

And veil'd in shadows Nature's face appears
To hearts o'erwhelm'd with grief, to eyes suffused with tears. (LXVIII)

These ringing assertions and balanced antitheses reinforce the sense of self-contradiction and self-confinement. Similarly, even when the final couplet does not form a self-enclosed epigram, Smith might use epigrammatic elements. The final couplet of Sonnet LXII is not a generalised epigram, for example, but in the final line Smith uses caesura and antithesis to give it an air of finality and contradiction: “I only fly from doubt—to meet despair!” The antithesis here is cruelly ironic, since although “fly from” and “meet” are opposites, “doubt” and “despair” are merely

different degrees of the same thing. Wherever she turns, Smith can find no resolution of the self's contradictions. Coleridge recorded a similar experience in a great elegiac sonnet of his later years, "Work Without Hope" (1825), whose final couplet is as self-riven and epigrammatic as any of Smith's: "WORK without Hope draws nectar in a sieve; | And HOPE without an object cannot live." (*CW*, XVI.1033) Like Smith, Coleridge feels the wholeness and rejuvenation of nature, as amaranths bloom and the winter presages spring. But inner contradictions, and the absence of the integrating principle of hope, leave the self as multiple and divided as the balanced antitheses of the couplet.

Another of Smith's distinctive techniques is to end her sonnets with an alexandrine. Neither Wordsworth nor Clare do so as often as she (Figure 3.3). The last two examples in the previous paragraph both end in alexandrines. In both cases, the line is divided neatly into two three-beat units by a caesura:

When, from ideal ill, | the enfeebled spirit fails!

To hearts o'erwhelm'd with grief, | to eyes suffused with tears.

14 of the 24 alexandrines follow this pattern. Sometimes, the effect is antithesis, as when the speaker's heart, "... trembling at the past, recoils at future woe" (LII). This resembles other antitheses we have seen at the end of Smith's sonnets, suggesting that the speaker is trapped on both sides: neither the "past" nor the "future" gives any reason to hope. In other cases, the second half of the alexandrine can intensify the first half, as when Reason "bids the truth recur—with aggravated pain" (XXXVIII); or the second half might complete the syntax of the first, as when accumulated evils "shut my languid sense—to Hope's dear voice and thine!" (LV). Coleridge mocked these aspects of Smith's final lines in his wickedly accurate parodies:

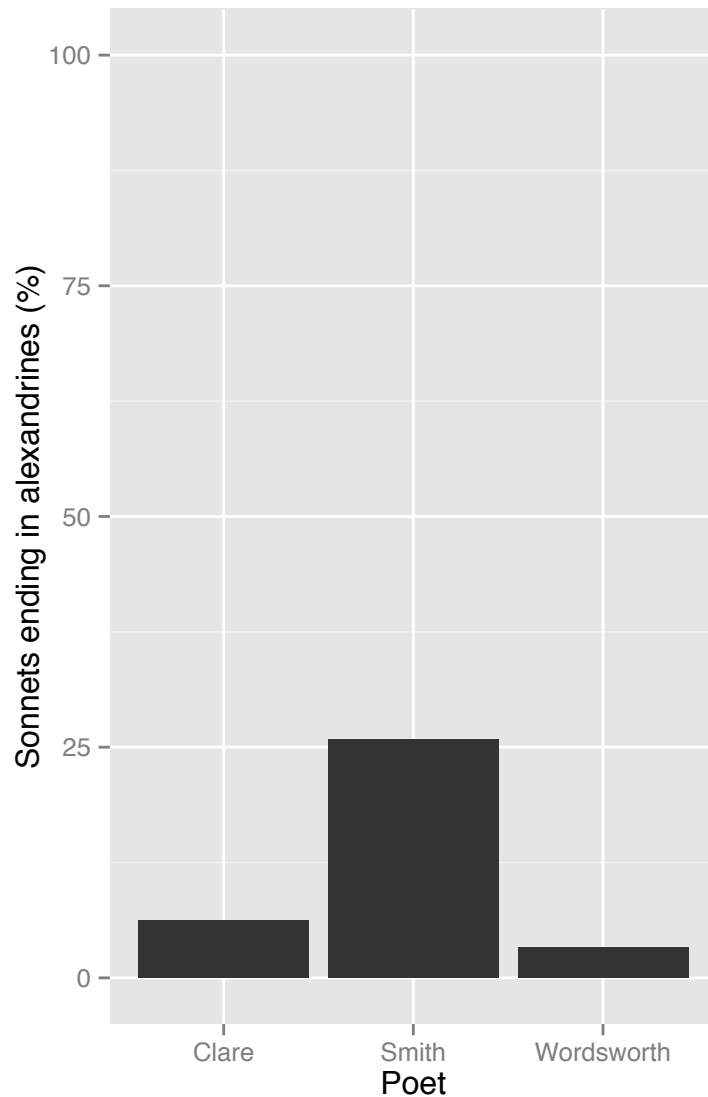
POETRY: SMITH'S AND CLARE'S SELF-ABNEGATING SONNETS

As when thro' broken clouds at night's high noon
Peeps in fair fragments forth the full-orb'd harvest-moon! (*CW*, XVI.357)

Here are Smith's antitheses: "night's high noon," a moon simultaneously fragmentary and "full-orb'd." Here is Smith's alliteration, her terminal alexandrine, and her sense of melancholy. Of course, this parody—an elegiac reworking of *The House that Jack Built*—does not end with the severe philosophical sense of self-contradiction which is really Smith's hallmark.

Figure 3.3

Sonnets ending in Alexandrines



Clare, *n*=638; Smith, *n*=83; Wordsworth, *n*=514.

When Clare ends with an alexandrine, it can seem accidental. When Smith ends with one, it is obviously intentional. This intentionality turned off some early readers: “The forced inversions, the unnatural conceits, the remote allusions, the splendid metaphors, and pompous epithets, have convinced us that the *head*, instead of the *heart*, has been the parent of most of our whining productions.”⁴⁹ But such criticism actually gets at the core of Smith’s poetics. There is a conflict of heart and head in her sonnets, as they summon up great images of nature’s grandeur and power, but end with a crushing sense of the self’s unfitness to participate in nature’s harmony.

We have already seen how Clare avoided giving his sonnets this crushing form by putting couplets in the middle of them. In 200 of his sonnets, he adopted a more radical technique, and simply made every rhyme a couplet:

The mower tramples on the wild bee’s nest
 & hears the busy noise and stops the rest
 Who careless proggle out the mossy ball
 & gather up the honey comb and all.
 The boy that seeks dewberrys from the sedge
 & trys the poison berrys on the hedge
 Will often find them in the meadow hay
 & take his bough and drive the bees away.
 But when the maiden goes to turn the hay
 She whips her apron up and runs away
 The schoolboy eats the honey comb and all
 & often knocks his hat agen the wall
 & progs a stick in every hole he sees
 To steal the honey bag of black-nosed bees (*MP*, v.257)

This is a striking innovation. Wordsworth wrote a single sonnet in couplets.⁵⁰ Smith wrote none. As we have seen, Smith’s final couplets slam her sonnets shut. But these

⁴⁹ “[Review Of:] *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems*, by Charlotte Smith,” *Critical Review*, 21 (1797): 151.

⁵⁰ “Extract. From The Conclusion of a Poem, Composed in Anticipation of Leaving School,” *WW*, 1. This poem is uncharacteristically written in iambic tetrameter.

couplets have the opposite effect. Weiner observes that Clare's couplet-sonnets give the sense of "arbitrariness" rather than unfolding structure.⁵¹ Herrnstein Smith explains why: any "*systematic repetition of formal elements*" tends to "[maintain] the reader's expectation of continuation."⁵² Each time we hear a couplet in a sonnet like this, it simply repeats the same structure we have heard before, and creates the expectation of another couplet to come. The end of the poem does not sound like the end. It ends abruptly simply because it ends.

Clare uses a number of other techniques to enhance the poem's sense of arbitrariness. He randomly recycles rhyme-sounds: the poem rhymes *aabbccdddbbee*. In all but one case, the recycled rhyme is also a rich rhyme, where the very same word is repeated: "ball," "all," "all," "wall;" and "hay," "away," "hay," "away." This use of rich rhyme sets Clare apart (Figure 3.4). Like his rhyme words, events and actions randomly repeat. The mower happens upon a group of unspecified people who "gather up the honey comb and all" in line 4, and then in line 11 the schoolboy "eats the honey comb and all." Nothing has happened. Nothing has changed. Honeycomb continues to exist, and the intrepid continue to gobble it up despite the danger of the bees. We can contrast this with the way Wordsworth occasionally uses rich rhyme (he does so in four of his sonnets):

How clear, how keen, how marvellously bright
The effluence from yon distant mountain's head,
Which, strewn with snow smooth as the sky can shed,
Shines like another sun—on mortal sight
Uprisen, as if to check approaching Night,
And all her twinkling stars. Who now would tread,
If so he might, yon mountain's glittering head—
Terrestrial, but a surface, by the flight

⁵¹ Weiner, *Clare's Lyric*, 69.

⁵² Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 73.

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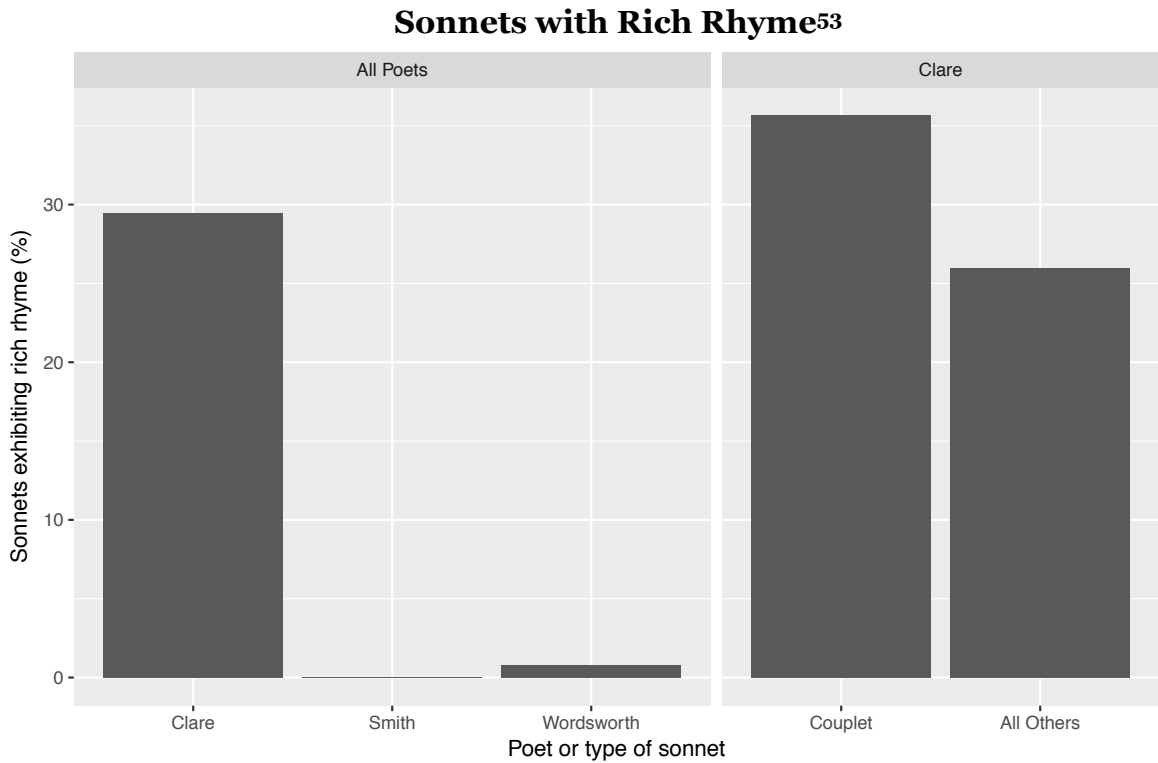
Of sad mortality's earth-sullying wing,
Unswapt, unstained? (WW, 209)

The repetition of “head” highlights the poet’s shifting ideas of the mountain. When Wordsworth repeats the word “head,” he does so to refer to this particular peak. Clare’s “honey comb and all,” by contrast, is generic (see §3.3). Wordsworth first sees the “head” as it is, “strewn with snow.” The second time he sees the “head” in his imagination. He imagines stepping on the mountain, creating a conflict between his sense of its beauty, and his sense of his own “sad mortality.” He resolves this conflict in the sonnet’s third and final sentence:

Nor shall the aërial Powers
Dissolve that beauty, destined to endure,
White, radiant, spotless, exquisitely pure,
Through all vicissitudes, till genial Spring
Has filled the laughing vales with welcome flowers.

The sonnet illustrates the mastery of Wordsworth’s well-formed mind over the world. His imagination transforms the mountain into an image of immortality. The “head” of the mountain dissolves into a more general apprehension of its springtime “beauty.” This mental mastery is impossible in the buzzing, various world of Clare’s sonnets, with their unstructured rhymes. Nor is it possible in the cruel sonnets of Smith, that snap shut like a guillotine on the poor poet’s neck.

Figure 3.4



Clare, *n*=638; Smith, *n*=83; Wordsworth, *n*=514.

We have seen how many devices Smith and Clare combine to create their distinctive senses of the sonnet form. Smith does not merely adopt the Shakespearean style, with its terminal couplet, but avoids medial couplets and deploys alexandrines, antitheses, and alliteration to strengthen her poems' impression of abrupt termination. Clare does not merely strew his couplets with medial couplets, but strews them with rich rhyme and clever patterns of syntax and imagery to give them a blurry, open-ended form. Scholars have long noted that the couplet-sonnets he wrote in Northborough are particularly "resistant to rhetorical closure."⁵⁴ As Figure 3.4 demonstrates, when Clare wrote couplet-sonnets, he also increased his use of rich rhyme. When he adopts the arbitrary rhyme-scheme of the

⁵³ Since the machine cannot discern homophones like "piece" and "peace," it may underestimate the number of rich rhymes.

⁵⁴ Simon J. White, "John Clare's Sonnets and the Northborough Fens," *John Clare Society Journal* 28 (2009): 64.

couplet-sonnet, his individual rhyme-words also become more arbitrary. We will see a similar pattern below (Figure 3.5), when we turn to examine his syntax, which becomes more paratactic when he adopts the form of the couplet-sonnet. It is easy to see why so many scholars—even those, like Simon White, who praises Clare's work in the form—find it hard to call such poems “sonnets” at all.⁵⁵ But it is the very fact that they *are* sonnets which gives them such a sense of open-endedness, because they contrast so strongly with the tradition.

Smith and Clare both took a radical approach to the form of the sonnet. Smith adopted the derided “illegitimate” sonnet to express her sense of poetic form as a prison for the malformed self. Clare denuded the sonnet with his couplets and rich rhymes, creating poems that seem unstructured by contrast with those of his great forebears. In both cases, rhyme and metre are used to portray a particular sense of self-deformation: Smith's sense of the self as a malformed prisoner, and Clare's sense of the self as a formless diffusion through reality.

3.2 Enclosing the Self (2): Sequencing

Smith's and Clare's sonnets are not only structured on an individual level. Both poets also string their sonnets into sequences. There is a long tradition of sonnet sequences, and this has important implications for the representation of selfhood. As Jonathan Culler observes, individual lyric poems are often ritualistic, cryptic, and iterable, and do not give a strong sense of an individual self who utters them. But when we read lyrics in a sequence, “we put together a speaker,” and the poems acquire a “fictional aspect” of plot and character.⁵⁶ Smith's and Clare's approaches

⁵⁵ He argues that they are strictly just “sonnet-like poems:” *ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁶ Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2015), 19, 318.

to the sonnet sequence were characteristically opposed. All but one of Smith's published sonnets appeared in *Elegiac Sonnets*, which from the third edition onward put all the sonnets in a numbered order. The result was a long and ever-expanding sequence, growing from 16 sonnets in 1784 to 92 by 1800. Clare preferred much shorter sequences. It is impossible to be definitive about how many sequences he wrote, since most of his poems exist only in manuscript and were never edited by him for publication.⁵⁷ In some cases, however, for instance in the manuscript of *The Midsummer Cushion*, Clare entitled his sonnets and arranged several into sequences. In other cases, it is apparent from the poems' position in the manuscript, or their contents, to guess that some fall into a sequence. The editors of the standard Oxford edition print 134 of Clare's 638 sonnets (21%) in 53 sequences. These sequences range from 2 to 6 sonnets in length, with a mean of 2.53. Smith courted the "fictional aspect" of the sonnet sequence, stringing her sonnets into a long chronological autobiography. Clare seems to have avoided this effect.

We can compare the effects of these different approaches to sonnet sequencing by examining how Clare's and Smith's sequences conclude. Under the self-formation model, we should expect the final sonnet of the sequence to enclose all the preceding sonnets in a coherent whole. And indeed, this is how the most famous sequences of the period end. Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* might chart Sappho's sufferings and end with her death, but the final sonnet ringingly asserts that the result of her suffering is immortality:

O! Sky-born Virtue! sacred is thy name!
 And though mysterious Fate, with frown severe,
 Oft decorates thy brows with wreaths of Fame,
 Bespangled o'er with sorrow's chilling tear!

⁵⁷ This can pose some acute problems when it comes to Clare's longer poems. According to Jonathan Bate, not one edition of Clare's *Child Harold* prints the stanzas in the same order! Bate, *John Clare*, 572.

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Yet shall thou more than mortal raptures claim,
The brightest planet of the ETERNAL SPHERE!⁵⁸

Wordsworth's most beautiful and tightly-structured sequence, *The River Duddon* (1820), likewise ends with an evocation of eternity. The sequence tells the story of a walk from the source of the river to the sea. When he reaches the end of the river, he casts back his eye—not only on the river itself, but on the sonnets that memorialise it: “I see what was, and is, and will abide; | Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide” (*WW*, 303). The river pours into the sea like humans into death, and the end of the sequence is the end of another chapter in Wordsworth's mortal life. But nonetheless Wordsworth feels an intimation of immortality:

We men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish;—be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

For Wordsworth and Robinson, the reward of self-formation is eternal life. All the former moments, all the sonnets which preserve them, all the chilling tears of Sappho, all the youth and defiance of Wordsworth, are preserved for all time. The self is forever at home.

Clare's short sequences resist this sublime, synthesising view. Indeed, some of his sequences end on precisely the opposite note: “& no one cares & still the strife goes on” (*MP*, v.364). He does sometimes gesture at immortality in the manner of Robinson or Wordsworth, as in his lovely sequence commemorating Robert Bloomfield: “& seasons round thy humble grave shall be | Fond lingering pilgrims to remember thee” (*MP*, IV.398). But his most distinctive manner is different.

⁵⁸ Feldman and Robinson, *A Century of Sonnets*, 89.

Probably his most famous sequence today is his four-sonnet series about badger-baiting. It ends on the harrowing note of a badger's death:

He falls as dead & kicked by boys & men
 Then starts & grins & drives the crowd again
 Till kicked & torn and beaten out he lies
 & leaves his hold & cackles groans & dies (*MP*, v.362)

There is no evocation of immortality for the poor badger, no attempt to make his death meaningful. As many have noticed, this final sonnet is only 12 lines long, its shortness emphasising the shortness of the badger's life.⁵⁹ This is yet another abrupt termination. The story of the badger simply continues till it doesn't. The badger, unlike Sappho or Wordsworth, has no moment of recollection and summation before he leaps into eternity. Clare's short sequences are only a small part of his sonnet output. Most of his sonnets are free-floating, individual poems. They do not describe a chain of events in the formation of a self, but random events in the life of the world.

Smith's approach is different. Six sonnets served the role of final sonnet as *Elegiac Sonnets* expanded. All record moments of recollection and summation, but none gestures towards an eternal synthesis in the manner of Robinson or Wordsworth. Three of her concluding sonnets simply assert that Smith is too miserable and exhausted to write any longer:

3rd and 4th editions, 1786:

Her pencil sickening Fancy throws away,
 And weary Hope reclines upon the tomb;
 And points my wishes to that tranquil shore,
 Where the pale spectre Care pursues no more. (XXXVI, ll 11-14)

5th edition, 1789:

For of Calamity so long the prey,

⁵⁹ Andrew Hodgson, "Form and Feeling in John Clare's Sonnets," *John Clare Society Journal* 31 (2012): 54; Chris Washington, "John Clare and Biopolitics," *European Romantic Review* 25, no. 6 (2014): 666.

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Imagination now has lost her power,
Nor will her fairy loom again essay
To dress Affliction in a robe of flowers. (XLVIII, ll. 5-8)

Volume 2, 1st edition, 1797:

Crush'd to earth, by bitterest anguish prest,
From my faint eyes thy [the Muse's] graceful form recedes;
Thou canst not heal a heart like mine that bleeds ... (LXXXIV, ll. 9-11)

In each case, the sequence ends because Smith can write no more, not because she has achieved a pinnacle of vision. In fact, these sonnets flatly contradict the claim in Sonnet I, that the sorrowful write the best poetry, for in all of them sorrow drives Fancy, Imagination or the Muse away. Realising this, in each case she longs for death—not because it brings immortality or fame, but merely “Pity and Remembrance” (LXXXIV, l. 14), and the “tranquil shore” of oblivion. The result of her long self-deformation is the sense that selfhood is a burden of which she would rather be rid. Clare expresses a similar sense of self in his most famous lyric, “I Am:”

I long for scenes, where man hath never trod
A place where woman never smiled or wept
There to abide with my Creator, God;
And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept,
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below—above the vaulted sky. (*LP*, l.397, ll. 13-18)

For Smith in her sonnets, and Clare in his asylum poems, life is “trouble,” and the self is something to be shuffled off in the peace of the grave.

Oblivion is also a theme of Smith's original final sonnet, later renumbered XXIV. This is perhaps her strangest ending. It is a dramatic monologue in the voice of Werther, the tragic hero of Goethe's famous novel. He is lying in his grave:

1st and 2nd editions, 1784:

The tears shall tremble in my CHARLOTTE'S eyes;
Dear, precious drops!—they shall embalm the dead!
Yes—CHARLOTTE o'er the mournful spot shall weep,
Where her poor WERTER—and his sorrows sleep! (XXIV, ll. 11-14)

Labbe argues that this sonnet “threatens an implosion of identity,” but that is surely an understatement.⁶⁰ Smith shatters herself into multiple shards. She has adopted Werther’s voice, identifying with his tragic fate. But she adopts this perspective simply to imagine her own non-existence in the grave, and she also shares her gender and first name with Charlotte, Werther’s distraught lover, with whose misery Smith also seems to identify. Smith’s identity is riven by contradictions: she is Werther and Charlotte, she is alive and dead, she is miserable and unconscious. The fact that the poem is a dramatic monologue in the voice of another person introduces another contradiction. As Culler observes, when we read dramatic monologues, we typically attribute the content to the fictional speaker, but the form—the metre, the rhyme, the rhetoric, the *poetry*—to the poet.⁶¹ There is thus another divide between Smith the writer of the poem and Werther the speaker whose voice she adopts to portray herself. In its original form, *Elegiac Sonnets* ended in a mire of self-contradiction and intractable problems of interpretation.

Smith’s original ending is the starkest. But the endings she finally wrote for Volume 1 and its eventual sequel were her subtlest. In both, Smith gazes on nature, and feels a complex mixture of identification and repulsion. In Sonnet LIX, Smith sees the moon, which shines brightly above a swirling mass of storm clouds:

6th edition, 1792:

—So, in unsullied dignity elate,
 A spirit conscious of superior worth,
 In placid elevation firmly great,
 Scorns the vain cares that give Contention birth;
 And blest with peace above the shocks of Fate,
 Smiles at the tumult of the troubled earth. (ll. 9-14)

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 108.

⁶¹ Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 269.

This is one of Smith's most powerful images because of its ambiguity. Smith seems on the one hand to identify with the moon. Smith is a poet, and her ability to comprehend the moon's superiority is evidence of her own spirit's "superior worth." But though her imagination can take her to the moon, Smith herself is still trapped beneath the storm clouds. Her vision of the moon cannot help her to understand her sufferings on earth, which remain "vain" and meaningless. Again, her self is split, and remains opposed to the stormy world that torments her.

Smith achieves a similar multiplicity of consciousness in the sonnet with which she ended the final version of her great book:

Volume 2, 2nd edition (1800):

Lo! the radiant start of day
Lights up this lovely scene anew.—My fate
Nor hope nor joy illumines—Nor for me
Return those rosy hours which here I used to see! (XCII, ll. 11-14)

This is her finest descriptive sonnet, and we will return to it in §3.3. All we need to note here is the contradiction in Smith's experience of time. As it passes, she sees it renew the world and leave herself unchanged. Her "scene" is "lovely" and bright, but her "fate" is dark. Labbe is half-right to say that time is a "deforming process" in these sonnets.⁶² It deforms Smith by eroding her, reducing her to a stump of pain, even though Smith retains her power to see and appreciate how time regenerates the natural world. "One lives only to lose," Smith once wrote.⁶³ A couplet and a fine alexandrine close her sonnet, and the sequence that made her as a poet.

Smith's erstwhile friend, William Hayley, once accused her of "querulous egotism."⁶⁴ His unkind stroke hit on a certain truth. Smith's sense of self is indeed

⁶² Labbe, *Charlotte Smith*, 1.

⁶³ To Sarah Rose, 26 April 1806, in Smith, *Letters*, 730.

⁶⁴ Smith quotes Hayley's remark in a letter to Sara Rose, 4 July 1804, *ibid.*, 630.

“querulous.” It is painful and quivering. Her great sonnet sequence is a story of *sparagmos*, in which her mind is progressively torn to pieces while the world around her goes on indifferently growing and dying. Clare himself often expressed a similar sense of dismembered identity, but in his sonnets he appears to have found a solution to it. He allows himself to be dismembered, as his consciousness flows out into hundreds of little unconnected fragments of reality. We have seen how these different approaches affected Smith's and Clare's rhyme, metre and sequencing. As we will now see, it also altered the way they describe the world.

3.3 The Function of Description

Smith and Clare shared a fascination with natural history. They loved birds, flowers, insects, animals and trees. They observed things keenly, and were well read in botany, ornithology, entomology and zoology. They fed this love and knowledge into their sonnets, which abound in precise descriptions. This was something Clare prized in Smith's poetry:

I have never read one [poet] that mentions [the nightjar] except M^{rs} Smith in her Sonnets, which I had the pleasure to meet with last summer in a friend's book case. Her poems may be only pretty but I felt much pleased with them because she wrote more from what she had seen of nature than from what she had read of it. Therefore those that read her poems find new images which they had not read of before though they have often felt them, & from these associations poetry derives the power of pleasing in the happiest manner.⁶⁵

Clare might seem to be damning “pretty” Smith with faint praise, but elsewhere he puts her in his “catalogue” of truly descriptive poets.⁶⁶ And his praise is doubly striking, because it so closely resembles the praise he himself would receive in the twentieth century, for the “accuracy,” “richness” and “completeness” of his own

⁶⁵ John Clare, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 34. Punctuation and spelling lightly regularised.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

descriptions.⁶⁷ The nightjar Clare refers to appears in Sonnet XLII, “Composed During a Walk on the Downs in November 1787:”

O'er the tall brow of yonder chalky bourn,
The evening shades their gather'd darkness fling,
While, by the lingering light, I scarce discern
The shrieking night-jar sail on heavy wing. (ll. 4-7)

Smith had a lower opinion of her originality than Clare. She believed herself the *second* nightjar poet in English, after Gilbert White.⁶⁸ She also later admitted that she had been playing fast and loose with the truth, because there are never nightjars on the downs in November.⁶⁹ Clare nonetheless makes a salient point: this nightjar is a new image and it is this novelty that gives it power to please. It is a new image because it is unfamiliar from the poetic tradition. It is not loaded with literary “associations,” but with associations from lived experience. Poets have apostrophised lovely roses and pretty nightingales since time immemorial. Smith has opened a new terrain of feeling by describing the strange croaking nightjar instead.

Smith and Clare shared an aesthetic of variety, a desire to describe nature in all its forms, even if, like the nightjar, they do not seem made for poetry.⁷⁰ In 1796, Smith requested the loan of a book, John Aikin's *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777).⁷¹ Long before Wordsworth, Aikin complained that “descriptive poetry has degenerated into a kind of phraseology,” and advocated

⁶⁷ John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 131.

⁶⁸ Charlotte Smith, *A Natural History of Birds, Intended Chiefly for Young Persons*, 2 vols. (London: John Arliss, 1819), II.95.

⁶⁹ In a footnote to *Beachy Head: SP*, 239.

⁷⁰ I have described this aesthetic of variety elsewhere: Michael Falk, “The Nightjar’s Shriek: Nature’s Variety in the Sonnets of John Clare and Charlotte Smith,” *John Clare Society Journal* 36 (2017), 34-38.

⁷¹ To Cadell and Davies, 5 Jan 1796, in Smith, *Letters*, 218.

poets getting back to nature.⁷² Contemporary poetry constantly falls into “uninteresting sameness,” but nature shows such “variety” that a poet who merely describes it as it is will not suffer this flaw to their beauty.⁷³ Seeing nature properly is an innate skill, possessed by “every one who surveys natural objects with a searching and distinguishing eye; whether he consider them singly, or as parts of a system, whether he call them by their trivial or learned applications.”⁷⁴

In their prose, both Clare and Smith advocated just this kind of “searching and distinguishing eye.” In Smith’s *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (1804), Mrs Talbot tells her children George and Emily that they must learn to draw, because drawing will “[awaken them] to a thousand beauties which common observers do not see, or see without pleasure...”⁷⁵ Mrs Talbot wanders the countryside with her children, gives them lessons in Natural History, and asks them to repeat little poems to the animals, plants and landscapes they see around them. The aim of the poems is “to excite [the children’s] curiosity,”⁷⁶ and they are so accurate and beautiful that the children collect them as though they were the things they describe.⁷⁷ In his fragment on “Taste,” Clare recapitulated Aikin’s and Smith’s arguments: “the man of taste feels excessive rapture in contemplating the rich scenery of an autumn Landscape which the rude man passes unnoticed.”⁷⁸ Such taste can only be cultivated by kneeling down and seeing things close up: “... there is happiness in examining minutely into the wild flowers as we wander amongst them, to

⁷² John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (Warrington: Joseph Johnson, 1777), 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁵ Charlotte Smith, *Conversations Introducing Poetry: Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History, for the Use of Children and Young Persons*, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804), II.52.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II.133.

⁷⁷ See Dahlia Porter, “From Nosegay to Specimen Cabinet: Charlotte Smith and the Labour of Collecting,” in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 36.

⁷⁸ Clare, *Natural History*, 283.

distinguish their characters & find out to what orders they belong in the artificial & natural systems of botany.”⁷⁹ Clare was interested in the “characters” of things, in the qualities that make them what they are. As we will see, Smith had a different sense of things’ individuality in the world.

Smith, Aikin and Clare all argued that poetic imagery should be more objective, more attuned to facts. This is not how Romantic imagery is usually understood. Critics during the Romantic period frequently argued that the purpose of description was not to portray the world but to express the poet’s feelings. Germaine de Staël argued that in Romantic poetry, “outward facts and circumstances” display “that which is passing in the soul.”⁸⁰ Francis Jeffrey agreed:

the very essence of poetry ... consists in the fine perception and vivid expression of that subtle and mysterious analogy which exists between the physical and the moral world—which makes outward things and qualities the natural types and emblems of inward gifts and emotions ...⁸¹

In our own time, scholars have repeated similar arguments. M.H. Abrams famously argued that the Romantics saw the mind not as a mirror of the external world, but as a lamp that actually creates it.⁸² If this is the case, the very idea of an objective external world to describe becomes problematic. As Timothy Brownlow puts it, there is no “Landscape” in Romantic poetry, but “Moodscape.”⁸³ Jonathan Bate makes the remarkable argument that the Romantics actually invented the pathetic fallacy.⁸⁴ But for Aikin, Smith and Clare, natural description is not a lamp, Moodscape or pathetic fallacy, because their theories are directed at the reader.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 284. Punctuation and spelling lightly regularised.

⁸⁰ Germaine de Staël, *Germany*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1813), 307.

⁸¹ Francis Jeffrey, “Review of *Records of Women: With Other Poems, and the Forest Sanctuary: With Other Poems*, by Felicia Hemans,” *Edinburgh Review* 50, no. 99 (1829): 35.

⁸² M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

⁸³ Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 16.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), 124.

Descriptive poems describe not the poet, but the world. They enable the reader to see things as though they were there, evoking their wonder or their curiosity. Moodscape relies on the “self-conscious identification between mood and environment.”⁸⁵ But Clare’s sonnets usually aim to be un-self-conscious, while Smith self-consciously alienates herself from nature, rather than identifying with it.

It was while living in Northborough that Clare wrote his most objective sonnets, such as this stunning evocation of birdlife:

The tame hedge sparrow hops about for seed
 & painted red cap feeds on grunsel weeds
 The blackbirds [forage] where [the] scarecrows was
 & pecking linnet green as is the grass
 Eats at the cabbage seed till all is gone
 & thrushes fetch the cherries every one
 The pink flies in the bushes all the day
 & pecks about the leaves & goes away
 The yellow hammer hops about the beds
 & the young blue cap pecks the poppy heads
 The wagtail wades the sink, & willow wren
 Peeps round the currant trees & hides again
 & sparrows feeding with the hens all day
 Hears the maids shoo & scarcely flies away (*MP* v.378)

This is a remarkable poem in the history of the English sonnet: a rhyming list of 10 bird species, their little actions precisely described, with nary a reflection or poetic insight in view. We could try to read this poem as an exploration of Clare’s emotions, of his love for nature, perhaps, or his sense of alienation in his new surroundings at Northborough. There are no adverbs or personal pronouns or even subordinating conjunctions, however, to indicate the emotional charge of the images. The sonnet does not form part of a sequence with a recognisable narrative. It is really just a catalogue of beautiful birds, described purely by their appearance and behaviour.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

We see how they move: “hops,” “pecking,” “fetch,” “flies,” “pecks,” “peeps.” We learn what different things they eat: “seed,” “grunsel weeds,” “cabbage seed,” “poppy heads,” chook feed. We learn where they live, and what colour they are. And we glimpse how these birds cohabit with humans, as the sparrows “Hear the maids shoo & scarcely flies away.” The poem is a list of realities, things you might see yourself if you sat or rode or walked or lay somewhere in the country. Weiner argues that Clare’s imagery is often “exemplary” in this way.⁸⁶ These birds are not particular birds that Clare sees at a particular time with a particular set of feelings. They are kinds of birds that exist, wonderful examples of nature’s teeming variety.

Many modern readers disagree with readings like this, and try to prove that Clare’s poems are in fact full of self-reflection. Hickman argues that “Clare’s encounter with the world is mediated by story ...”⁸⁷ His sonnets portray self-consciousness, in other words, because they tell little stories about the mind grappling with the world. This approach works well for Hickman’s example (“I found a ball of grass among the hay,” *MP* v.246), which narrates a connected series of events in the past tense, using four “when”s and two “again”s to indicate the passage of time. It also contains several uses of the word “I” and one moment of explicit self-reflection: “I ... wondered what the thing could be.” But there is no story or temporal sequence in our example. It is not even clear these birds exist at the same time or in the same place. Nonetheless, a critic such as Bate would argue, the poem is self-reflexive because poetry is always self-reflexive. A poem like “The tame hedge sparrow hops about for seed,” is a conscious piece of literary artifice. Whenever Clare writes a poem, he “separates himself from the land,” and, “as a

⁸⁶ Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, “Exemplary Figures in Clare’s Descriptive Poems,” *John Clare Society Journal* 36 (2017).

⁸⁷ Ben Hickman, “John Clare and the End of Description,” *John Clare Society Journal* 30 (2011): 6.

writer he inhabits the environment of imagination.”⁸⁸ In other words, he shapes what he sees into a poem, imposing order on his experience, and when we read the poem we become aware of Clare’s mind, putting these birds into rhyming couplets. There is some merit to this argument, but it confuses two separate ideas: Clare’s self-conscious artistry, and the self-consciousness (if any) actually portrayed in his poems.⁸⁹ He was certainly a self-conscious artist, but might he not have tried to describe un-self-consciousness in his verse, in the manner of Rumi, Keats or St John of the Cross?⁹⁰

In “The tame hedge sparrow hops about for seed,” Clare makes use of one of his most distinctive words, “and.” The poem is paratactic.⁹¹ Like the couplets that describe them, these birds appear next to one another in no apparent order, only disappearing when the maid appears in the final couplet to shoo them away. Clare uses “and” far more often than either Smith or Wordsworth (Figure 3.5), and is particularly likely to use it in his couplet-sonnets. These statistics complement the thoughtful analysis of Barrell, who has shown that even when Clare uses hypotactic conjunctions (e.g. “while” or “when”), he uses them in a paratactic way.⁹²

⁸⁸ Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 166.

⁸⁹ Brownlow makes a similar confusion when he talks of Clare’s “conscious artifice:” *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape*, 39. See Weiner’s discussion of intentionality in Clare’s sonnets: *Clare’s Lyric*, 53-56.

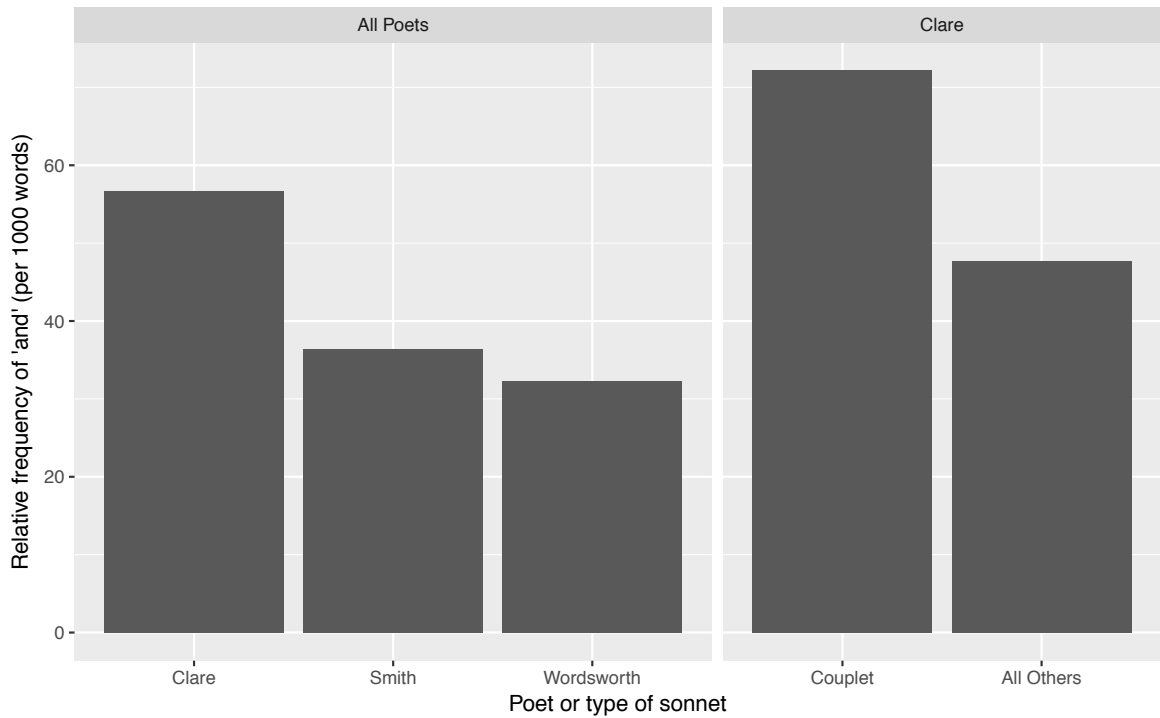
⁹⁰ Indeed, Geoffrey Hartman argued that this was a key theme of Romantic poetry: Geoffrey Hartman, “Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness,’” in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970).

⁹¹ See Smith, *Poetic Closure*, chap. 3.

⁹² John Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 124-29.

Figure 3.5

“And”



Clare, *n*=638; Smith, *n*=83; Wordsworth, *n*=514.

Barrell argues that Clare’s paratactic style prevents the emergence of a “transcendent subject.” Instead of representing a self, who looks at the landscape and struggles to idealise and unify it, Clare’s most distinctive sonnets represent a “manifold of impressions.” There is still a “perceiving subject,” but for Clare the subject is identical to the things it perceives. For Clare, “being is perceiving.”⁹³

Can we call this consciousness, reduced to its perceptions, a “self”? This raises a philosophical debate which has raged for at least the last three hundred years. Locke argued that the moment we are conscious, we are self-conscious: for it is “impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive.”⁹⁴ Someone must be watching all the birds in Clare’s sonnet, so that someone must exist. Hume demurred. If we do have a simple, unitary self, he argued, we should be

⁹³ Ibid., 127.

⁹⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 335.

able to perceive it—but all we *can* perceive are all the different things in the world: “I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.”⁹⁵ Hume might have seen Clare’s poem as a vindication: the mind “is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, though falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity.”⁹⁶ There is no person or voice or “identity” that unites all the perceptions in “The tame hedge sparrow hops about for seed.” These birds are united only by “and,” by what Hume calls “constant conjunction.”⁹⁷

However we resolve this philosophical dispute, it is clear that Clare’s style of description eliminates the self from the frame as much as possible. Smith is always conscious of her anguish. Wordsworth is always conscious of his spiritual being. Clare is often conscious of nothing but the beautiful things of the world. His writing has a quality Erich Auerbach identifies in all paratactic writing: it is “fraught with background.”⁹⁸ Perhaps there is some powerful force linking all Clare’s birds together, but it lurks behind this mysterious word “and.” Clare practises what Bate calls “the magic of naming.”⁹⁹ A name identifies a thing, conjuring it from reality. Clare’s naming is magical because he *merely* names. He evokes the reality of things, leaving their meanings and associations for others to decide. There is something democratic in this outlook, argues Simon Kövesi, in which everything is “muffled by the wonder and blurred boundaries of a levelling nature.”¹⁰⁰ There is no hierarchy in Clare. Nothing is above or below anything else. Everything is with or beside.

⁹⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, 252.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12.

⁹⁹ Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 175.

¹⁰⁰ Simon Kövesi, “John Clare &... &... &... Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome,” in *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*, ed. John Rignall, H. Gustav Klaus, and Valentine Cunningham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 85.

In her children's poetry, Smith often evokes a similar wonder. These poems can be as paratactic or list-like as Clare's—and just as full of species' names:

In the lone copse or shadowy dale,
 Wild cluster'd knots of Harebells blow,
 And droops the Lily of the vale
 O'er Vinca's matted leaves below,
 The Orchis race with varied beauty charm,
 And mock the exploring bee, or fly's aerial form. ("Wild Flowers," 191, ll. 19-24)

Though Smith rounds her children's poems off with a moral, Mrs Talbot argues that this is simply to encourage the child reader to draw analogies between natural and human kind.¹⁰¹ It is a different matter in the sonnets. In these, Smith can usually perceive the intrinsic meaning of nature, but her "painful consciousness" prevents her from identifying with it (XC.3). The greatest of her sonnets of "painful consciousness" was her last:

SONNET XCII. WRITTEN AT BIGNOR PARK IN SUSSEX, IN AUGUST, 1799.

Low murmurs creep along the woody vale,
 The tremulous Aspens shudder in the breeze,
 Slow o'er the downs the leaden vapours sail,
 While I, beneath these old paternal trees,
 Mark the dark shadows of the threaten'd storm,
 As gathering clouds o'erveil the morning sun;
 They pass!—But oh! ye visions bright and warm
 With which even here my sanguine youth begun,
 Ye are obscured for ever!—And too late
 The poor Slave shakes the unworthy bonds away
 Which crush'd her!—Lo! the radiant star of day
 Lights up this lovely scene anew—My fate
 Nor hope nor joy illumines—Nor for me
 Return those rosy hours which here I used to see!

The first three lines, with their lack of conjunctions, might give the sense of Clarean parataxis: each line introduces a different, precisely observed fact about the external world, with no subordinating conjunctions to join them into a reflective whole. But

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Conversations*, 55-56.

then in line four, the hypotaxis comes, with its inevitable note of self-reflection: “*While I*, beneath these old *paternal* trees.” Smith makes her identity explicit. All these things are happening at the very moment that she sits at her “paternal” seat, a place linked to her through family. They are linked not only by family but by her emotions. Smith “marks” the “threaten’d storm,” and sees the sun is “o’erveiled.” This Moodscape is as sad as Smith herself. As the poem progresses, however, these links of family and emotion are severed.

The *volta* comes in line seven. It is at this moment that the poem’s secret process is unveiled like the sun, and Smith’s self-identity begins to unspool: “They pass!” The clouds do not live up to their threats, the storm recedes, the sun re-emerges. This corresponds to an improvement in Smith’s worldly condition, as she, the “Slave,” is released from “the bonds ... | Which crush’d her.” (In 1799, Smith believed that the long-running dispute over her father-in-law’s complex will had finally come to an end, and that she and her children might finally have financial security.) But strangely, as the world alters around her it fails to change her state of mind. The clouds might recede, but the resolution of her legal troubles has come “too late,” and the beautiful memories of her childhood at Bignor remain “obscured for ever.” She becomes self-conscious and self-alienated, referring to herself in the third person as a “Slave,” and feeling the split between her own past and present.

The final movement of the poem introduces a new and powerful element to Smith’s description: “Lo! the radiant star of day | Lights up this lovely scene anew!” This image is objective in an important sense. Smith turns the sun into a symbol of happiness and renewal—it is “radiant” and the things it illuminates are “lovely.” But Smith is neither radiant nor lovely in herself. The sun is not inert matter, given a meaning by the mind of the poet, nor is it a mystical symbol of the deep union of the

poet's soul and the soul of the world. It is itself something good and happy, and when Smith sees this it only accentuates her own sense of misery and isolation, of her slave-like position in society, of the scars left on her soul by time. Wordsworth himself sometimes describes a similar state of mind:

So once it would have been,—'tis so no more;
 I have submitted to a new control:
 A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
 A deep distress hath humanised my Soul.

Not for a moment could I now behold
 A smiling sea, and be what I have been:
 The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;
 This, which I know, I speak with mind serene. ("Elegiac Stanzas," *WW*, 453)

Wordsworth writes serenely of what agonises Smith, but he has a similar sense of nature's objective meaning—the possibility of a “smiling sea”—and of time's ability to rob us of our ability to commune with it. In a way, the conclusion of Smith's poem brings her back to the Clarean parataxis of its opening lines. Smith might be highly conscious of her self, but her self does not dominate the scene. It is only a single dweller in a vast and busy world, which it shares with a million other things.

In Smith and Clare's sonnets, the nonhuman parts of the world—the animals, the trees, the clouds—are “unfailingly meaningful.”¹⁰² For them, the force and meaning of things is independent of the human mind. In this they anticipate an interesting strain of contemporary philosophy. Thinkers like Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett advocate a post-Cartesian account of reality, arguing that a third-person approach can explain important aspects of reality overlooked by the first-person perspective popular in modern philosophy. Latour argues that our lives are filled with things like Smith's sun, “quasi-objects” that are a tissue of mere facts and rich

¹⁰² Weiner, “Exemplary Figures,” 60.

meanings.¹⁰³ We tend to assume that objects are created by humans when we define and describe them, but Latour argues that really we share the world with such quasi-objects, and that they define us as much as we define them.¹⁰⁴ This is just what Smith experiences in her final sonnet, as she slowly comes to recognise the existence of her tiny wounded self in a vast world of moving things. Bennett, meanwhile, argues that the things of the world act together to form “assemblages.”¹⁰⁵ Everything, from a lump of garbage to a cheetah to a hydrogen atom, has its own “vital impetus,” but each thing’s “efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces.”¹⁰⁶ As things come together, they spontaneously develop “*shi*,” a “style, energy, propensity, trajectory or *élan* ...”¹⁰⁷ This is just what Clare recognises in “The tame hedge sparrow hops about for seed.” Each individual bird is a citizen in the democratic republic of the universe, with its own actions and energies. But when Clare packs eleven birds into the assemblage of his sonnet, we get a sense of the vital energy or *shi* that ripples through the bird-world.

There is a crucial difference between Smith and Clare’s styles of description. We noted earlier how “exemplary” Clare’s descriptions are. He is mostly interested in the characters of things, the kinds of birds or flowers or trees or people that exist. Smith is more interested the quiddity of things, the particular people and creatures and times and places she encounters. One way we can see this is to compare our poets’ use of demonstrative pronouns (Figure 3.6).

¹⁰³ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 78.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

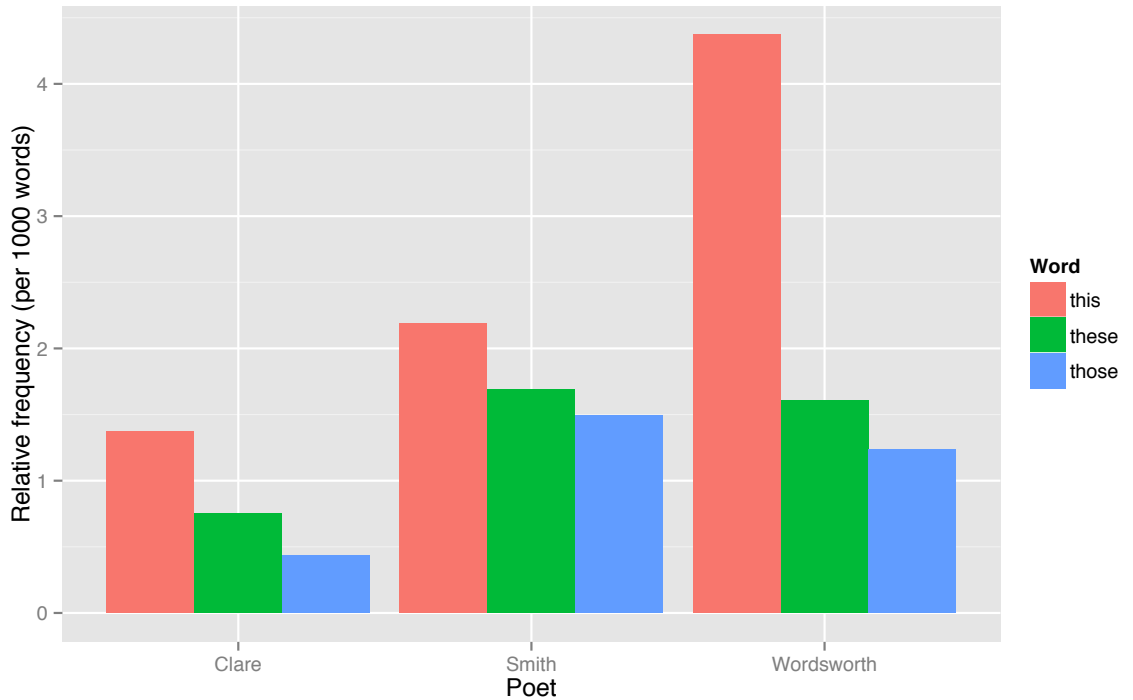
¹⁰⁵ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 23. Compare Latour’s notion of a “network:” Latour, *Modern*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

Figure 3.6

Three demonstrative pronouns: “this,” “these” and “those”¹⁰⁸



Clare, $n=638$; Smith, $n=83$; Wordsworth, $n=514$.

Like Wordsworth, Smith often refers to “these” things and “those” things, particular things at moments of experience. We can see what differences this makes by comparing Smith and Clare on the nightingale:

Poor melancholy bird—that all night long
 Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe;
 From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow,
 And whence this mournful melody of song? (*CSP*, III, ll. 1-4)

When first we hear the shy come nightingales
 They seem to mutter o'er their songs in fear
 & climbing e'er so soft the spinney rails
 All stops as if no bird was any where (*MP* v.222)

¹⁰⁸ It was not possible to include “that” in the graph, because it can also be used as a complementiser (“I didn’t know that he was a martian!”) or as a relative pronoun (“The wizard that casts the spell must fondle the newt”). There is a computational technique for just this problem: part-of-speech tagging. But the algorithms work poorly on Clare’s oddly spelt and largely unpunctuated poems.

Smith describes a particular experience of listening to a particular nightingale at a particular time. Clare describes what it is like when the nightingales return in April. Thus Smith refers to “*this* mournful melody of song,” the very song she hears, while Clare refers more generally to “their songs.” The *this* brings the lonely nightingale close to Smith’s lonely person, while a *this* might have spoiled Clare’s democratic evocation of peasant life among the birds. It is not simply a matter of this single word, of course. Smith highlights her close personal connection to this particular nightingale by addressing it, while Clare uses plurals, the third person and a *when*-construction to indicate the generality of his own birds.

Clare and Smith have both earned their reputations as poets of precise and original description. Scholars have frequently suggested that Smith’s gender and Clare’s class drove them to their innovative, close-up style of description. Barrell has argued that Clare rejected the genteel conventions of eighteenth-century landscape. While a gentleman-poet like James Thomson looks down on the landscape from above, the peasant-poet Clare looks around it from within.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Judith Pascoe argues that gender partly explains why Smith showed a more “intimate acquaintance” with nature than her canonical male contemporaries. Robbed of independence by her marriage, she could not travel to judge and compare different landscapes in the manner of a Thomson or a Wordsworth, but could only wander through the countryside with her children in the manner of her own Mrs Talbot.¹¹⁰

We should not distinguish Smith and Clare too starkly from their gentlemanly contemporaries, however. Percy Shelley argued that to the true poet

¹⁰⁹ Barrell, *Landscape and the Sense of Place*, chap. 3; *Poetry, Language and Politics*, chap. 4.

¹¹⁰ Judith Pascoe, “Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith,” in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Romantic Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 203-04.

“the self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe.”¹¹¹ Is this not precisely how the forlorn Smith presents herself in the implacable world of regenerative nature? Keats claimed that true poets have “no self,” and instead have the “negative capability” of limitless sensitivity to the passage of the world.¹¹² Clare’s descriptive sonnets are surely masterpieces of such negative capability, much like Keats’s own descriptive masterpiece, “To Autumn.” Wordsworth too sometimes describes losing his sense of self in his sonnets:

Verily I think,
Such place to me is sometimes like a dream
Or map of the whole world: thoughts, link by link,
Enter through ears and eyesight, with such gleam
Of all things, that at last in fear I shrink,
And leap at once from the delicious stream. (*WW*, 207)

This is a Wordsworth of openness to the world, of Smithian or Clarean humility, whose self is only a small part of the richness that surrounds it. There is, however, still an important difference. Wordsworth claims that each thing shines with the “gleam | Of all things.” There is a single spirit pervading all. Smith and Clare do not usually share this monism, stressing instead the variety of things. As Clare puts it in “Shadows of Taste:”

Not mind alone the instinctive mood declares
But birds and flowers and insects are its heirs
Taste is their joyous heritage and they
All choose for joy *in a peculiar way* (*MP*, III.303, ll. 3-6, my emphasis)

He goes on to describe the different joys of nature, and the different minds that enjoy them. Smith, in “Studies by the Sea,” takes an image of something singular and deep—the ocean—and reveals its variety:

¹¹¹ Percy Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Lee Clark (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), 294.

¹¹² John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I.387, 193.

He who with more enquiring eyes
Doth this extensive scene survey,
Beholds innumerable changes rise,
As various winds its surface sway ... (289, ll. 11-14)

The primary function of description in Smith and Clare's sonnets is to evoke the world, rather than to symbolise the self. But the world constantly reminds Smith of her own emotional and social deformities, even when she describes its beauties with clarity. And describing the world allows Clare to rid himself of the form of selfhood altogether. It only remains to consider what Smith and Clare write when they do refer to their selves. What does the word "I" mean in these poems of teeming nature?

3.4 The Meaning of "I"

So far, we have seen how Smith and Clare portray self-deformation in their sonnets: through self-contradictory or highly open form, and through precise and varied natural description. And yet they will insist on using the word "I" to denote an individual whose experiences we read about:

I feel I am;—I only know I am,
And plod upon the earth, as dull and void:
Earth's prison chilled my body with its dram
Of dullness, and my soaring thoughts destroyed,
I fled to solitudes from passions dream,
But strife persued—I only know, I am,
I was a being created in the race
Of men disdainful bounds of place and time:—
A spirit that could travel o'er the space
Of earth and heaven,—like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free,—
A soul unshackled—like eternity,
Spurning earth's vain and soul debasing thrall
But now I only know I am,—that's all. (Clare, *LP*, l.397-98)

With transport, once, sweet bird! I hail'd thy lay,
And bade thee welcome to our shades again,
To charm the wandering poet's pensive way

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And soothe the solitary lover's pain:
But now!—such evils in my lot combine,
As shut my languid sense—to Hope's dear voice and thine!
(Smith, *SP*, "LV. The return of the nightingale. Written in May 1791," ll. 9-14)

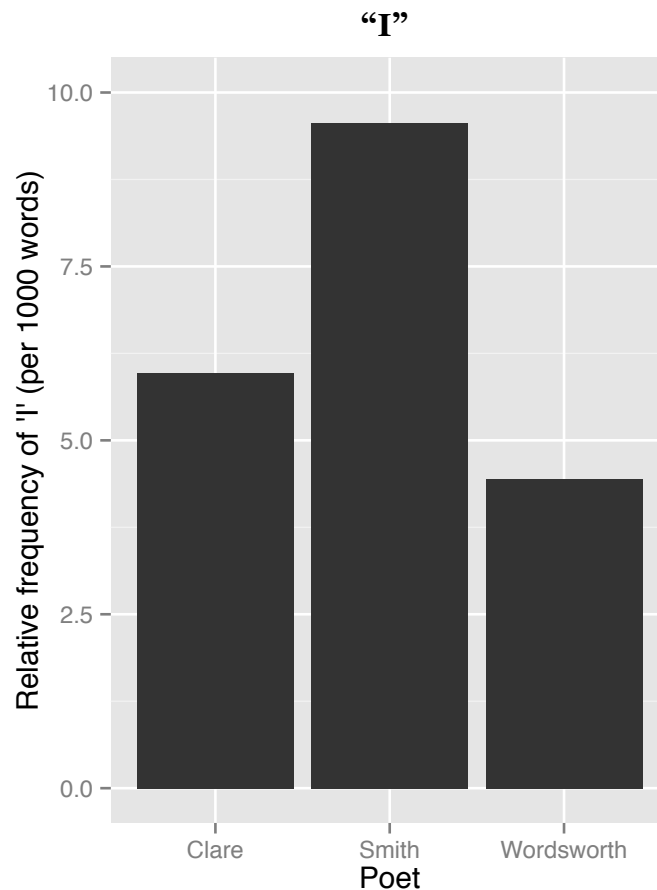
There is a strange contradiction in the "I"s of these poems. Both are showpieces, in which Clare and Smith display their imaginative powers. Clare spends seven lines describing in sublime tones the power of his mind to encompass the universe. Smith spends the first eight lines of her sonnet describing with a poet's sensitivity the "prelusive note" of the nightingale (l. 4). But the "I" of Clare's sonnet insists he can no longer imagine these eternal spaces, and the "I" of Smith's sonnet insists that her "sense" is now shut to the nightingale's song. Both poets try to resolve this contradiction by contrasting their past and future selves. It was Clare's former self that could "trace creation," but "now" he is reduced to a mere rump of existence. It was Smith's former self that "hail'd" the nightingale, but "now" she is deaf. These solutions do not resolve the contradiction, however, because it is Clare's present "I" that imagines his former powers, and it is Smith's present "I" that hears the nightingale's "soft voice of young and present Love" (l. 7). We have encountered a similarly contradictory "I" already, in Barbauld's poem "Life," when the poet's reflections on death lead her into a thicket of paradoxes: who am "I" without life, and what is my life without "me"? When the self is deformed, self-reference becomes complicated.

Linguists call the self-referential aspect of language "deixis," of which there are three main kinds: person, place, and time.¹¹³ When I speak or write, I can refer to myself personally ("I," "me," "mine"), spatially ("here," "there") or temporally ("now," "then"). All these words put the things of the world in relation to me. As

¹¹³ Yan Huang, *Pragmatics*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173.

Culler observes, we usually read poems deictically, imagining a “speaker” or “persona” who utters the words of the poems in a more-or-less specific time and place.¹¹⁴ He is right to criticise this approach—even the straightforwardly autobiographical sonnets we have just considered are problematic if we assume a singular speaker utters them. The better approach is Käte Hamburger’s: “for the behaviour of the lyric ‘I’, no norm or aesthetic definition can be given. ... In a hundredfold nuances it appears or does not appear.”¹¹⁵ As we will see, the deformed “I”s of Smith and Clare behave in surprising ways.

Figure 3.7



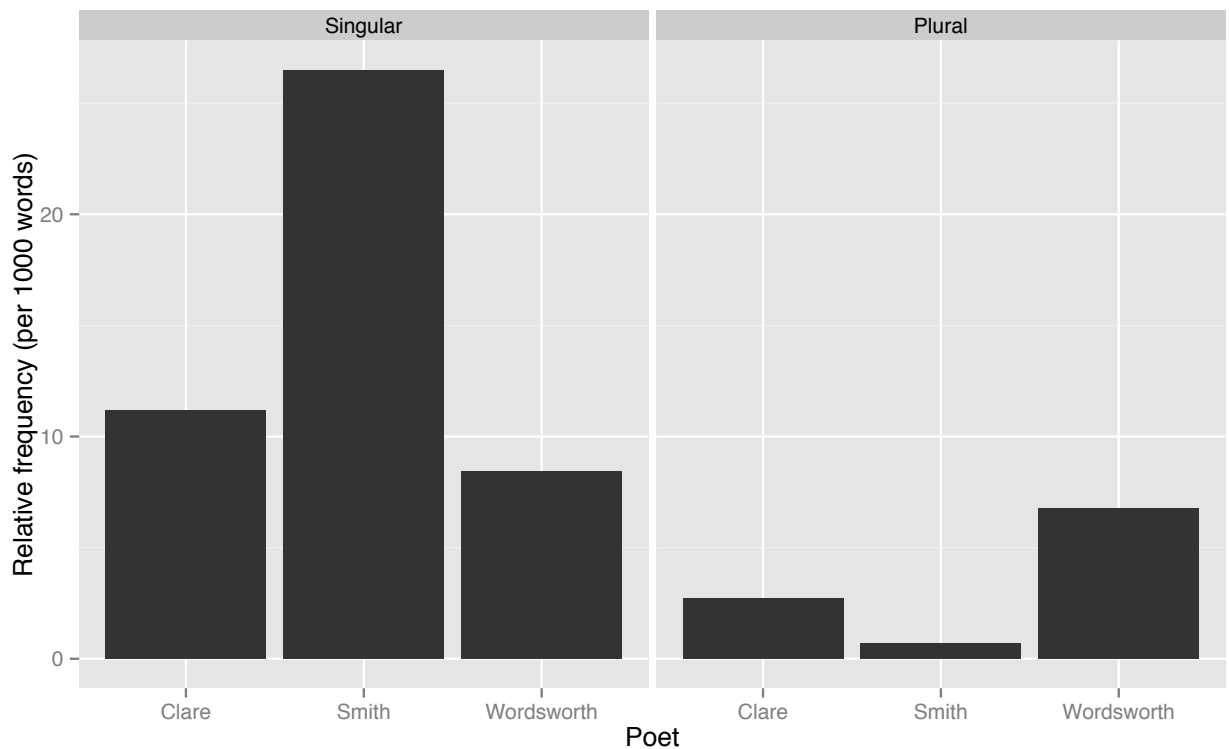
Clare, $n=638$; Smith, $n=83$; Wordsworth, $n=514$.

¹¹⁴ Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 77. This is precisely Abrams’s approach in Abrams, “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric.”

¹¹⁵ “Es klärt letztlich darüber auf, daß für das Verhalten des lyrischen Ich keine Norm, keine ästhetische Definition zu geben ist. ... In hunderfältigen Nuancen erscheint es oder erscheint es nicht.” Käte Hamburger, *Die Logik Der Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1957), 188-89.

The first surprise is shown in Figure 3.7. It may not be surprising to learn that Smith uses the word “I” more frequently than either Clare or Wordsworth, but it may come as a shock that Wordsworth, whom Keats described as a poet of the “egotistical sublime,” uses “I” the least often of all three. If we include all first-person pronouns and possessives, a more complex pattern emerges (Figure 3.8). This graph does suggest what we might originally have suspected, that Clare uses the least person-deixis. When singular and plural are added together, Wordsworth uses 15.21 first-person words per 1000, while Clare uses only 13.93. The lonely Smith is the least likely of the three to use the plural first-person. What causes these different patterns in the poets’ use of these words?

Figure 3.8
First-person words*



*Singular: *I, me, my, mine, myself*. Plural: *we, us, our, ours, ourselves*.

Clare, $n=638$; Smith, $n=83$; Wordsworth, $n=514$.

A good place to start is with place and time deixis, with where and when the “I”s of these poets are. We can get a good overall picture of place and time in these sonnets by considering their titles. Titles are often integral to lyric poems, observes Hamburger. Lyrics are usually cryptic and concise, and their titles can indicate their “Sinnzusammenhang,” the way their meaning hangs together.¹¹⁶ Smith usually uses her titles to specify the place and time of composition: “Written on the Sea-Shore.— October 1784,” “Written on Farm Wood, South Downs, in May 1784.” Bishop Hunt argues that these titles were themselves a great innovation. Not only did they add a new confessional dimension to lyric poetry, but they made “the activity of writing, of artistic creation, ... an inseparable part of the complex experience which [the poet] describes.”¹¹⁷ Smith also used the title pages, frontispieces, epigraphs and prefaces to her poems to re-emphasise this autobiographical element.¹¹⁸ As we know, Smith also wrote sonnets in the voices of fictional characters, such as Werther or her own Orlando and Celestina. But in these cases too her titles typically specify the place and time of supposed composition: “Supposed to have been written in a church-yard, over the grave of a young woman of nineteen.” “Supposed to have been written in America.” Wordsworth copied Smith’s technique,¹¹⁹ giving his sonnets titles like “London, 1802” and “At Applethwaite, Near Keswick, 1804.” He would also add datelines to some of his sonnets: “At the head of Glencoe,” “(Landing at the mouth of the Derwent, Workington.),” “(During an Eclipse of the Sun, July 17.)”

Clare’s titles are normally of a different kind: “Nature,” “The Pismire,” “A Prayer,” “Wood Pictures in Winter.” These shorter titles usually just identify the things Clare describes in the poem, rather than identifying the time and place of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁷ C. Hunt, “Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith,” *Wordsworth Circle* 1 (1970): 88.

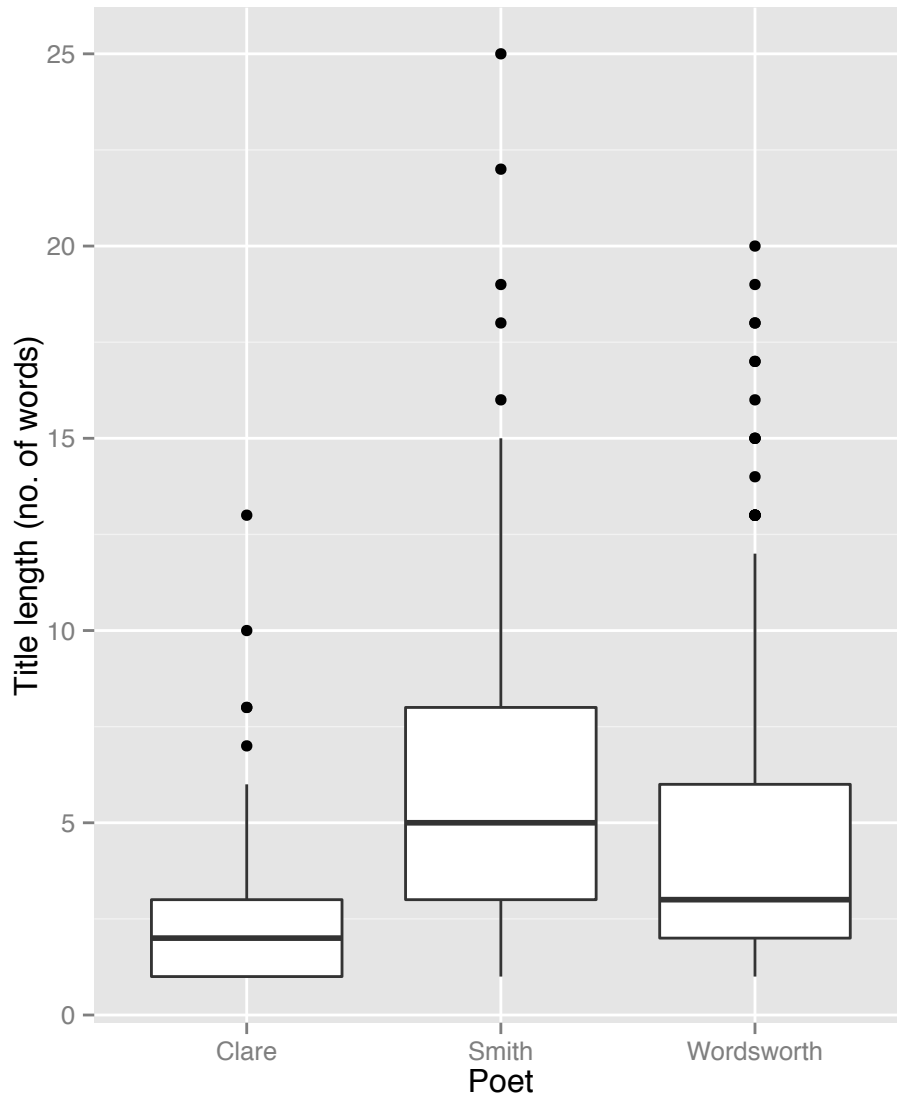
¹¹⁸ Labbe, *Charlotte Smith*, 24-49.

¹¹⁹ Hunt, “Wordsworth and Smith,” 89.

composition. Thirty of his sonnets are simply called "Sonnet." As we have seen, Clare's rhyme and syntax make it difficult to read many of his sonnets as records of particular moments. Usually he describes typical or repeatable experiences. If you go for a walk, you might see "The Gipsy Camp" or "The Mock Bird" or "The Last of April." But you certainly won't see Smith's "the Sea-Shore.—October 1784" or Wordsworth's "Applethwaite, Near Keswick, 1804."

Clare's unspecific titles are accordingly shorter than Smith's and Wordsworth's. Figure 3.9 is a box-and-whisker plot of the length in words of their titles. Each segment of a box, and each line extending from it, represents one quarter of the poet's titles. The line in the middle of each box is the median. The dots represent outliers, whose distance from the upper quartile is more than 1.5 times the length of the box. Half of Smith's titles are 3 to 8 words long, so the box length is 5, and the upper quartile is 8. Any title longer than 15.5 words is therefore an outlier. Smith's titles are longer in general, and she also wrote the longest in the corpus: "Written Sept. 1791, during a remarkable thunder storm, in which the moon was perfectly clear, while the tempest gathered in various directions near the earth."

Figure 3.9
Title Length



Clare $n=339$; Smith $n=85$; Wordsworth $n=387$.

(Sonnets without title excluded.)

Another distinguishing feature is Smith's and Wordsworth's use of dates. Smith includes the date in 11 of her titles, Wordsworth does so in 45 of his titles and 12 of his datelines. Clare only includes dates in two of his titles: "1830" and "The Hail Storm in June 1831." In neither case does he use the date to specify the time of composition. "1830" parodies sonneteers who write about the present:

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These vague allusions to a country's wrongs
Where one says 'aye' and others answer 'no'
In contradictions from a thousand tongues
Till like to prison cells her freedoms grow
Becobwebbed with these oft repeated songs (*MP* IV.506, ll. 1-5)

This poem refers to the time of composition, only to entreat poets to eschew topical references and avoid the “vague allusions” of all poetry on contemporary themes. His other dated sonnet is different. It refers to an event in 1831, but contains no reference to the time of writing:

Darkness came o'er like chaos—& the sun
As startled with the terror seemed to run
With quickened dread behind the beetling cloud
The old wood sung like nature in her shroud
& each old rifted oak tree's mossy arm
Seemed shrinking from the presence of the storm
& as it nearer came they shook beyond
Their former fears—as if to burst the bond
Of earth that bound them to that ancient place
Where danger seemed to threaten all their race
Who had withstood all tempests since their birth
Yet now seemed bowing to the very earth
Like reeds they bent like drunken men they reeled
Till man from shelter ran & sought the open field (*MP*, IV.226-27)

The sonnet reads like a newspaper article rather than an autobiography. There is some deixis: words like “came,” “seemed,” “behind,” “nearer” and “now” indicate that the storm is seen from a human perspective, below the clouds and among the trees. But the only human mentioned is “man” in the abstract, and it is not clear whether the poem describes the speaker's own experience of the storm, or is a third-person account. The effect is to generalise the experience. This is what it is like to experience a storm. It is not a record of how a particular mind experienced a particular storm at a particular time. This makes the very concept of a speaker or

self in these poems paradoxical. To Clare's formless self, there seems to be no difference between his own experience and anyone else's.

This contrast becomes even clearer if we compare the words these poets use to write their titles (Table 3.2). Wordsworth and Smith use words like "written," "composed," "on" and "at," to draw attention to the time and place of composition. The most common deictic markers in Clare's titles are different: "spring," "summer," "autumn" and "morning" are cycles of nature. Time in Clare's sonnets is not personal and autobiographical, but cyclical and common.

Table 3.2
Top ten title words

Clare		Smith		Wordsworth	
Word	Freq*	Word	Freq*	Word	Freq*
the	108.24	the	122.22	the	111.30
sonnet	48.24	to	83.33	of	80.00
to	45.88	of	51.85	to	27.25
a	41.18	written	44.44	in	24.93
of	34.12	a	37.04	a	22.03
in	27.06	in	35.19	on	22.03
spring	16.47	on	31.48	at	19.71
summer	16.47	from	25.93	and	13.33
autumn	12.94	at	16.67	composed	11.59
morning	12.94	by	12.96	by	11.01

*Per 1000 words

Two more words in this table raise a fiendish problem in Smith scholarship: "from" and "by." Smith uses these words to indicate a translation—"From Petrarch"—or to indicate that the sonnet comes from one of her novels—"... from the novel *Celestina*." And although Smith twice uses "by" to describe the location of her sonnet, her other five uses of the word indicate sonnets supposedly written "by Werter." This raises the old problem of how autobiographical Smith's sonnets really are. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Smith admitted that at least one of

her apparently autobiographical poems—her nightjar sonnet—described an experience that never happened. Yet we have seen how she refers to events in her life, gives the date of composition, and sequences her sonnets to give them an autobiographical dimension. Scholars have spilt much ink over the balance of autobiography and artifice in *Elegiac Sonnets*. Claire Knowles argues that the most important aspect of Smith's sensibility was sincerity, especially when compared to the make-believe performances of the Della Cruscans.¹²⁰ Labbe and Andrews argue that the *Sonnets* comprise a “constructed” or “fictional” autobiography.¹²¹ Backscheider argues that they include too much “artifice and performance” to be really autobiographical.¹²² Contrasting Smith with Clare indicates that this whole debate is on the wrong footing. All autobiography is artificial. The fact that Wordsworth turned his real romance with Annette Vallon into the fake story of Julia and Vaudracour does not make *The Prelude* any less autobiographical. Indeed, post-structuralists argue that every autobiography is artificial to the core. Our autobiographies are always framed by literary conventions, which decide in advance what sort of structure and significance our lives may have.¹²³ What really makes a text autobiographical is not its authenticity but its deixis. Does it refer to the author, to somebody else or to no-one at all? Clare tried to eliminate autobiographical references from his sonnets by generalising them. Smith and Wordsworth did their best to convince the reader that the “I” of each sonnet was a particular person in a particular place. This person either was the author, or resembled them closely (in the case of Smith's translated sonnets and dramatic monologues). Smith might play

¹²⁰ Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780–1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 49.

¹²¹ Labbe, 8; Kerri Andrews, “‘Herself [...] Fills the Foreground’: Negotiating Autobiography in the *Elegiac Sonnets* and *The Emigrants*,” in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 14.

¹²² Backscheider, 325–26.

¹²³ See Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), chap. 4.

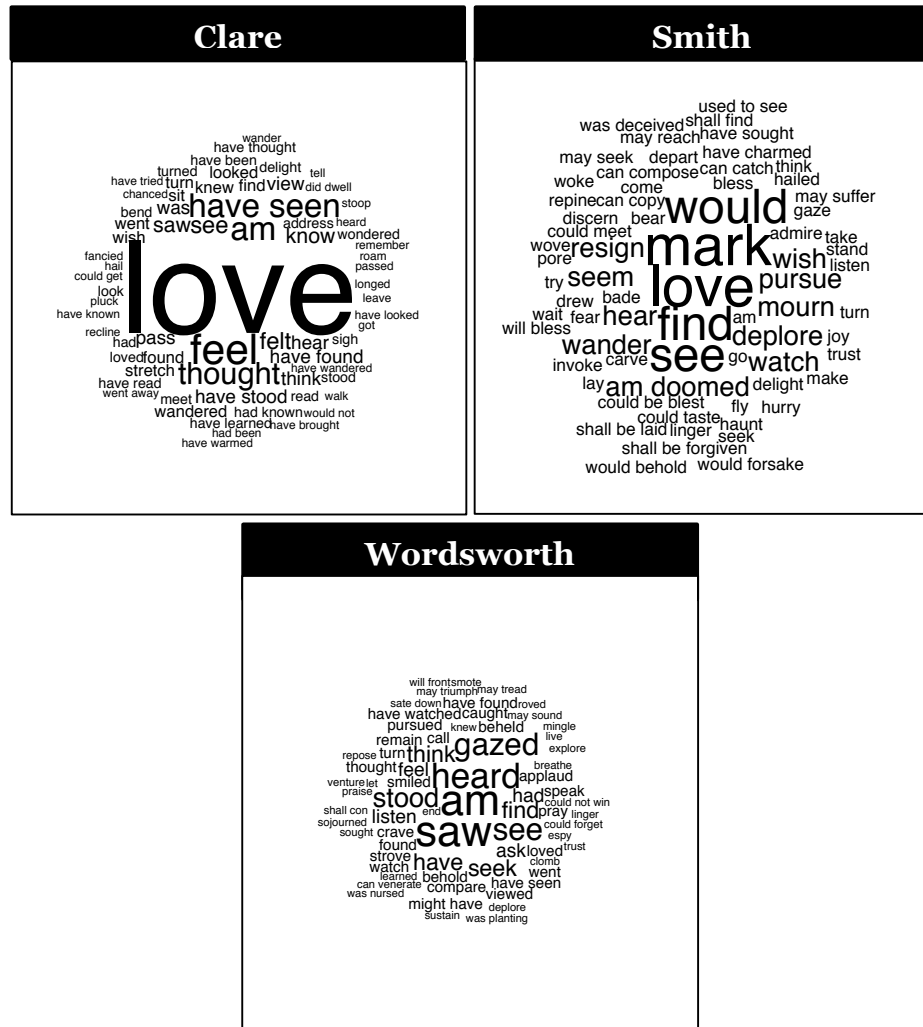
fast and loose with the truth, but she presents her sonnets as the history of her own particular life.

So far I've been drawing a contrast between the "I"s of Smith and Wordsworth, which wander the world and write sonnets about what they see and do, and the "I" of Clare, which is a kind of self-annihilating mystic, a Christian who has achieved self-annihilation, or a Sufi who has achieved *fanaa*, and who no longer has particular experiences of their own. But there are also important contrasts between Smith and Wordsworth. Smith uses the first-person singular three times more than Wordsworth, and he frequently uses the first-person plural, which Smith avoids (Figure 3.8, above). To get to the bottom of this difference, we must examine exactly what Smith, Clare and Wordsworth use the first person singular to do. Figure 3.10 shows literally what "I" does in Clare, Smith and Wordsworth's sonnets. Probably the most striking single pattern is the frequency of "I love" in Smith and Clare. In 9.5% of cases, Clare's "I" loves in the present tense. Smith's "I" loves only 4.1% of the time, but "I love" is still the most common I-phrase in her sonnets, tying with "I mark." Wordsworth, by contrast, never once writes "I love" in a sonnet, though twice he writes "I loved" and once "I have loved."¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Strictly speaking, he only writes "I loved" once: "For she was one *I loved* exceedingly" (*WW*, 346, my emphasis) In the other instance, he writes: "*I*, who accompanied with faithful pace | Cerulean Duddon ..., | And *loved* with spirit ..." (*WW*, 329, my emphasis). This example demonstrates my method. I have in each case found every finite verb whose subject is "I." I have treated periphrastic forms such as "have been brought up" or "cannot see" as a single verb. But I have not included *to*-forms in the verb: "I love to see" has simply been counted as an instance of "I love."

Figure 3.10

“I” predicates



Scholars have often noted Clare’s tendency to write “I love.” Referring to “Emmonsails Heath in Winter,” Barrell suggests that “the words at the beginning of the sentence, ‘I love to see’, are mainly used as a peg on which to hang a continuum of images and events, united primarily in that they are all things that the speaker claims he loves to see.”¹²⁵ Like so many mystical poets, Clare claims to achieve self-annihilation through love. His “I” flows out into things, and his self dissolves into “images and events.” The effect is particularly clear in one of his last sonnets:

¹²⁵ Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics*, 126.

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I love to see the summer beaming forth
And white wool rock clouds sailing to the north
I love to see the wild flowers come again
And Mare blobs stain with gold the meadow drain
And water lilies whiten on the flood
Where reed clumps rustle like a wind shook wood
Where from her hiding place the Moor Hen pushes
And seeks her flag nest floating in bull rushes
I like the willow leaning half way o'er
The clear deep lake to stand upon its shore
I love the hay grass when the flower head swings
To summer winds and insects happy wings
That sport about the meadow the bright day
And see bright beetles in the clear lake play (*LP*, II.1024)

All this “I” does is revel in the existence of what surrounds it. Its sole activity is to “love” or “like” whatever strikes its senses. It is disembodied, a roving eye or ear flitting from place to place—although we will see below that Clare actually weaves a certain kind of embodiment into many of his sonnets.

Of the five times Smith’s “I” loves, three are similar to Clare’s. Impersonating Werther, she tells the North Star: “I love to see thy sudden light appear” (XXIII, l. 7). Speaking in her own voice of the river Arun, she says “I love to listen to the hollow sighs, | Thro’ the half-leafless wood that breathes the gale.” (XXII, ll. 3-4) And in one of her finest sonnets, she addresses the night:

SONNET XXXIX. TO NIGHT.
I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night!
 When the faint Moon, yet lingering in her wane,
And veil’d in clouds, with pale uncertain light
 Hangs o’er the waters of the restless main.
In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind
 Will to the deaf cold elements complain,
 And tell the embosom’d grief, however vain,
To sullen surges and the viewless wind.
Tho’ no repose on thy dark breast I find,
 I still enjoy thee—cheerless as thou art;
 For in thy quiet gloom the exhausted heart

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Is calm, tho' wretched; hopeless, yet resign'd.
While to the winds and waves its sorrows given,
May reach—tho' lost on earth—the ear of Heaven!

In this poem, as in Clare's, love is a means of self-forgetfulness. Just as the calm moon hangs over the "restless main," loving the night lightens the weight of Smith's sad destiny—she is "calm" and "resign'd" despite her wretchedness and despair. Of course Smith refers the night to her own particular experience. She implies that she, "in deep depression sunk," is particularly fit to love this "mournful" and "cheerless" time of day. Her "I," however, does not analyse or comprehend. It simply gives itself to the night, loving and "enjoying" it, and in so doing strives for communion with God. The aim of this loving "I" is to dissolve itself, but unlike Clare's "I" it never quite achieves it. This unfulfilled longing is a distinctive feature of Smith's sonnets: her "I" constantly "would" that things were different. It pursues, wishes, mourns, is doomed, resigns and deplores. Clare's "I" does few of these things. When it isn't loving, it mostly interacts with the landscape, reclining, stooping, standing, and plucking. It feels and thinks and wonders, but in general terms. Wordsworth's "I" is similar to Smith and Clare's, in that it spends time seeing things in nature. But where Smith's "I" simply marks what appears, Wordsworth's is more likely to gaze on them intentionally. And where Smith and Clare's "I"s abandon themselves through love, Wordsworth's is more certain that "I am."

Smith's sense of lonely yearning helps to explain why she uses the first-person singular so much less often than Clare and Wordsworth. "We" is a complex pronoun, because of whom it can include. Sometimes it includes everyone in Britain or perhaps on earth:

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers (Wordsworth, *WW*, 206)

But a time
Like this we live in, when the abject chime

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Of echoing Parasite is best approved,
Was not for thee. (*CSP*, "To the shade of Burns," LXXXII, ll. 7-9)

Or it might refer to the speaker and their addressee:

Turnill, we toiled together all the day
& lived like hermits from the boys at play (*Clare, MP* v.248, ll. 1-2)

Or simply to the speaker and some of their friends at a particular place in time:

Hark from amid the corn that happy brawl
'Tis village childern running after flowers
To this void bosom how the sounds recall
Memories again of childhood's merry hours,
When through the garden pails or o'er the wall
We reached at garden flowers with eager hands,
Or boldly sought the field flowers free for all (*Clare, MP* II.303, ll. 1-7)

When Clare and Wordsworth evoke rural life, the "we" is quite effective at creating a sense of community, of shared experience. Clare frequently evokes the collective life of Northamptonshire—particularly the Helpston of his youth—while Wordsworth frequently evokes the communities of humanity, Christendom or Britain. Clare dissolves himself into these communities. Wordsworth asserts his membership. Smith rarely expresses such solidarity with a human community. She is far more likely to express solidarity with a lonely refugee (LXIX), wandering madman (LXX) or pile of bones washed out of a graveyard in a spring tide (XLIV).

Analysis of "my" brings out some different features of Smith, Clare and Wordsworth's person-deixis (Figure 3.11). All three poets have the same main use for "my"—to refer to their own hearts, minds or souls. It is not surprising to find three great Romantic poets musing on the nature of consciousness. But here the similarities end. "My" asserts possession. We use it to identify what things are ours, what the constituent parts of our selves are. For Clare, life is largely a physical affair. He is the only one of our sonneteers who refers repeatedly to his feet, staff, stool,

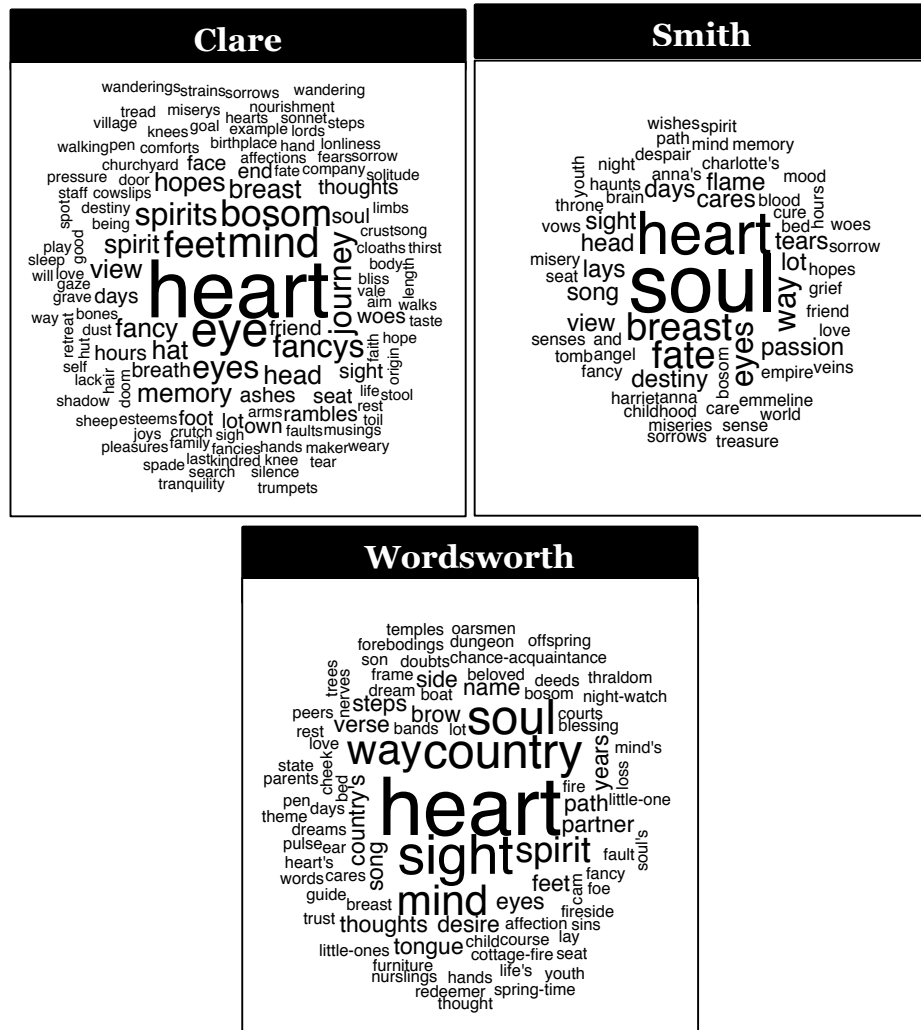
limbs, nourishment, clothes, crutch or door. Wordsworth refers repeatedly to “my sight.” Clare is more likely to refer to “my eye.” Scott Hess argues that Clare is more “embodied” than other Romantic poets.¹²⁶ This seems like a perverse argument when we consider how little Clare refers to himself in his poems, but it is true that he seems more interested in his breathing, sweating, fleshly body than Smith and Wordsworth are in their own. He is in fact the only one of our sonneteers to refer to “my body” at all. Clare lives in a world of things, and from this perspective he too is often just a bunch of things.

Smith has a more abstract sense of what belongs to her, and she tends to brood on her place in the universe’s providential scheme. Her intense sense of alienation leads her to brood on her fate, lot, destiny and tomb. Clare tends to talk about his journey or his walks. Smith is more likely to refer to her “way,” a broader and more abstract concept: “... *my* weary way | Ends but in sad vicissitudes of care” (LXII, ll. 12-13). As we might expect, Smith uses the word “my” 1.5 times more frequently than Clare, and twice as often as Wordsworth. Experience constantly throws her back on herself. The patriotic Wordsworth refers to his country, and the domestic Wordsworth refers to his nurslings, child or parents. When Smith refers to her others, they are always individuals that participate in her misery: her dead daughter Anna, her sympathising friend Harriet, Werther’s desolate Charlotte or Emmeline, the distant lover of the forlorn Godolphin from Smith’s novel *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* (1788). Smith’s life is both abstract and particular. She is trapped in a painful corner of an implacable universe, and surrounded by things which press on her mind and recall her isolation.

¹²⁶ Scott Hess, “John Clare, William Wordsworth, and the (Un)Framing of Nature,” *John Clare Society Journal* 27 (2008): 33.

Figure 3.11

“My” things



Smith and Clare share much in common as sonneteers. They both experimented with the traditional rhymes and metres of the sonnet to destabilise its usual feeling of closure and resolution. They also experimented with the form of the sonnet sequence, though for different purposes: Smith strung nearly all her sonnets into a long chronology of her own life, while Clare created short, enigmatic and impersonal sequences. They share a sense of nature’s variety and objectivity, and an “I” that tries to dissolve itself into nature through the power of love. At the root of all this lay their

shared sense of the self as a small, fragile, lonely thing fit for little but the feeling of pain. They had different solutions to this feeling of lonely isolation. Clare deformed his sonnets till they had no form at all, revelled in nature's variety till it eliminated his self, and turned his "I" into a slot for the world to pour through. Smith shaped her sonnets into prison cells that snap shut, described nature's objectivity to assert her own alienation from it, and turned her "I" into an inky wound. Clare wrote some sonnets of Wordsworthian contentment, and others of Smithian dejection, but the bulk of them express a mystical self-abandonment. Though Smith's love of nature and longing for death present her with the possibility of self-abandonment in her sonnets, she never successfully shuffles of her wounded self in any of them. It was only in her beautiful children's poems, and in her final masterpiece, "Beachy Head" (1807), that she would approach Clare's formless mode of being:

An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,
 I loved her rudest scenes—warrens, and heaths,
 And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
 And hedge rows, bordering unfrequented lanes
 Bowered with wild roses, and the clasping woodbine
 Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch
 With bittersweet, and bryony inweave,
 And the dew fills the silver bindweed's cups—
 I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks
 Nourish the harebell, and the freckled pagil;
 And stroll among o'ershadowing woods of beech,
 Lending in Summer, from the heats of noon
 A whispering shade; while haply there reclines
 Some pensive lover of uncultur'd flowers ... (*SP*, 231, ll. 346-59)

Even here, however, her self-annihilation is expressed in the past tense.

In their autobiographical prose, Smith and Clare explained the concepts of self-deformation which inspired their sonnets. Smith deformed herself through a hard battle with marriage, property and the law, which taught her that women,

particularly women of spirit and rationality, had no place in the England of her day. Motherhood was her defining struggle, and she fought in vain for years to secure her children the lives she felt they deserved as members of their class. But as a married woman, she was a *femme couverte*, a non-person subsumed by her husband's identity. She feared he would expropriate her royalties.¹²⁷ She lamented the marriage articles that gave him her fortune and made no provision for a separation.¹²⁸ Her long struggle to settle her father-in-law's will left her with a Kafkaesque notion of society:

My whole time has been occupied in attending to the affairs of my family, on which I begin to think a spell certainly rests which will for the small remainder of my life render my endeavours after peace & competence as fruitless as those attempts have been in which I have consumed the best of my days.¹²⁹

Like Adeline Mowbray, Smith was tempted to believe that some secret universal force, some "spell," was tormenting her for mysterious reasons. Of course, had she been less genteel, she might have led quite a pleasant life on her income—as her friend Joseph Johnson pointed out.¹³⁰ Had she been meeker, the rich men who patronised her might not have abandoned her in her hour of need. Instead she wrote her heroic poetry. The deformed selfhood it portrays, Stokes rightly points out, corresponds to the "actual condition of being female" in the society she knew.¹³¹

Clare also lost himself in the legal and economic system of his society. Enclosure transformed the landscape of his youth, changing its look and awakening within him the ancient traditions of rural protest. Literacy separated him from his own class. Madness and fame took him first to London and then to Northborough,

¹²⁷ Smith, *Letters*, 12-14.

¹²⁸ See *ibid.*, 79-80, 548.

¹²⁹ To Joseph Cooper Walker, 7 Oct 1801. *Ibid.*, 383-4.

¹³⁰ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 106.

¹³¹ Stokes, "Lorn Subjects," 159.

and finally the asylum. In most of his sonnets, his elimination of self is a beautiful thing, an openness to a universe of fine and wonderful objects. But in a late fragment on “Self-Identity,” Clare revealed the darker side of this worldview. He argues that the sense of self is essential to happiness and morality: “Self Identity is one of the finest principles in everybody’s life and fills up the outline of honest truth in the decision of character—a person who denies himself must either be a mad man or a coward.” This is a surprising argument from a man whose poetry can be read as one great act of self-denial. But he goes on to clarify his sense of what the self is:

... there are two impossibilities which can never happen—I shall never be in three places at once nor ever change to a woman and that ought to be some comfort amid this moral or immoral ‘changing’ in life ...¹³²

For Clare, the self is ultimately nothing but a location in space and time, and the fact of his own maleness. In the asylum he is reduced to a rump of self. All the beautiful buzzing things in his sonnets are vulnerable to “changing.” They come and go indifferently, and in the end Clare is left with only the tattiest shreds of a personality. His sense of the smallness and vulnerability of his self helps to explain the sheer joy with which he lives when, like Vivian, he abandons himself and occupies the present.

Smith’s and Clare’s self-abnegating sonnets challenge our received narrative of the Romantic sonnet, and of Romantic poetry generally. It is simply not the case that Wordsworth introduced a new paradigm of the sonnet, informed by a new sense of self-formation, which replaced the paradigm introduced by Smith. Her sonnets and sense of deformed selfhood were emulated throughout the Romantic period, not only by Clare, but also by sonneteers such as Keats and Shelley and the later Coleridge. She had her opponents, such as Seward, Robinson, Hemans and

¹³² John Clare, *John Clare by Himself* (Carcanet: Manchester, 2012), Kindle edition.

Wordsworth himself.¹³³ All these sonneteers shared similar concerns, most of which Smith first raised: the self's place in nature, the relationship between the form of the sonnet and the form of the self, the "legitimacy" or "illegitimacy" of different kinds of sonnet, the relationship between poetry and the poet's actual experiences. Smith and Clare's quest for self-abandonment, hers a failure, his often a success, was one response to these concerns.

Their sonnets have implications for our understanding of Romantic poetry as a whole. Curran claims that poetic form is "always a ground for self-mirroring and self-creation" in Romantic poetry,¹³⁴ but we have seen how for Smith and Clare, poetic form could equally be a weapon of self-destruction. We should not discount by any means the organic forms of poems like Wordsworth's sonnets, but simply note that the quintessential Romantic themes of confession, natural description and formal experimentation could also lead to the self-deformation of a Smith or a Clare.

We should not be surprised that Smith and Clare had similar attitudes about the form of the self and the form of poetry. Clare was influenced directly by the older Smith, inspired by the "spontaneity and immediacy" of her sonnets.¹³⁵ There were also important similarities in their circumstances. Bate points out that women and the labouring classes faced similar challenges in becoming poets, and breaking into "a literary world dominated by well-to-do, well-educated, well-connected men."¹³⁶ Curran has argued that the kind of detailed description we usually associate with

¹³³ Though Wordsworth emulated and praised her poetry as late as 1833, as evidenced by his oft-cited footnote to "Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off Saint Bees' Heads:" "The form of stanza of this poem, and something of the style of versification, are adopted from ... Charlotte Smith: a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligation than is likely to be either acknowledged or remembered." *WW*, 724.

¹³⁴ Curran, *Poetic Form*, 216.

¹³⁵ Weiner, *Clare's Lyric*, 58.

¹³⁶ Bate, *John Clare*, 509. Of course many of Smith and Clare's forbears were both women and peasants: see Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Clare was actually a common feature of women's poetry in the period, and that such detailed description usually "suggest[s] a decentered mind or a society compounded of incongruities."¹³⁷ Clare and Smith both portrayed the decentred mind of the outsider in their poems, even if their brilliant experiments with poetry earn them a place at the centre of the Romantic canon.

They were not the only outsiders prone to detailed description and a decentred view of the self. William Hazlitt made just the same point about another interloper trying to make their mark on literary London:

The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that 'perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart.' His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry, that makes us like ourselves so well, the feeling of continued identity.¹³⁸

The poet is Thomas Moore, Irishman, and the first Catholic ever admitted to Trinity College Dublin. As we saw in Chapter 1, Hazlitt began his writing career with his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1804), in which he claimed the self was purely imaginary and ought to be eradicated through benevolence. By the time he published this lecture in 1818, he clearly had a different opinion. Now he felt that a "feeling of continued identity" was essential not only to our own happiness, but to poetry, and Moore's various and detailed poems simply did not give this sense of a well-formed self.

¹³⁷ Stuart Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 190.

¹³⁸ Hazlitt, *Works*, v.151.

Moore was not simply a poet. He was also one of the greatest biographers of the Romantic period. In his best biography, he tackled the most Romantic life of all, that of his friend, Lord Byron, a man of titanic genius as well as physical and moral deformity. In that great work, Moore would not only detail the causes of his friend's moral derangement, but would come to express a deep scepticism about the very existence of a singular, integral self. All this we will see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE: THOMAS MOORE'S MULTIFORM BYRON



One of my earliest recollections is gazing on the bright blue sky as I lay in my little bed, before my hour of rising came, and listening with delighted attention to the ringing of a peal of bells. I had heard that heaven was beyond those blue skies, and I had been taught that *there* was the home of the good, and I fancied that those sweet bells were ringing in heaven. What a happy error! Neither illusion nor reality, at any subsequent period of my life, ever gave me such a sensation of pure, heartfelt delight, as I experienced when morning after morning I looked on that blue sky, and listened to those bells, and fancied that I heard the music of the home of the blest, pealing from the dwelling of the most high. Well do I remember the excessive mortification I felt when I was told the truth, and had the nature of bells explained to me; and, though I have since had to awake often from illusions that were dear to my heart, I am sure that I never woke from one with more pain than I experienced when forced to forego this sweet illusion of my imaginative childhood.¹

NO GENRE is more Romantic than life. Nothing is more Romantic than the struggling artist or poet, “pursued from exile to exile,” whose banishment is the price of their vision.² In *Blackadder*, Percy Shelley is suicidal, Byron tubercular, and Coleridge unconscious from drug use—the myth of the Romantic life endures. Amelia Opie, lying in her bed as a child, thought she could hear the music of heaven. She awoke to the Truth, but at what price? She is a secular Eve, who must lose her innocence to obtain knowledge. Hearing the music of heaven was a precious experience, but has become a tarnished memory. In many

¹ Amelia Opie, quoted in Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, *Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie*, 2 ed. (Norwich: Fletch and Alexander, 1854), 11-12.

² Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge, 1957), 14.

Romantic lives, a youth of promise gives way to an adulthood of sadness and compromise.³ This brings the question of self-deformation to the fore. Did Opie advance or regress in her growth, when she ceased to hear heaven sing?

It may be objected that life is no genre. Surely it is the raw material of literature, not its finished product? But the *Life* is a literary form, which has evolved as society and culture have changed. Romantic autobiography has long been recognised as a crucial genre of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Not only were many of the most famous and enduring autobiographies of European literature written or published in the Romantic period, but—it is commonly argued—this is also when literature itself became autobiographical.⁴ The two poets who, by the 1830s, were widely considered the masters of their art in English were William Wordsworth and Lord Byron, two of the most self-obsessed writers in the English tradition. We have already noted the autobiographical strains in Smith's sonnets. In the twentieth century, it was M.H. Abrams who drew most attention to the centrality of autobiography in Romanticism. It was during the Romantic period, he claims, that readers began to judge art "in terms of the relation of art to the artist."⁵ All art was self-expression, and so was in some sense autobiographical.

If the Romantics were great autobiographers, one might assume they were also great biographers. Strange to say, scholars have rarely held this to be true. In the last 50 years, a number of scholars have devoted attention to Romantic-era biographies, but their research has yet to spill over into mainstream accounts of the period.⁶ Opening the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001), and turning to the article

³ Kenneth R. Johnston, "The Unromantic Lives of Others: The Lost Generation of the 1790s," *Wordsworth Circle* 40, no. 2/3 (2009): 68.

⁴ See above, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 3.

⁶ The major works in this tradition are Joseph W. Reed, *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century, 1801-1838* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966); Francis R. Hart,

on “Britain: Romanticism and Life Writing,” one would be forgiven for thinking that not a single biography of note had been published between 1798 and 1850. The author discusses *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), *The Prelude* (1805-50) and *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821); they mention Dorothy Wordsworth’s journals and the travel writing of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Ann Radcliffe; but they spare no ink for a single biography.⁷ A glance at the index to the latest *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (2010) reveals numerous references to great autobiographies of the period, but even when great biographers like Anna Barbauld, Robert Southey, Mary Hays, William Godwin, Thomas Moore or John Gibson Lockhart appear in the index, their great biographies do not.

Why is this the case? Scholars have given various answers. Leon Edel, Richard Holmes and Paula Backscheider all complain that literary criticism has yet to come to grips with biography as an art form. Biographies are typically read and reviewed as non-fiction titles about their subjects, rather than works of literary art. They are sorted by the subject’s surname on bookshop shelves, not the author’s.⁸ They are poorly reviewed in newspapers and magazines, with reviewers rarely taking note of how a biography is actually structured.⁹ These arguments apply to all

“Boswell and the Romantics: A Chapter in the History of Biographical Theory,” *ELH* 27, no. 1 (1960); *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971); Mitzi Myers, “Godwin’s ‘Memoirs’ of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject,” *Studies in Romanticism* 20, no. 3 (1981); Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Richard Holmes, *Dr Johnson & Mr Savage* (London, Sydney and Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993); Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jane Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography, 1640-1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

⁷ Kevin Hickey, “Britain: Romanticism and Life Writing,” in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 139-40. The following article, on “Early Nineteenth Century Biography,” redresses this gap—but this is symptomatic, suggesting that there is no “Romantic” biography at all.

⁸ Richard Holmes, “The Proper Study?,” in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

⁹ Paula Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-15. Leon Edel makes a similar point: Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York and London: Norton, 1984), 31-32.

biographies, but Romantic biographies may be at especially high risk of under-appreciation. Joseph Reed, who wrote the first major study of Romantic biography, assigned virtually all the period's biographies to the dustbin. The Romantic period was not a "golden age" for biography,¹⁰ and whatever good biographies *were* written in the period, they were not really Romantic.¹¹ What exactly would constitute a truly Romantic biography he never explains.

Reed represents one extreme of opinion. Later scholars have argued that the Romantics did have a coherent concept of the form. The "paradigm of romantic biography," writes Mitzi Myers, was subjective, focussing on the "internal and private aspects" of the self.¹² Francis Hart claims that between 1791 and 1831, James Boswell was the dominant influence.¹³ His *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) was considered exemplary, and great biographers like Moore and Lockhart imitated it in their own works. They tried to bring biography close to autobiography, by quoting their subjects at extreme length and keeping their own narration to a minimum. Annette Cafarelli disagrees with Hart, arguing that a different tradition was more important: it was Samuel Johnson's brief *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) that influenced the really great Romantic biographers. When William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey turned to biography, they wrote pithy essays, not Boswellian epics.¹⁴ Holmes takes a more balanced view: the Romantics were influenced by both these great biographers. Johnson's brief *Life of Richard Savage* (1744) provided the Romantics with a model of the Outcast Poet,¹⁵ while Boswell's *Johnson* was an "epic"

¹⁰ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, vii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28. Reed makes the rather strange argument that this was due to the growth of the Evangelical movement.

¹² Myers, "Godwin's 'Memoirs' of Wollstonecraft," 303.

¹³ Hart, "Boswell and the Romantics," 45.

¹⁴ Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poetry*, 1, and chaps. 4 and 5.

¹⁵ Holmes, *Dr Johnson & Mr Savage*, 45.

of “common humanity,” demonstrating biography’s potential to vividly describe the whole personality.¹⁶ Both examples nourished the Romantic generation.

With Myers and Holmes, we can see the familiar model of Romantic self-formation rearing its head again. In the Romantic biography, the subject is an outcast, whose personality develops as they struggle with themselves and with the world. Later scholars have built on this model. Elinor Shaffer claims that nineteenth-century biographies developed alongside the *Bildungsroman*.¹⁷ Jane Darcy claims that Romantic biographers were innovative because they portrayed the “gradual development of an individual.”¹⁸ These scholars believe that Romantic *Lives* had optimistic plots of self-formation. Others argue that Romantic biographies tended to be more tragic. Julian North argues that the Romantic poets were portrayed as “inherently immature” in their first biographies.¹⁹ Alan Richardson argues that Romantic biographies of labouring-class poets tended to be supercilious, depicting their subjects as children of nature whose attempts to cultivate themselves led only to “poetic decline.”²⁰ For all these scholars self-formation is the key to Romantic biography. Romantic biographers saw it as their task to explain how their subjects became the people they became. Romantic theorists of biography agreed, according to Reed. Theorists held that a person was shaped by their society, and that a good biographer should show how a person developed within the prevailing social order.²¹ For Thomas Carlyle, for example, life

¹⁶ “The Proper Study?,” 11.

¹⁷ Elinor S. Shaffer, “Shaping Victorian Biography: From Anecdote to *Bildungsroman*,” in *Mapping Lives*, ed. France and St Clair, 116-17.

¹⁸ Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography*, 20.

¹⁹ North, *Domestication of Genius*, 7.

²⁰ Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, 257.

²¹ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, 81.

was a “Combat” between “Self” and “Environment,” and a good biography must tell the story of his combat.²²

Thus there seems to be an emerging consensus that Romantic biographers portrayed the self-formation of their subjects in much the same way, supposedly, that Romantic novelists portrayed that of their protagonists, or Romantic poets of themselves. Scholars have unearthed examples of both self-formation and self-deformation in biographies of the period, but none has tackled the question of self-deformation head on. North and Richardson have considered the concept, but on a narrow basis. North argues that in Romantic biography, self-formation was a matter of “domestication.” If a person developed successfully, they would be able to marry their successful public life to a successful private life. She leaves unanswered the question of how the Romantics thought public or private success might be achieved, and of how such success or failure might bear on a person’s personality. Richardson, meanwhile, is more interested in the political aspects of labouring-class biographies, rather than in what they say about the self. Thus the question remains: how did Romantic biographers write about self-deformation? What shape would a Romantic biography take if the biographer thought their subject had deformed themselves?

To answer these questions, let us turn to the most Romantic life of all: Lord Byron’s. He was, says Cafarelli, “the greatest biographical phenomenon of his age.”²³ He led a life of incredible achievement, of extraordinary combat between Self and Environment, of quest and high feeling—and, for his contemporaries at least, of self-deformation. His marriage collapsed, his daughter Allegra died, he never saw his

²² Ibid.

²³ Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 145.

other daughter Ada after her first months of life. His poetry was replete with the cynicism of premature age:

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone! (*BW*, 112, ll. 5-8)

His suppressed bisexuality and sexual love for his half-sister drove him across the seas—first to Italy where he felt his tongue lose its English, and then to Greece, where he died fortifying Missolonghi, only for the Ottomans to sack it the year he was gone. His failures added to his glamour: the scandal, the moral opprobrium, the death and the broken hearts. But they also brought his poetry into question. The literary critic Isaac D'Israeli felt Byron had never reached his potential:

Lord BYRON has run but an unfinished course. ... I consider that had he lived, the complete development of his powerful capacity, the elevation of his generous temper, in a word, the perfect formation of his character, would have been the necessary consequence of his nature.²⁴

Matthew Arnold took a dimmer view, as we saw in the Introduction: Byron lacked the “patience, knowledge, self-discipline, [and] virtue” required to form himself properly.²⁵ He may have been one of the greatest poets of the nineteenth century, but he was flawed. As we have seen, it is this apparent failure in Byron’s self-formation that has led many scholars to claim his poetry is not really Romantic. He was a cynic, whose failed quest for meaning locked him out of the true visionary strain of British Romantic poetry. He was a Charles Vivian or a Charlotte Smith, rather than a William Wordsworth.

²⁴ Isaac D'Israeli, *The Literary Character; or, the History of Men of Genius, Drawn from Their Own Feelings and Confessions*, 4th revised ed., 2 vols. (London: Colburn, 1828), I.xxix-xxx.

²⁵ See above, p. 10.

There are over 200 biographies of Byron,²⁶ but one stands out above the rest: Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of His Life* (1830-31). It is written in the full Boswellian mode, comprising a huge bulk of Byron's letters and journals, with Moore's narrative woven among them. For many scholars of biography, it is a classic. George Saintsbury, Harold Nicholson, Francis Hart, Richard Altick, Joseph Reed, Richard Holmes, and Julian North all treat it as a major work in the history of the genre. A fellow Byron biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, finds Moore's book a "remarkable production," and says it became "the standard work" on Byron's life in the nineteenth century.²⁷ Moore was one of Byron's closest friends, and had already written one popular biography, his *Memoirs of the Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (1825), before tackling his noble friend's explosive history. He would go on to write *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (1831), the great Irish revolutionary, completing a trilogy of radical, controversial lives. At the beginning of his *Byron*, Moore explained why the book was necessary. In Byron's life, "the literary and the personal character were so closely interwoven" that neither could be understood without the other.²⁸ He aimed to strip away the rumours and the slander, to penetrate the deep recesses of Byron's character, and explain how *that* man, lying broken on the shores of Greece with wife, child and lovers abandoned behind him, could have written *that* poetry, sweeping Europe with its incredible power. As we will see, his assessment of Byron's self-deformation was extremely complex. He did not deny Byron's "moral derangement," and tried to explain its causes in Byron's heredity and experience. But he also tried to do justice to the "variety" of Byron's genius and the

²⁶ Holmes, "The Proper Study?," 15.

²⁷ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, reprint ed. (London: John Murray, 2014), 542.

²⁸ Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1830-31), digital ed. in David Hall Smith, *Lord Byron and His Times*, <http://lordbyron.org>, accessed 17 August 2017, I.vii. Future references to this edition.

changeableness of his “multiform” character. The result was a massive, philosophical biography, over the course of which Moore himself became sceptical of the concept of the self. Moore’s *Byron* is a tale of a man trying to form himself, failing, and disintegrating—but it was this very disintegration which allowed his genius to be so various and far-reaching.

Moore’s immensely complex, indeed formless Byron was not the Byron the public encountered elsewhere. Hazlitt accused him of the same “querulous” egotism of which Hayley accused Smith.²⁹ “Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts,” thought Hazlitt, and “There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness.”³⁰ Where Moore saw a complex personality impossible to tie down, John Galt made a simple diagnosis of “morbid sensibility.”³¹ In *Glenarvon* (1816), her bitter *roman à clef*, Caroline Lamb depicted her former lover as the Tempter himself:

O better had it been to die than to see and hear Glenarvon [i.e. Byron]. . . . he would speak home to the heart; for he knew it in all its turnings and windings; and, at his will, he could rouse or tame the varying passions of those over whom he sought to exercise dominion. Yet, when by every art and talent he had raised the flames of love, tearing himself from his victim, he would leave her, and then weep for the agony of grief by which he saw her destroyed.³²

Moore included these aspects in his Byron, the misanthropy, the melancholy, the lasciviousness, but let none of these traits define his friend, whose personality he held to be indefinable.

²⁹ Hazlitt, *Works*, XI.77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, v.153.

³¹ John Galt, *The Life of Lord Byron* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), digital ed. in David Hall Smith, *Lord Byron and His Times*, <http://lordbyron.org>, accessed 17 August 2017, 22. Future references will be to this edition, indicated in parentheses.

³² Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1816), II.147-48.

Byron's failed self-formation is not the only failure of Moore's *Byron*. A biography is always to some extent also an autobiography, the story of the author's quest to understand their subject.³³ Many readers have argued that Moore himself failed in this quest. Nicholson thought Moore insufficiently "brave" to have really succeeded.³⁴ Reed lurches between calling Moore's *Byron* a "glorious failure" and "a sprawling, unselective agglomeration" which hardly manages to give even a "faint light of Byron's personality."³⁵ Cafarelli simply claims it "did not fare well" and was "widely regarded as disappointing."³⁶ A large part of this dislike has surely to do with external factors: the sheer length of Moore's biography (it is more than 500,000 words long) and the fact that it was impossible he could reveal Byron's incest or discuss his bisexuality with family members still living in 1830. But as we will see, there is a certain truth to the idea that Moore failed in his own quest. Moore is ever-present in the book. The biography includes 143 letters Byron wrote to Moore, and a handful that Moore wrote back. Moore witnessed several key scenes of Byron's life and narrates them in the first person. And as we shall see in §4.1, Moore's philosophical, speculative style of writing lays bare his reasoning process as he analyses the written remains of his friend's life. We accompany Moore on his quest for Byron's personality, and we see him, in the end, unable to locate a "pivot of character" that ties the whole together (II.782). As we will see in §4.4, this leads him, like Maria Edgeworth and John Clare, to question the very concept of an integral self.

³³ Not everyone is happy about this: one great biographer wishes that "more biographers would make separate books of these, or write their autobiographies rather than allowing them to intrude in their particular narrative of the life they have researched." Edel, *Writing Lives*, 110.

³⁴ Harold Nicholson, *The Development of English Biography* (London: Hogarth, 1927), 114.

³⁵ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, vii, 102, 04.

³⁶ Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 15. She includes Lockhart's *Scott* in this damnation—a bold move, considering that previous scholars of biography, like Nicholson and Reed, have extolled it as the best or second-best biography in the language!

This chapter falls into four main sections. In §4.1, I discuss the philosophical style of Moore's biography, showing how he derived his complex theory of self-deformation from David Hume and D'Israeli, and developed a delightful, intellectual prose style to communicate it to his readers. In §§4.2-3, I use the novel technique of sentiment analysis to model the structure of the biography's plot. Critics have often accused the book of being shapeless, but in §4.2 I use sentiment analysis to show how Moore gave Byron's life the dual structure of a courtship plot (Volume 1) followed by a Smithian or Clarean tale of exile (Volume 2). In §4.3 I use the technique to compare Moore's biography to several others from the period, revealing his distinctive sense of how self-deformation unfolds in time. Finally, in §4.4 I consider the autobiographical element in Moore's *Byron*, and Moore's ultimately sceptical realisations about the nature of selfhood.

4.1 Moore's Theory of Self-Deformation

Charles Babbage was impressed when he read Moore's book. Its "analysis" of Byron came "nearer to the clearness of *science* than any thing he had ever read."³⁷ And Babbage would know, being the greatest computer scientist of the nineteenth century (alongside, incidentally, Byron's own daughter Ada). What was it about Moore's method that drew this compliment from Babbage? After all, many of Moore's more recent readers have found his analysis crude rather than scientific. Moore was a hero-worshipper, his critics say, who shielded Byron from critique by arguing that genius is above the moral judgement of mere mortals.³⁸ There is a grain of truth to this argument. Moore did suggest that "such a character" as Lord Byron's

³⁷ 14 February 1830, Thomas Moore, *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. Wilfred S. Dowden, 6 vols. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983-1991), III.1290.

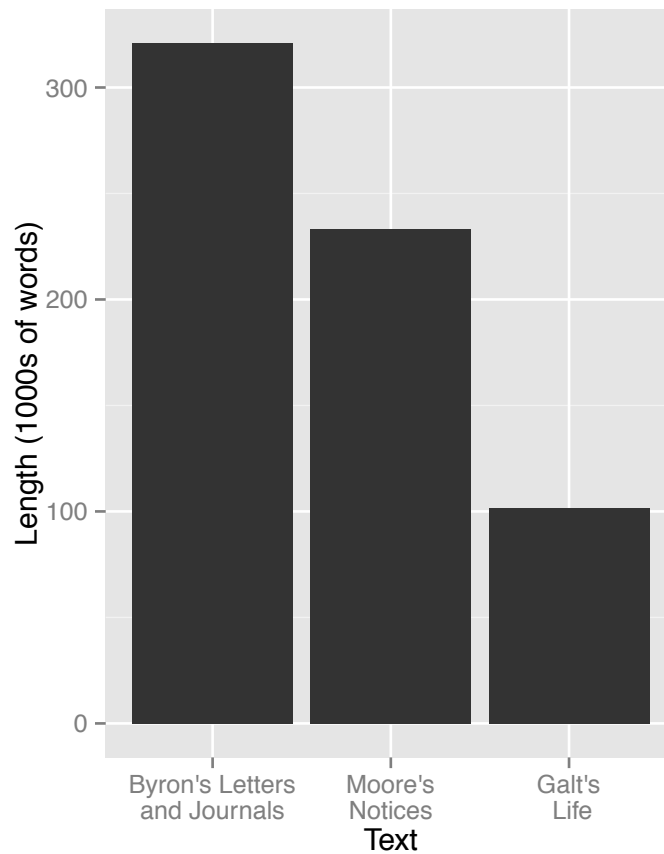
³⁸ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, 112-14; Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79; North, *Melancholy and Literary Biography*, 74; Darcy, *Domestication of Genius*, 207.

cannot be judged “by ordinary standards” (1.656). But he did not take 1,493 quarto pages to make such a simple point. Instead, he developed a complex philosophy of selfhood, which he applied to the evidence of Byron’s letters and journals to uncover the truth of Byron’s genius and character.

Moore had a clear sense of his biographical method: “Biography ... is like dot engraving, made up of little minute points, which must be attended to, or the effect is lost.”³⁹ He wanted to break Byron down into his elements, and see how they interacted. To do so, he had to collect, print and interpret every available scrap of detail—though much of it could not be published with decency. This preponderance of detail has sometimes distracted readers from Moore’s presence in the book. Moore’s *Notices* “might easily be comprised in a small duodecimo,” said the reviewer of Volume 1 in the *Monthly Review*.⁴⁰ In fact, though Byron’s 561 letters and two journals do occupy most of the biography’s pages, Moore’s *Notices* are themselves a substantial literary work. The book is 568,000 words long, of which 320,000 comprise Byron’s letters and journals, and 233,000 Moore’s *Notices*—making the *Notices* about as long as *Moby Dick* (1851). The remaining 15,000 words include 18 other letters and the lengthy appendix. Moore’s *Notices* were no minnows—they were in fact more than twice as long as their nearest competitor, Galt’s *Life of Lord Byron* (1830) (Figure 4.1).

³⁹ Quoted in Ronan Kelly, *Bard of Erin: The Life of Thomas Moore* (Dublin: Penguin, 2008), 4.

⁴⁰ “[Review of Moore’s *Byron*, Volume 1],” *Monthly Review* NS 13 (1830): 219.

Figure 4.1**Who Has Mo[o]re Words?**

What did Moore use all these words to say? Babbage was right to call his style scientific. It is necessary to quote at some length, in order to show how Moore expands and buttresses his analysis of Byron's character. In this passage, he explains why the young Byron was a poor student of classics:

But, notwithstanding his backwardness in the mere verbal scholarship, on which so large and precious a portion of life is wasted*, in all that general and miscellaneous knowledge, which is alone useful in the world, he was making rapid and even wonderful progress. With a mind too inquisitive and excursive to be imprisoned within statutable limits, he flew to subjects that interested his already manly tastes, with a zest which it is in vain to expect that the mere pedantries of school could inspire; and the irregular, but ardent, snatches of study which he caught in this way gave to a mind like his an impulse forwards, which left more disciplined and plodding competitors far behind.

LIFE: MOORE'S MULTIFORM *BYRON*

* "It is deplorable to consider the loss which children make of their time at most schools, employing, or rather casting away, six or seven years in the learning of words only, and that very imperfectly."—COWLEY, *Essays*.

"Would not a Chinese, who took notice of our way of breeding, be apt to imagine that all our young gentlemen were designed to be teachers and professors of the dead languages of foreign countries, and not to be men of business in their own?"—

LOCKE *on Education*. (1.60-61)

This passage gives a good example of Moore's analytical style. Presented with the evidence of Byron's poor results at school, Moore is prompted to inquire what significance school results might have in a person's life. What did it mean for Byron to have "a mind like his"? What qualities did his mind possess which barred him from success in "verbal scholarship"? Moore distinguishes "mere" schoolwork from real "progress" of mind, and like a proud parent insists that Byron's bad grades were the result not of dullness, but of the "inquisitive" and "excursive" aspects of his mind that ensured his real improvement. Moore's style is effusive. He writes long sentences and is clearly enthusiastic about the growth of his fellow-poet's mind. But he is also intellectual and analytic, drawing distinctions and making arguments.

Moore buttresses this analysis with a scholarly footnote, something he does constantly throughout the biography. He cites the great poet, Abraham Cowley, to show that Byron's dislike of school was poetical. He cites the great philosopher, John Locke, to show that his own theory of Byron's education has the sanction of a great thinker. Nearly all of Moore's footnotes are like one of these two. He either cites another genius similar to Byron, or he cites a philosopher to justify his own analysis. In both cases, the footnotes evidence his own erudition, and give an intellectual cast to his style.

Moore's effusive, intellectual, scholarly style is the polar opposite of his great rival, Galt's:

At Harrow [Byron] acquired no distinction as a student; indeed, at no period was he remarkable for steady application. Under Dr. Glennie he had made but little progress; and it was chiefly in consequence of his backwardness that he was removed from his academy. When placed with Dr. Drury, it was with an intimation that he had a cleverness about him, but that his education had been neglected. (31)

Both Galt's conclusion and his psychological method are different to Moore's. Moore makes careful distinctions. For Galt, a spade is a spade: "backwardness" is backwardness, and "progress" is progress. Moore tries to discern the inner motivation behind Byron's outward actions. Galt simply judges him: the man who wrote 16½ cantos of *Don Juan* (1819-24) and learnt Armenian in six months was "at no period ... remarkable for steady application." Moore explains his theory of education with footnotes. Galt never explains why academic progress is reliable evidence of mental progress. Moore distinguishes the poetic Byron from his "disciplined and plodding" classmates. Galt leaves the contrast between Byron and his schoolmates implicit. Moore aims at expansion, scholarship, and precise philosophical explanation, Galt at force and concision.

Moore is a highly self-conscious biographer, constantly drawing attention to his own theories and methods. This is a risky style, argues Backscheider: "[s]ometimes biographers have such well-developed theories of personality that readers perceive them; at that point, the readers' opinion of that theory becomes an element in the judgement of the credibility and quality of the biography."⁴¹ So it has been for Moore. The *Gentlemen's Magazine* thought he had thrown a "cunning web of sophistry" over Byron's vices.⁴² Saintsbury felt that the "genial" Moore was "very badly equipped" for such "abstract discussions," which anyway have no place in

⁴¹ Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, 113.

⁴² "[Review of Moore's *Byron*, Volume 1]," *Gentleman's Magazine* 100 (1830): 146.

biography.⁴³ Andrew Elfenbein finds Moore's explanations to be "bland pieties."⁴⁴ On closer inspection, however, Moore's theory of self-deformation is not sophistical or shallow, but has deep philosophical roots.

There are two writers whom Moore cites with especial frequency in his footnotes: David Hume and Isaac D'Israeli. He drew on these two thinkers to frame a complex theory of self-deformation, based on the key concepts of "character" and "genius." Hume is mentioned a dozen times in the book, but two of Moore's footnotes to him in particular give a sense of what he drew from the sceptical Scotsman. The first describes Byron's youthful flirtation with atheism in 1808:

If exemption from the checks of religion be, as infidels themselves allow*, a state of freedom from responsibility dangerous at all times, it must be peculiarly so in that season of temptation, youth, when the passions are sufficiently disposed to usurp a latitude for themselves, without taking a licence also from infidelity to enlarge their range. It is, therefore, fortunate that, for the causes just stated, the inroads of scepticism and disbelief should be seldom felt in the mind till a period of life, when the character, already formed, is out of the reach of their disturbing influence ...

* "Look out for a people entirely destitute of religion: if you find them at all, be assured that they are but few degrees removed from brutes."—Hume. ... (I.122-3)

Moore quotes Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757) to provide support for his theory that atheism is a kind of self-deformation, but there is an interesting twist to the way he applies Hume's argument to Byron's case. Byron is both like and unlike ordinary people. On the one hand, Byron showed the great "prematurity of development" which sets the genius apart from everyone else: as such a young infidel, he was a "rare and melancholy spectacle" (I.124). On the other hand, atheism had the same effect on him that it has on any person, and he lost moral "control" (ibid). Byron is both a human and a genius, both ordinary and extraordinary.

⁴³ George Saintsbury, *The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury, 1875-1920*, 3 vols. (London and Toronto: Dent, 1923), I.418.

⁴⁴ Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, 79.

Moore takes an argument from Hume, and applies it carefully to Byron's case. On a deeper level, he takes concepts from Hume's philosophy, and uses them to weave his whole analysis. Two especially important concepts in this passage are "passions" and "character." We have seen that Hume held passions to be the foundation of ethics, and that morality is "more properly felt than judg'd of."⁴⁵ It is no surprise, then, to find Moore describing the moral effects of atheism in terms of passions. The concept of character was also an essential part of Hume's moral philosophy, because it underpinned his notion of moral responsibility. People's passions are in constant flux, shifting and changing from moment to moment, so they are a poor basis on which to judge people. Our judgement instead "must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character."⁴⁶ Moore uses "character" in just this sense: had Byron already matured and formed a durable character, he could have withstood the shocks of scepticism—"it being impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article..."⁴⁷ But, Moore suggests, we ought not to judge Byron too harshly. He was a sceptic because he was an impressionable youth with shifting feelings, not because he had the character of a hardened infidel.

In a second footnote to Hume, Moore develops another crucial idea about human character: its contradictory nature. Byron has just read the mocking review of *Hours of Idleness* (1807) in the *Edinburgh Review*:

His pride had been wounded to the quick, and his ambition humbled:—but this feeling of humiliation lasted but for a moment. The very reaction of his spirit against aggression roused him to a full consciousness of his own powers;* and the pain and the shame of the injury were forgotten, in the proud certainty of revenge.

⁴⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, 470.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 575.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 608.

* "Tis a quality very observable in human nature, that any opposition which does not entirely discourage and intimidate us has rather a contrary effect, and inspires us with a more than ordinary grandeur and magnanimity. ..."—HUME, *Treatise of Human Nature*. (I.144)

There is a drama of emotions in the young lord's heart, as "pride," "ambition," "humiliation," "pain," "shame" and "certainty of revenge" battle it out for control of his will. This is an unconscious process, over which Byron has no control. He is not self-consistent. This interplay of emotions never ceases, as the "reaction of his spirit" thrusts him from feeling to feeling, one minute provoking him to write his bilious *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1811), the next filling him with remorse for doing so (I.158). Though Moore does suggest that Byron's "powers" were extraordinary, his reference to Hume underlines the fact that for all his genius, Byron's passionate self-contradiction was a part of his "human nature." The notion that he explained all Byron's qualities according to a simple notion of genius is false.

Moore expresses what is probably Hume's most fundamental claim: "... what is man but a heap of contradictions!"⁴⁸ The great length and detail of Moore's biography is justified by his sense that Byron's character is so complex.⁴⁹ Jeffery Vail praises Moore for respecting the "disorderliness of human life" in *Byron*, but it is truer to say that Moore respected the disorderliness of Byron's life in particular.⁵⁰ His *Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* is less than a quarter the length of his *Byron*. Moore justifies the briskness and psychological shallowness of the book by arguing that "simplicity" was Fitzgerald's "predominant feature."⁵¹ This

⁴⁸ Hume, "Of Polygamy and Divorce," *Essays*, 193. Boswell is also insistent on this point: "Man is, in general, made up of contradictory qualities." James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 1399.

⁴⁹ Darcy finds the same philosophical outlook in Boswell's *Johnson: Darcy, Melancholy and Literary Biography*, 94.

⁵⁰ Jeffery W. Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 181.

⁵¹ Thomas Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1831), II.186.

simplicity was his great strength, says Moore, because it made him a man of action. Geniuses are seldom men of action, distracted as they are “by the versatility of [their] own powers.”⁵² Here was a shorter, simpler biography to portray a shorter, simpler mind—or so Moore claimed. *Fitzgerald* is really a disappointing book, despite its moments of brilliant political analysis (buttressed with scholarly footnotes to Aristotle). But it does indicate that Moore’s decision to write such a long and effusive biography of Byron was intentional. He was attempting to do justice to both the contradictions of Byron’s human character, and the “versatility” of his genius.

If Hume helped Moore explain Byron’s character, D’Israeli helped him explain Byron’s genius. How did Byron produce “those dazzling miracles of poesy, with which he afterwards astonished and enchanted the world”? (I.142) Moore found his answers in D’Israeli’s eccentric works of literary scholarship, principally *The Literary Character*, released in four expanding editions between 1795 and 1828. D’Israeli described this book as “a course of experimental philosophy,” which would describe the innate qualities of genius.⁵³ It is “experimental” not because D’Israeli conducted his research in a laboratory, but because his claims are rooted in experience.⁵⁴ In his first book, *A Dissertation on Anecdotes* (1793), he had claimed that only anecdotes can provide good evidence of “the history of manners.”⁵⁵ In accordance with this principle, he harvested literary history for anecdotes of authors, and then submitted them to the reader to prove his theories. Nearly every page of *Literary Character* bristles with authors’ names: young geniuses are frequently misunderstood by their parents, like Jean Racine, Blaise

⁵² *Ibid.*, II.187.

⁵³ D’Israeli, I.xii. Future reference indicated in the body of the text.

⁵⁴ See the entries for “Empirical” and “Experience” in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983), 115-17, 26-29. Hart rather aptly calls D’Israeli’s approach “neo-Baconian,” as he also does Boswell’s: Hart, “Boswell and the Romantics,” 47.

⁵⁵ Isaac D’Israeli, *A Dissertation on Anecdotes* (London: Kearsley and Murray, 1793), 6.

Pascal, Petrarch and Vittorio Alfieri (I.57); geniuses are precocious, and conceive their grand designs even in youth, like Francis Bacon, John Milton, François De Thou, Montesquieu, Louis-Sebastian de Tillemont, and Racine (I.86); they are often anxious of failure, like Charles James Fox, John Curran, Rousseau, Edward Gibbon, Robert Burns, Alexander Pope, and George Romney (I.168-69); they are often gripped by a sublime enthusiasm when they compose their great works, as De Thou, Franz Haydn, Thomas Gray and Horatio Nelson all attest (II.24-25); they are often impractical, like Montesquieu, Bacon, Buffon and Edward Young (II.113-14); they always breath the spirit of their own nation—witness Spain's Lope de Vega, Felipe Calderón and Miguel de Cervantes; France's Pierre Corneille, Racine and François Rabelais; Italy's Petrarch, Torquato Tasso and Giovanni Boccaccio; and the master-genius of England, William Shakespeare! (II.299-300) The names come thick-and-fast, printed in emphatic small caps. D'Israeli's learning was joyous and eccentric, and Moore was evidently inspired not only by his ideas but by his method.

Moore refers five times to *Literary Character* (I.42, 255, 262, 595, II.86), and once to another of D'Israeli's tomes (II.543), *Curiosities of Literature* (1791). His first footnote to D'Israeli is the most important, because there Moore engages in detail with D'Israeli's methods and concepts. Moore is discussing Byron's claim to be a fine sportsman and fighter at Harrow:

‡ Mr. D'Israeli, in his ingenious work "on the Literary Character," has given it as his opinion, that a disinclination to athletic sports and exercises will be, in general, found among the peculiarities which mark a youth of genius. In support of this notion he quotes Beattie, ... [and] Milton ...

Such general rules, however, are as little applicable to the dispositions of men of genius as to their powers. ... many others may be cited in which the directly opposite propensity was remarkable. In war, the most turbulent of exercises, Æschylus, Dante, Camoens, and a long list of other poets distinguished themselves; and, though it may be granted that Horace was a bad rider, and Virgil no tennis-player, yet, on the other hand, Dante was, we know, a falconer as well as swordsman; Tasso, expert both as

swordsman and dancer; Alfieri, a great rider; Klopstock, a skaiter; Cowper, famous, in his youth, at cricket and foot-ball; and Lord Byron pre-eminent in all sorts of exercises. (1.42-3)

Moore uses D'Israeli's name-dropping method to criticise D'Israeli's own claims. Moore drops names throughout the biography to support his analysis of genius, particularly in the crucial passage where he explains the breakup of Byron's marriage (see §4.2, below). But this footnote points to a deeper and more important difference between Moore and D'Israeli. D'Israeli argued that all geniuses were fundamentally the same: "the literary character has ever preserved among its followers the most striking family resemblance" (*Literary Character*, 1.6). Some argue that this was Moore's opinion too.⁵⁶ But here we find Moore disputing the idea that there are any "general rules" about the personality of genius. Moore's analysis of Byron's self-deformation is thus fraught with tension. To some extent, he argues that geniuses have certain qualities in common—such as versatility and precocity—but he also argues that a person's "genius" is unique and individual. Meanwhile, as we have already seen, he argues that Byron's "character" obeyed the immutable laws of human nature that bind us all.

From Hume and D'Israeli, Moore derived both the method and the key concepts of his biography. The method was inductive. The key principles were Hume's theory of the conflicting passions and the formation of durable character, and D'Israeli's conception of the genius as a person born with deep and lofty qualities of mind, setting them apart from others. Hume and D'Israeli were not the only writers Moore quoted, of course, and they were far from the only empiricists to consider the questions of human character or genius in the long eighteenth century. Moore cites dozens of people, including Samuel Johnson, William Cowper,

⁵⁶ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, 144.

Alexander Pope, Vittorio Alfieri, Antonio Canova, Edward Gibbon, John Gibson Lockhart, Adam Ferguson, William Wordsworth and Dr John Reid. But the two pillars of his theory of self-deformation are the concepts of “character” and “genius,” which Hume and D’Israeli in particular help him to explain.

On this theory, what would it mean to deform yourself? For Moore, formation does not mean the formation of a single unitary self, but the formation of each separate component of a person:

It is, indeed, remarkable that, essentially as his genius seemed connected with, and, as it were, springing out of his character, the developement of the one should so long have preceded the full maturity of the resources of the other. ... the gloom, the grandeur, the tenderness of his nature, all were left without a voice, till his mighty genius, at last, awakened in its strength. (I.175)

The character and the genius of a person are “connected,” but distinct. They develop at different speeds, they develop in different ways, and when they develop, they have different implications for the person. Moore carefully distinguishes these two processes: Byron’s character undergoes “developement,” while his genius slowly reaches the “full maturity of its resources.” There is a fundamental distinction in Moore’s narrative between character, which is composite, unstable and formed by circumstances, and genius, which is innate, individual and self-realising.

This theory permeates Moore’s language whenever he describes Byron’s character or genius. He frequently dwells on the “formation” of Byron’s character (I.122, 252, 255). Byron’s experiences often had an “influence” on his character (I.25, 53), or “causes ... worked a change” in it (I.177), or a new feeling “settled ... deeply” into it (I.182). Great experiences caused a “revolution” in it (I.186), while others merely left “traces” (I.185) or “affected” it (I.251). His alienation “added to the vigour” of it, even though it was “fatal” to his “enthusiasm” (I.392). New experiences

would bring about “new phenomena” in it (I.395). His character also had durable elements. Some of his “characteristics” were “preserved unaltered” in his life (I.67). Some were “imbedded” by “nature” (I.185). One of these characteristics, indeed, itself prevented him from changing: his “tenaciousness of early opinions and impressions” (II.312). Nonetheless, his “ever-shifting character” (II.268) might also display temporary changes, such as the “evident increase of intellectual vigour” he displayed in Venice (II.181). To throw these developments into relief, Moore occasionally imagines how Byron’s character “*might* have been, under more favourable circumstances” (I.323). The entire analysis culminates in the biography’s final pages, when Moore attempts to synthesise his observations into a single, coherent portrait of his friend, and finds the task nearly impossible (II.781-807).

Moore’s understanding of Byron’s genius is different. Byron’s character is made up of innumerable traits, some innate and some acquired, which shift and combine in myriad ways. Genius, by contrast, is a natural faculty, which cannot change, but only reveal or hide itself. Moore describes Byron’s genius as deep and hidden. It is “volcanic” (I.89), a “rich mine” (I.175), it is “diamond quarries” which must be “worked and brought to light” (I.253). He describes it as a living, self-acting thing. It is “brought ... into action” (I.124). It produces “natural effusions” (I.143). It is a “vital principle” (I.148), a “power” (I.326, 591) and an “instinct” (I.592). It “unfold[s] itself” (II.648). It is an “all-absorbing flame” (II.762). He describes how Byron’s genius was revealed. At first, it was “an undiscovered world” (I.278). During its “first steps,” Byron felt a “growing consciousness of his own power” (I.254). Its “energies” were “forced out” (II.2). And when the time came, he “arrived at the full consciousness of his genius” (I.593), and it finally “awakened in its strength” (I.175). Moore describes genius as a gift of nature, but it is not intrinsically good: “... it was

out of the struggle between the good and evil principles of his nature that his mighty genius drew its strength" (I.323-24). It is a sad thing to see evil in a friend, even if it is the price of something beautiful. For Moore, character is complex, a tapestry of different traits woven by circumstance. But genius is simple and undetermined. It is "infinite" (II.670).

On this theory, Byron could have deformed himself in two main ways. He could have failed to form an adequate character, and he could have failed to realise the potential of his genius. He has frequently been accused of both faults, not least by D'Israeli, who, as we saw above, claimed that Byron had died before "the complete development" of his genius and the "perfection formation of his character." As we will see, Moore held there was a close and tragic relationship between Byron's genius and character. He held, unlike Hazlitt, Arnold and D'Israeli, that Byron's genius did reveal itself in all its power and versatility, but this was only possible at the price of his moral character, which was deformed by a long course of melancholy and alienation. In the following two sections, we will see how Moore structured his narrative to portray this complex and contradictory self.

4.2 The Plot of Byron's Life (1): The Dual Structure

All biographies have a shape, or should do. As the biographer comes to know their subject, says Backscheider, they "construct a shape and trajectory for the life," like the plot of a novel.⁵⁷ They sit down at their writing desk, with piles of letters and newspaper cuttings and notes, and find a pattern that brings the whole together. "Every life takes its own form," argues Edel, "and a biographer must find the ideal and unique literary form that will express it."⁵⁸ Edel's lofty goal of the unique

⁵⁷ Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, 100.

⁵⁸ Edel, *Writing Lives*, 30.

biography is inspiring, but impossible. The biographer inevitably brings their own ideas about human life to the book, as well as their conception of biography as a literary form. Accordingly, the life-shapes of biography are partly conventional. As Joseph Reed puts it:

When criticizing Cavendish's *Wolsey*, the critic cannot attack the fallacies of the wheel of fortune, to assert instead that Carlyle's nineteenth-century formulation of the battle of life ... or twentieth-century psychological assumptions are fairer, more appropriate, or more realistic.⁵⁹

We have seen the stock of conventions Moore drew upon to understand Byron's life. The question is how he used these conventions to shape the raw mass of Byron's literary remains into a coherent narrative or life-shape.

The problem is that for the last 50 years, scholars have generally found Moore's *Byron* to have no shape at all. "Moore's prefabricated formula for genius simply did not fit Byron," argues Reed,⁶⁰ and the book is accordingly "a sprawling, unselective agglomeration."⁶¹ Later scholars have not fundamentally challenged Reed's interpretation. North and Darcy both agree with Reed that Moore was trying to impose this formula on Byron's life, but neither is particularly interested in whether he succeeded.⁶² Vail shifts between two positions. He argues that Moore actually applies his theory of genius "systematically" and therefore effectively.⁶³ He then goes on to argue that the book's "lack of an 'organizing structure' of the kind Reed expects ... is really a triumph of Moore's realism," because it expresses the disorder of Byron's life.⁶⁴ Disorder is indeed a crucial feature of Moore's theory of human nature and of Byron's personality, as we have already seen. But this does not

⁵⁹ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, 157.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶² North, *Domestication of Genius*, 74; Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography*, 207.

⁶³ Vail, *Literary Relationship*, 169.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

mean his book lacks organising principles. There is a dialectic between Byron's gradually forming character and his suddenly exploding genius. As Moore traces these two principles through Byron's life, he gives the narrative a coherent two-part structure.

To reveal this structure, I rely on sentiment analysis, a new computerised method for studying plots. Sentiment analysis works by measuring the emotional positivity or negativity of sentences, which can then be used to graph the emotional ups and downs of a narrative over time. I use Matt Jockers's SYUZHET package to perform the analysis.⁶⁵ Jockers and his team hand-coded 165,000 sentences taken from a small corpus of contemporary novels. Each sentence was given an emotional value, and then the database of sentences was used to generate a dictionary, in which words are assigned an emotional value between -1 and 1. The software then splits the narrative into sentences, using the dictionary to calculate a sentiment score for each one:

Score:	0	-0.75	-0.5	-0.75	0.5	-1	0	0.75	0.75	0.6
Word:	The	foul	stinking	slug	joyfully	murdered	the	cute	happy	puppy.

To find the overall score for the sentence, we simply add the scores for each word: the result is -0.4. As Jockers has shown on his blog, the method is remarkably robust. It produces very similar results to humans, when they tag a text by hand. It also works for Shakespeare, even though the dictionary was compiled from contemporary fiction.⁶⁶ Jockers and his collaborator Jodie Archer have used the method to analyse bestselling novels, demonstrating in a remarkable recent study

⁶⁵ Syuzhet Ver. 1.0.0, CRAN, Vienna. It is pronounced "SUE-jet," and its name is derived from the syuzhet/fabula distinction popularised by the Russian formalists of the early twentieth century.

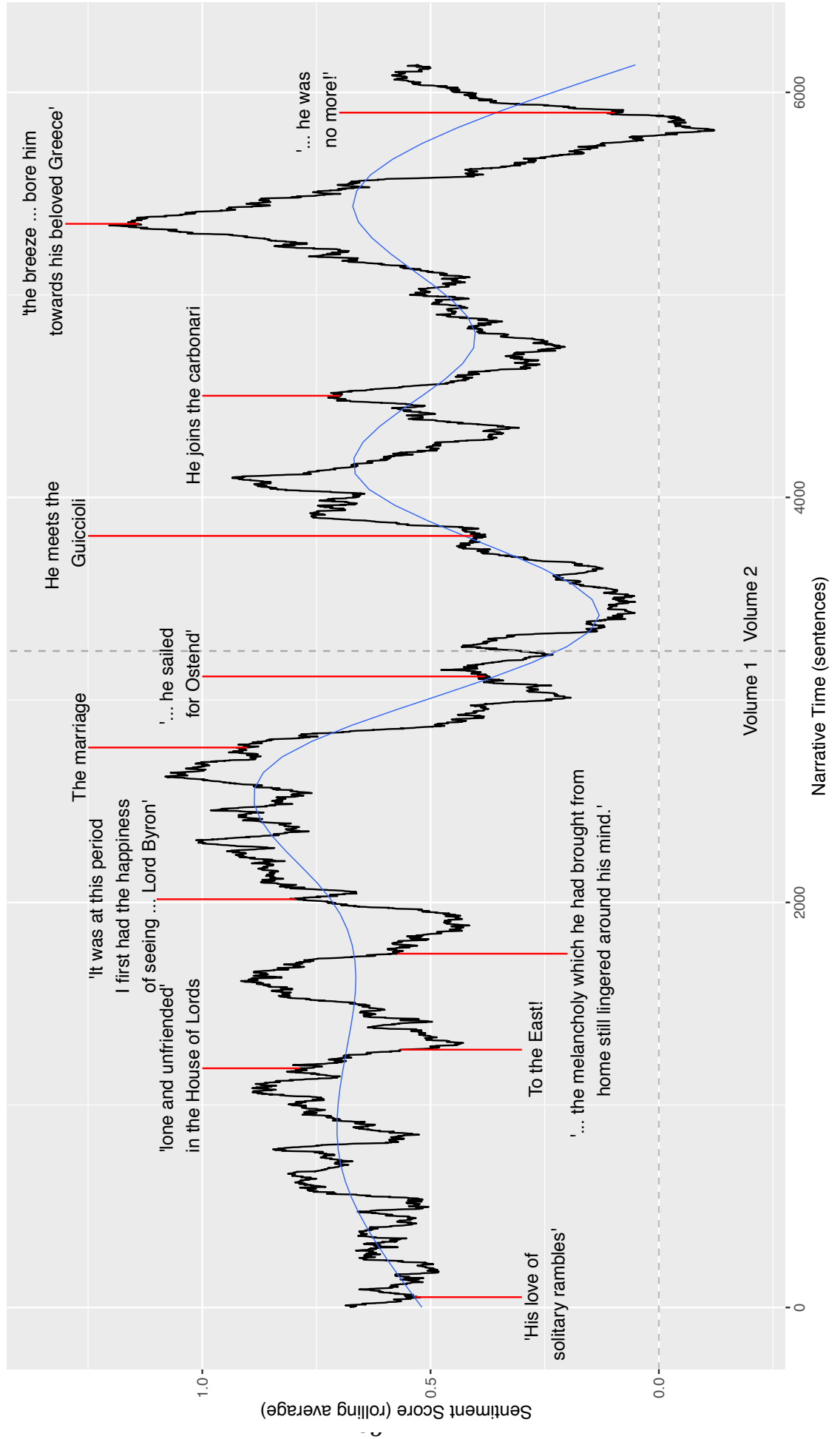
⁶⁶ Matthew Jockers, "That Sentimental Feeling," *MatthewJockers.net* (blog), Dec 20, 2015, <http://www.matthewjockers.net/2015/12/20/that-sentimental-feeling/>; "More Syuzhet Validation," *ibid*, Aug 11, 2016, <http://www.matthewjockers.net/2016/08/11/more-syuzhet-validation/>

that certain plot arcs are statistically more likely to sell.⁶⁷ The fact that their model can accurately predict sales provides strong evidence that the method captures something fundamental about narrative: its ability to appeal to our emotions and drag us into the story.

Moore's book, with the lengthy narration interspersed between Byron's letters and journals, can seem like a massive unstructured archive rather than a shapely story. Sentiment analysis reveals, however, that it has an elegant plot arc (Figure 4.2). Before we analyse the graph, it requires some qualifications. First, it only shows Moore's *Notices*. Byron's letters and journals were excluded because Moore simply printed them in chronological order, without imposing a shape upon them. Quotations woven through his *Notices* remain, however, since they are part of his rhetorical design. Second, the graph shows a rolling average, rather than the raw sentiment scores. Each point on the line represents the average of that sentence and the 125 sentences either side. The raw data is extremely noisy, and a rolling average allows us to actually see the twists and turns of the plot. The downside is that it cuts off 125 sentences at the beginning and at the end of the book. But this is a small price to pay in a book of about 6,500 sentences, especially when our main aim is to see the big movements of the story, rather than the particular emotions of the introduction and conclusion. The blue trend line is simply a visual aid.

⁶⁷ Jodie Archer and Matthew Jockers, *The Bestseller Code: Anatomy of the Blockbuster Novel* (London: Penguin, 2016), Kindle edition, chap. 3.

Figure 4.2 Moore's plot of Byron's life



The two most striking turning points occur at the end of Volume 1, and at the end of Volume 2. These huge fluctuations indicate the two most dramatic events in Byron's life, according to Moore's interpretation. At the end of Volume 1, Byron marries Annabella Milbanke, and the mood crashes: "He had, in the course of one short year, gone through every variety of domestic misery ..." (II.1). He sails to Ostend and exile. At the end of Volume 2, Byron sails again—for Greece, and freedom! He reaches the dizzying heights of real heroism: "His love of freedom, his generosity, his thirst for the new and adventurous,—all were re-awakened ..." (II.669). But this moment is brief, and death comes quickly:

It was but the other day that he had come among them, radiant with renown,—
inspiring faith, by his very name, in those miracles of success that were about to spring
forth at the touch of his ever-powerful genius. All this had now vanished, like a short
dream ... (II.771)

Byron's death is the only event which takes the rolling average below zero in Moore's biography. These turning-points reveal the organising principle of Moore's plot: its masterly division into two volumes. Volume 1 is a failed courtship plot, an anti-*Bildungsroman* describing Byron's doomed attempt to make it in literary London. Volume 2 is a Smithian or Clarean record of exile, recording his lonely wanderings in search of what he finally found: glory and oblivion, "the harvest of such a life of fame" (II.771). This division into volumes was not merely a convenient halfway point.⁶⁸ Moore's two-volume structure divides Byron's life into two clear phases culminating in two tragic *dénouements*; and as the curves of the graph indicate, the anti-*Bildungsroman* in Volume 1 is structured differently to the record of exile in Volume 2.

⁶⁸ Though Moore had initially hoped to restrict the work to a single volume: see his journal for 16 June 1829, Moore, *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, III.1229.

The first volume documents Byron's failed quest for a conventional life. This may seem a strange claim. Byron was a rebel, a sexual non-conformist, a genius, not a slave to middle-class morality! But Moore does present him as a man in search of the usual domestic and professional comforts, and presents the years of his fame in London as the happiest of his life. Like Vivian, Adeline or the conventional hero of a *Bildungsroman*, Byron was reared in rural solitude, with an absent father and a flawed mother. From birth, he had both social and anti-social impulses: he was born with his "uncontrollable spirit" (I.8), and yet his "affectionate sweetness and playfulness" meant that he was "easily manageable, by those who loved and understood him ..." (I.9) Which impulse would triumph? Events would decide in favour of rebellion, as early experience cut Byron off from his fellows. His title made him arrogant (I.20). His clubfoot "haunted him, like a curse" (I.94). His mother was weak and capricious (I.25), and was so foolish that Byron, far from loving her, felt not even a "sentiment of cordiality" towards her (I.273). By the time he arrived at Harrow, he was already a brooding outcast (I.52). By the time he reached Cambridge, he was boasting of rakishness (I.120), flirting with atheism (I.122ff.), infecting himself with the "dangerous spirit of ridicule" (I.130), and found that life had already "palled" (I.146). Strong forces were unleashing his uncontrollable spirit, while loneliness and licence were eating away his amiability. But his genius was growing of its own accord, demonstrating "how unhurt the vital principle of genius can preserve itself even in atmosphere apparently the most ungenial and noxious to it." (I.148) And some elements of his amiable character remained, as proven by his "ardent" childhood friendships (I.44), and the ability of his tutor, Becher, to soften him (I.81).

With this mixture of social and antisocial qualities, Byron arrived on the stage of life. This is the point where Austen, Edgeworth, Opie or Scott usually begin their novels: with a protagonist fresh from childhood and youth, on the cusp of adulthood. For Moore, Byron's debut in London was the first great failure of his life. The graph of the plot, with its gentle upward slope, plunges when Byron arrives "lone and unfriended" in the House of Lords (I.163). For Moore, this was a profound moment: probably no "youth of his high station had ever before been reduced" so low on their entry to the house, Byron "not having a single individual of his own class either to introduce him as a friend or receive him as an acquaintance" (ibid.). Galt scoffs at Moore's explanation: Byron "was not so friendless nor unknown, but that he might have procured some peer to have gone with him," though the affair did wound his youthful "self-importance" (56). For Moore, however, this moment was a symbol of Byron's extreme isolation during his first years in London. Though *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) was succeeding in the press, Byron's love life was in tatters and his debts were mounting. His "thirst after affection was thwarted," his ambition was "checked" and "mortified," his entire situation was "galling" (I.181). This is, for Moore, the culmination of the first phase of Byron's life. With melancholy "deeply settled into his character" (I.182), he fled England for the first time, making an "indefinite pilgrimage" to the East (I.186).

As should be apparent, Moore tells a dynamic and melodramatic story of Byron's life. A combination of nature and nurture conspire to deform his character, as loneliness and failure suppress his natural amiability and exacerbate his natural misanthropy, even while his genius unfolds. It is a life of dramatic turning points, such as his lonely appearance in the House of Lords or his wild journey east. Moore's dynamism and melodrama comes out clearly by contrast with Galt. For Moore,

Byron's journey east was a first exile. For Galt, Byron went east simply because he thought "all men should in some period of their lives travel," and it might help his political career (55). Galt's Byron is relatively mundane. Moore's Byron, as North rightly points out, leads a complex life of "problematic oppositions."⁶⁹

Despite these setbacks and crises, the overall movement of Volume 1 is upward. Byron's journey east cures his self-obsession by expanding the "circle of his sympathies" (I.256). He returns full of melancholy (note the dip at the end of the voyage), but the publication of *Childe Harold* brings about his halcyon days. Moore presents Byron's glittering years in London as his most sustained period of happiness. This was when he met Byron and knew him best, and the acquaintance convinced him that Byron was amiable despite his faults: "Such did I find Lord Byron, on my first experience of him; and such,—so open and manly-minded,—did I find him to the last." (I.314) Looking back in volume 2, Moore says that the clubbable Byron of the London years had "poetry of character" (II.390). Figure 4.2 reveals how Moore wove this poetry of character into the emotional texture of his narration—this period has the most sustained positive sentiment scores.

As in *Vivian and Adeline Mowbray*, a failed courtship perverts Byron's self-formation. This is the point of the biography which Reed and his followers have seized upon, to prove that Moore explained Byron's life with a simplistic theory of genius. Reed argues that, for Moore, "The whole idea of marriage is anathema to the theoretical genius ..." ⁷⁰ Byron must be forgiven his domestic failings, because genius and marriage don't mix. Darcy also interprets Moore in this way.⁷¹ There is some evidence for this reading. In his longest discussion of Byron's marriage, Moore does

⁶⁹ North, *Domestication of Genius*, 74.

⁷⁰ Reed, *Early Nineteenth-Century Biography*, 119.

⁷¹ Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography*, 207.

claim that “rarely, if ever, have men of the higher order of genius shown themselves fitted for the calm affections and comforts that form the cement of domestic life.” (I.589) Geniuses are constantly drawn back “into the lonely laboratory of the Self,” and may be too solipsistic to form part of a functioning household (I.592). This is, however, only one of the arguments Moore makes about Byron’s marriage, and Reed and Darcy are wrong to single it out as the principal one.

In the first case, Moore’s Byron is no solipsist, however solipsistic genius is. We have already seen how thoroughly Moore vindicates the sociable aspects of Byron’s personality—and both Moore and Figure 4.2 insist that the 300 pages of Byron’s social life in London are the happiest in the book. Moreover, we have seen how Moore attributes Byron’s misanthropy not only to his genius but to his early education and experiences of alienation. In the second case, Moore’s opponents pay too little heed to the speculative and tentative way Moore makes his arguments about Byron’s character. We have already seen how analytic and inquiring his prose style is. When he reaches the end of his argument that genius and marriage are often incompatible (I.595), he enjoins the reader to consult Chapter 18 of D’Israeli’s *Literary Character*. In this chapter, D’Israeli contradicts Moore’s theory: “It is *not* an axiom that literary characters must necessarily institute a new order of celibacy.” (II.149, my emphasis) Moore did indeed argue that Byron’s genius perhaps made him unfit for marriage, but this was not a simplistic argument, and it was not the only argument he made. Indeed, at the time he had entertained “sanguine hopes” that Byron’s marriage would “[win] him over to the brighter and better side of life” (I.589), and we will see how, in Volume 2, he represents Byron’s liaison with Teresa Guiccioli as a successful marriage, though unlawful and tainted by melancholy.

All this points to a deeper fact about Moore's biography that his critics sometimes overlook: its interest in chance and contingency. When Moore does tell the story of how Lord and Lady Byron separated, he carefully describes all the particular details that contributed to cause events. There was a "general incompatibility" in their characters (1.652), aggravated by an "ill-starred concurrence of circumstances" (1.651). Of course he only writes in a very general way about Byron's alleged abuses as a husband, and does not mention the (correct) rumours of his incestuous liaison with Augusta Leigh at all. Having described what circumstances he can, however, Moore goes on to suggest that things may have turned out differently if only a few variables were changed. Byron "was, to the last, disposed to reconciliation" (1.652). Had he not been continually dunned by creditors, perhaps "time" and "tolerance" might have wrought a miracle (1.650). In the end, it was not to be, but Moore is neither a fatalist nor a teller of fables. Aristotle long ago distinguished poetry from history by observing that the poet "utters universal truths," describing "the kind of thing that *would* happen," while the historian utters "particular statements," telling "what actually happened."⁷² *Adeline Mowbray* suggests that an enthusiastic feminist would almost inevitably be crushed by Opie's prejudiced society. Moore marshals much philosophy to try and explain Byron's life, but he is telling the story of an historical self in historical time, and rather than converting Byron into a fictional character like Adeline, he reveals the chance and contingent elements of Byron's self. Like Smith or Clare, Moore is always drawn into the particulars.

Volume 2 has a different structure and purpose to Volume 1. Volume 1 is designed to reveal how Byron's character was deformed and his conventional life

⁷² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

ruined during his time in England, and accordingly takes on the tragic structure of the anti-*Bildungsroman*. Volume 2 is the tale of Byron's afterlife once his character was deformed, as his "grand but disturbing powers" were at their full strength, and his "moral derangement" was at its height (II.52). It was a time of deep melancholy, and the troughs of the graph plunge lower than at any time in Volume 1. His life and work were in tune. For most of these years, Byron was writing *Don Juan*, "and never did pages more faithfully and, in many respects, lamentably reflect every variety of feeling, and whim, and passion that, like the rack of autumn, swept across the author's mind in writing them." (II.189) Moore's language highlights the two emotional keynotes of Volume 2: the pervasive melancholy, the "rack of autumn," and the explosive mood swings, "every variety of feeling." The average sentiment score in this volume is considerably lower, and the range of scores considerably wider.

Despite the pervasive melancholy, there are three great upswings in Volume 2, each of which represents a moment when Byron repeats, in an idealised though tainted form, one of the major events of Volume 1. The first upswing represents his "marriage" to Teresa Guiccioli, the second his political career with the Carbonari, and the third his mighty sacrifice on the shores of Greece. The biography has a typological structure, like the Bible. The events of Volume 1 prefigure the events of Volume 2, much as the Old Testament prefigures the New.⁷³ But the Bible is a transcendental comedy in which the New Testament fulfils or completes the Old, whereas Moore's *Byron* follows the sad logic of Karl Marx: first tragedy, then farce.

⁷³ See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), chap. 4; Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Selected Essays: Time, History and Literature*, trans. Jane O. Newman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 65-113.

Moore turns these first two upswings into symbols of the irreversibility of time and the unreality of social life, echoing the themes we encountered in Edgeworth and Opie. On the one hand, he suggests that Byron's achievements in exile were greater than during his earlier life. Though his love for Teresa Guiccioli was adulterous, and was therefore "much to be reprehended," Moore argues that their relationship "had in it all of marriage that his real marriage wanted, [and] seemed to place, at length, within reach of his affectionate spirit that union and sympathy for which, through life, it had thirsted." (II.393) Though the Carbonari failed to liberate Italy, they relit the coals of Byron's ashen heart, and proved just "how deep, how earnest, and expansive was his zeal in that great, general cause of Political Freedom" (II.389). On the other hand, though these events awoke Byron's lust for life, they could not reverse the erosions of Volume 1. His relationship with Guiccioli was imperfect, because "the pure poetry of the feeling had vanished" (II.393). The Carbonari might have given him that active role he had sought for and missed in the House of Lords, but he now lacked "those fresh, unworldly feelings" that "may be said to constitute the poetry of character" (II.390). Nonetheless, Moore claims, Byron's genius was vastly more powerful in his exile, "a difference, in point of force and grandeur, between the two explosions, almost as great as between the out-breaks of a firework and a volcano." (II.392-3) There is a strange double movement in Moore's biography. Byron was "unworldly" in his youth, but therefore happier in the world, and weaker in his poetry. As he became more worldly, he began paradoxically to recede from the world on a personal level, even as his explosive poetry encompassed the world on the imaginative plane. Moore uses the double structure of his biography, in which the second volume reflects the first, to emphasise this double movement of time.

The final upswing of Volume 2 is somewhat different. Moore sees Byron's final voyage to Greece as the fulfilment of his first quest to that benighted land. Byron had departed in 1809 to try and cure his melancholy. His eternal departure on the coast of the Adriatic would cure it forever, and shroud him in a glory more permanent than the effervescent fame he had once enjoyed in London. In Volume 1, Moore foreshadows this terrible fulfilment:

Could some spirit have here revealed to him the events of that interval,—have shown him, on the one side, the triumphs that awaited him, the power his varied genius would acquire over all hearts, alike to elevate or depress, to darken or illuminate them,—and then place, on the other side, all the penalties of this gift, the waste and wear of the heart through the imagination, the havoc of that perpetual fire within, which, while it dazzles others, consumes the possessor,—the invidiousness of such an elevation in the eyes of mankind, and the revenge they take on him who compels them to look up to it,—would he, it may be asked, have welcomed glory on such conditions? (I.211)

Moore depicts Byron as an Achilles, a hero who must choose between happiness and glory. There is the crucial difference, however, that Achilles is a legend while Byron was a man. Achilles knows he will die at Troy, for the gods have told him so. Byron lived in the real world, and there was in fact no “spirit” who could tell him his destiny. Achilles' only real opponents are the gods and his own rage. Byron had to suffer all the petty contingencies of an actual person. Like all the fulfilments of Volume 2, Byron's glorious sacrifice is tarnished by his self-deformation. A combination of “hereditary defect in his organization” and the “slow corrosion” of the years have prematurely aged him by the time he arrives in Greece (II.762), and he is snatched away before any of his great schemes for the country's liberation can be enacted. Time is irreversible, and the world is somehow less real than poetry.

Sentiment analysis has helped us to grasp the dual structure of Moore's *Byron*. We have seen how Moore shaped each half of Byron's life, and bolted them

together with a revisionary or typological structure. "Revision" is often seen as a key trope of Romantic literature, and is usually interpreted as a symbol of self-formation.⁷⁴ When Wordsworth revises his earlier memories in "Tintern Abbey" (1798) or the "Intimations Ode" (1807), or when Emma reflects on her behaviour at Box Hill, they come to a deeper sense of their authentic being. In Moore's narrative of self-deformation, revision has a more fraught and complex meaning. The formation of Byron's character and the unfolding of his genius are complex, opposed, and intertwined processes, which Moore does not suppose he can fully explain. They are contingent processes, the prey of circumstance. As Volume 1 explains Byron's maturation, Moore weighs a whole host of possible causes and possible effects. As Volume 2 glances back at Volume 1, Moore finds complex layers of clashing meaning in Byron's life. Perhaps, if biographies were more prominent in our histories of Romanticism, we would be more attuned to the chancy elements of Romantic selfhood, since biographies inevitably portray an imperfect interpretation of a real self. We will see in the next section, however, that Moore's dual structure, which stresses contingency and complexity, is quite distinctive even among Romantic biographies.

4.3 The Plot of Byron's Life (2): A Comparative Perspective

We have encountered various kinds of time so far in this study: the social time of *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray*, which wraps itself slowly around the poor protagonists, and the cyclical time of Smith and Clare's sonnets, which constantly rejuvenates nature while alienating Smith's self and abolishing Clare's. At certain points, Moore's narrative recalls these paradigms, but we have also seen that biography takes place in a third time, the time of history. We have seen how this

⁷⁴ See, for example, Siskin, *Historicity*, 104.

introduces an element of chance and doubt into the narrative, but it also introduces another problem, of intentionality. To what extent is Moore's narrative structure the result of his conscious art, and to what extent is it the result of the actual structure of Byron's life? We have encountered a problem like this already, when we considered the autobiographical nature of Smith's sonnets. But Moore's biography presents a different challenge. There is no doubt that Smith's sonnets are artificial. She could invent events to write sonnets about—like seeing a nightjar in November—and even when she wrote about real experiences, it was her choice which ones would become sonnets and enter the sequence of her life. Moore had less power to shape Byron's life because it was a matter of public record. If he fabricated events, he might be found out, and if he omitted too many, it would open his book to attack. To really assess the narrative structure of Moore's book, we must try to disentangle Moore's intentional design from the inevitable structure of any Byron biography.

To do this, Figure 4.3 puts Moore in comparative perspective, showing Moore's plot arc alongside those of three other biographies: Galt's *Byron*, Robert Southey's *The Life of Nelson* (1813), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). The red lines are linear trend lines, generated using the "least-squares regression" method.⁷⁵ The figure displays two salient patterns: the negative slope of both Byron biographies compared to the others, and the enormous emotional range of Moore's compared to the other three.

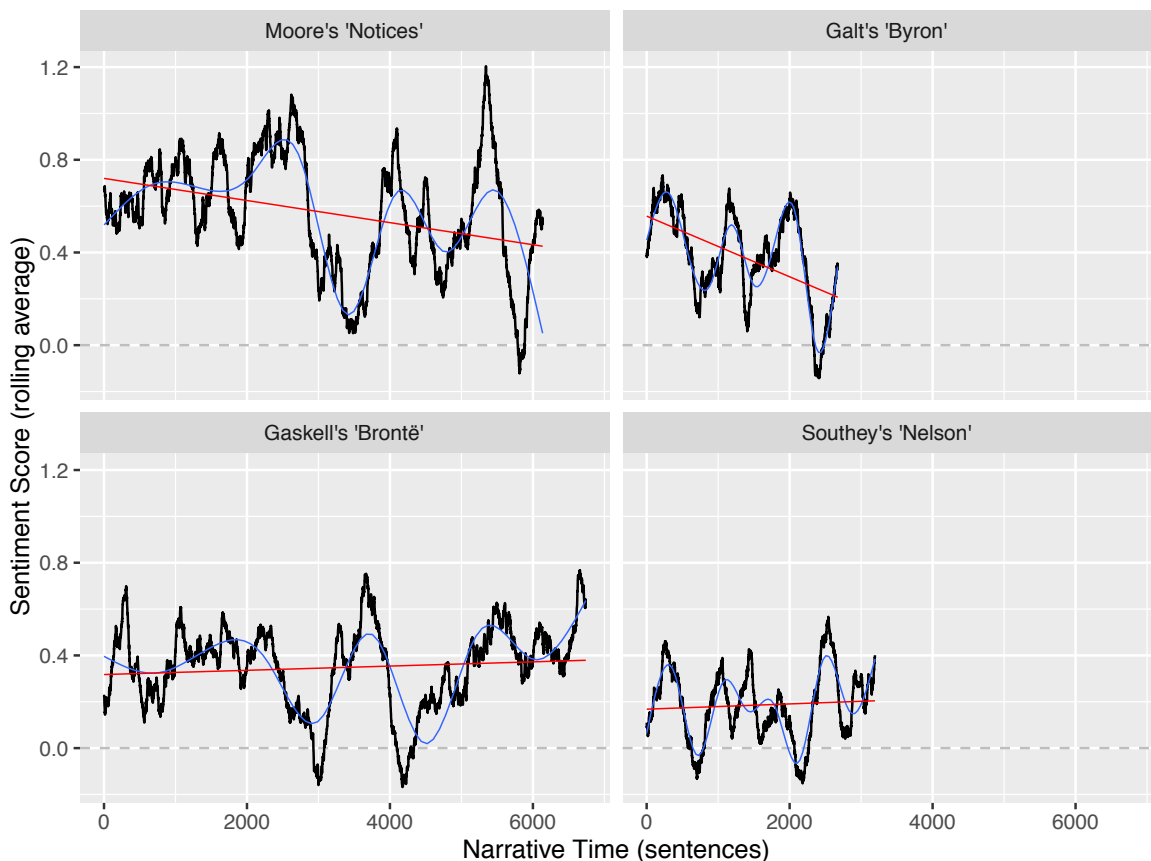
The Byron biographies have a downward slope because in both of them time is an erosive force. As time passes, the mood darkens. We can measure the size of this effect using the "coefficient of determination," which tells us how much a

⁷⁵ This finds the unique straight line that is closest to every point of the curve. It is called "least squares" because it measures the gap between the trend line and the curve by the distance squared.

particular variable can account for an observed change. The coefficients of determination are 0.11 for Moore, and 0.26 for Galt (rounded to two decimal places), meaning that the mere passage of time can explain 11% of the changes in mood in Moore's book, and more than a quarter of the changes in Galt's. In Gaskell and Southey, time has no such effect. Both have a shallow positive slope, but the coefficient of determination is less than 0.01. Both Moore and Galt seem to have taken a hint from Byron's own poetry, and see time as a force that robs and rages, though the effect is harsher in Galt's dismal narrative of decline.

Figure 4.3

Four Life-Shapes Compared



These different kinds of time are apparent when we read the biographies. Southey's Nelson is a tough, professional seaman, whose heroic valour and

unquenchable hope persist through all his sufferings and setbacks. Having already lost an eye in 1794, Nelson lost his arm at Tenerife in 1797. In Southey's brisk narration of this incident, this terrible injury has only transient consequences. In one paragraph, we learn that Nelson's "sufferings from the lost limb were long and painful."⁷⁶ In the next paragraph, three months have passed, the pains cease, and "From that time it began to heal" (111). In the third paragraph, the last of the chapter, Nelson is joking with a bureaucrat about whether he needs to prove his arm is really gone in order to obtain compensation (111-2). Nelson strides through time in Southey's biography, time which cures all ills and takes people when it is ready. The situation is different for Byron. His club foot, for example, does not dissipate like Nelson's arm, but is only aggravated by the passage of time. Right at the beginning, Moore tells us of Byron's "peculiar sensitiveness" about his foot (I.10), the "humiliation" of which he never forgot (I.25-6). Whenever the foot recurs in the biography, it is accompanied by this Smithian sense of painful consciousness. In his characteristic way, Galt copies Moore's analysis, but makes it harsher. Byron's "greatest weakness ... was a morbid sensibility to his lameness," an "unmanly and excessive" feeling which he "always retained" (25); it was "strange" that such a "trifling deformity" could have "haunted him like a curse" (345). In the world Southey conjures, time can heal even an amputated arm. In the world of Moore and Galt, it only rankles.

Time has a different significance again in Gaskell's *Brontë*. Charlotte Brontë led a monotonous life of seclusion, death and endurance. Gaskell strikes this melancholy chord in Chapter 1, which culminates in a description of the family memorial at Haworth, listing the deaths of Mrs Brontë (1821), Maria (1825),

⁷⁶ Robert Southey, *The Life of Nelson*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 110. Future references indicated parenthetically.

Elizabeth (1825), Branwell (1848), Emily (1848), and Anne (1849), followed by Charlotte's own in 1855.⁷⁷ Brontë is rooted in Haworth, a place Gaskell turns into a symbol of everlasting sameness:

All round the horizon there is this same line of sinuous wave-like hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar colour and shape, crowned with wild, bleak moors—grand, from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be. (12-13)

“Same,” “similar,” “solitude,” “loneliness,” “monotonous,” “illimitable”—these words set the tone of Brontë's quiet and imaginative life. The moors are always looming around her, awaiting her when she returns from school or Brussels, accompanying her in her greatest sorrows, and finally killing her after a “long walk over damp ground in thin shoes” strikes her with deadly fever (425). Her personality is as resilient as her stony hometown. She is a dutiful daughter, and time cannot rob her of her staunch Toryism. She “worship[s]” the Duke of Wellington as a child (80), writes an exercise about him when studying in Brussels (191), and is still admiring his picture on her wall in 1853 (402). She carries through life a certain “absence of hope” (91), with which she surmounts each of the Parsonage's calamities, and which she retains even after her great literary and social successes in the 1850s. André Maurois once wrote that the pleasure of a good biography is to see “the successive deposits of ideas left by Time on the central kernel constituted by heredity, environment, and childhood.”⁷⁸ For Gaskell, Brontë's central kernel is a deep old diamond, and Time can deposit nothing that will scratch it.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Elizabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1998), 15-16. All future references in the body of the text.

⁷⁸ Quoted in James Clifford, ed. *Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 172.

Moore's Byron does not have this stony endurance or strong sense of place. Gaskell's Brontë is always a Christian, a daughter, a Yorkshirewoman and a Tory. Moore's Byron cannot even hold onto his Englishness. Moore lionises "the social, practical-minded and, with all his faults and eccentricities, English Lord Byron" (II.331), but suggests that time weakens even this enduring element of his character. Once in exile, Byron can maintain his "wonderful purity of English" only in his poetry—in his letters, "Italianisms" start to proliferate (II.523-4). When he is finally called on to make use of his Englishman's "practical good sense" in Greece (II.678, 730), it is essentially useless. Brontë's rough Yorkshire fatalism carries her through disappointment after disappointment with grace and strength. Byron's English practicality is as chaff before the wind in the fraught circumstances of the Greek revolution, baffled by "every possible variety of obstruction and distraction ..." (II.761). But enduring things like Byron's Englishness or clubfoot are rare in Moore's biography. The poetical Lord's two key qualities, says Moore, were his "susceptibility to new impressions and impulses," and his "uncontrolled impetuosity" (II.785). Byron was so changeable—or to use MacCarthy's word, "rootless"⁷⁹—that time could erode everything but his most painful memories and dearest friendships. Galt again takes up this idea and gives it a harsher meaning. Byron was changeable because his attitudes were essentially just "pretensions" he adopted at will (e.g. 51, 54, 153, 350).

These four biographies have different perceptions of time. Nelson and Brontë embody different kinds of endurance, while Moore's Byron and Galt's embody different kinds of changeability, with Galt telling a far harsher tale of pretension and decline. Table 4.1 quantifies some of these differences between the biographies, and allows us to see just how distinctive the dual structure of Moore's plot really is.

⁷⁹ MacCarthy, *Byron*, 71.

Table 4.1**Emotional structure of the four biographies by sentiment score (3 d.p.)**

Text	Mean	Range	Mean Absolute Difference
Moore's <i>Byron</i>	0.573	1.326	0.206
<i>Volume 1</i>	0.675	0.888	0.155
<i>Volume 2</i>	0.459	1.326	0.211
Change	-32%	+49%	+36%
Galt's <i>Byron</i>	0.382	0.876	0.160
<i>Chapters 1-30</i>	0.430	0.674	0.145
<i>Chapters 31-49</i>	0.314	0.801	0.181
Change	-27%	+19%	+26%
Gaskell's <i>Brontë</i>	0.348	0.935	0.143
<i>Volume 1</i>	0.330	0.859	0.130
<i>Volume 2</i>	0.366	0.935	0.156
Change	+11%	+9%	+20%
Southey's <i>Nelson</i>	0.186	0.719	0.124
<i>No structural division</i>	NA	NA	NA

The mean is simply the average sentiment score for all sentences. The mean score drops in both Moore and Galt after Byron's exile, though the drop is larger in Moore's case.⁸⁰ No such change occurs at all in Gaskell's biography. This statistic also shows the emotional effect of Moore's effusive style and long sentences, which result in more positive sentiment scores than Galt's terse, dismissive prose or Southey's manly and violent narrative of war. The range and mean absolute difference measure how much the sentiment scores vary. The range is the difference between the highest and lowest scores. The mean absolute difference is a more complicated statistic, which measures the average distance between each point on

⁸⁰ Galt's biography is only in one volume, so I have split it at chapter 31, when Byron leaves England for good, for comparison.

the graph and the mean. Both these statistics reveal how Moore's sense of Byron's extreme "variety" is woven into the fabric of his prose and encoded in the dual structure of his narrative. Moore's sentiment scores vary far more widely than those of any of the other biographers throughout his work, and there is an enormous difference in the variation between the two volumes. We have seen already how Moore layers the meaning in Volume 2, drawing a stark contrast between Byron's loss of the "poetry of character," and his glory as a poet and man of action. Sentiment analysis suggests that this was a distinctive feature of Moore's biographical art.

Moore's *Byron* is an encyclopaedia of self-deformation. Its plot incorporates many of the themes we have already encountered in Edgeworth, Opie, Smith and Clare. Sentiment analysis has allowed us to uncover crucial features of its design. Using SYUZHET to guide us through the unfolding plot, we discovered the complex interplay of opposed forces that degraded Byron's character even as it unleashed his genius. Comparing the four graphs clarified what makes Moore's shaping of Byron's life distinctive: his gentler sense of time's corrosive power, compared to Galt, and his greater sense of the variety of emotion and experience, compared to Galt or Gaskell or Southey. The book is a philosophical investigation into Byron's life, in which Moore carefully considers all the elements that contributed to make Byron and his poetry what they were. Though he succeeded in giving a coherent shape to Byron's life, the shape he discovered was huge and complicated. As Moore considered the changeability of Byron's character, he came to doubt the stability and coherence of the self—as we will see in the final section of the chapter.

4.4 Moore's Quest

All biographies contain an element of autobiography. As Wolfgang Hildesheimer puts it in his biography of Sir Andrew Marbot:

Der typische Biograph ist derjenige, der nicht nur seinen Helden wählt, sondern der—wie Freud sagt—auf eigentümliche Weise an ihn fixiert ist, und zwar—ich ergänze—auf eine solche Weise, daß er zunehmend der Idee verfällt, von seinem Helden gewählt zu sein.⁸¹

The biographer sets out to find their subject's identity, but in doing so they inevitably reflect upon their own. The reader becomes aware of the biographer's presence, ordering and explaining the subject's life, and part of the drama of any great biography is the slow unveiling of this relationship between biographer and subject.

Moore is omnipresent in his *Byron*. He is the addressee of many of the letters printed in the biography, was the custodian of Byron's journals, and personally witnessed Byron's life in England (1812-16) and Venice (1819). Moore is both character and narrator, and in the process of understanding Byron he is compelled to try and understand himself. In the end, he claims to have identified himself and his biases, and to have controlled for them: "Of any partiality, however, beyond what our mutual friendship accounts for and justifies, I am by no means conscious ..."
(II.807). There is a note of insecurity in this statement, however, as Moore leaves open the possibility that he has unconscious partialities beyond his knowledge or control. This points towards a deeper scepticism in Moore's notion of the self.

Like Barbauld or Coleridge, Moore finally concludes that self-knowledge is difficult, even frightening: "Who is there, indeed, that could bear to be judged by even the best of those unnumbered thoughts that course each other, like waves of the sea, through our minds, passing away unuttered and, for the most part, even unowned by ourselves?" (II.792) There is a rich and complex thought behind this

⁸¹ "The typical biographer is one who not only chooses their hero, but—as Freud says—is fixated on them in a mysterious way, and indeed—I would add—in such a way, that they increasingly fall prey to the notion that it's their hero who's chosen them." Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Marbot: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 189. Some have doubted Sir Andrew's existence, but Hildesheimer's evidence seems to me conclusive.

question. When others judge us, they identify and define us. When they hold us responsible for a thought or deed, they decide what we are: a criminal, a hero, a misogynist, a pedant or a lover. Edgeworth and Opie knew the psychological cost of judgment, as society makes Vivian and Adeline feel the weight of their own existence. Moore agrees that it is hard to “bear” this weight, but his anxiety is different. Vivian and Adeline are judged for their actions. Moore fears being judged for the “unowned” and “unuttered” things in the mind, the thoughts and feelings we neither enact nor avow. Prying into Byron’s mind has made him realise how mysterious we are even to ourselves, and more than that, it has made him uncertain where the boundaries of the self really lie. Moore imagines that the mind is full of “unowned” thoughts, which do not belong to us and yet which may condemn us. “Evil into the mind of god or man | May come and go, so unapproved, and leave | No spot or blame behind,” says Milton’s Adam.⁸² Moore is less certain of his soul’s integrity.

His metaphor of the sea suggests other features of these hidden thoughts and feelings. Like waves of the sea, they are “numberless” and vast. The sea is stronger than our will and deeper than our comprehension. In *Childe Harold* it is “boundless, endless, and sublime, | The image of eternity, the throne | Of the invisible.” (*BW*, 251) For Germaine de Staël, it is “l’image de cet infini qui attire sans cesse la pensée, et dans lequel sans cesse elle va se perdre.”⁸³ If the mind is a sea, then the self is either a little boat rocked by forces it cannot control, or it is a wide formless plain whose principles of organisation lie hidden in unsearchable depths. In Moore, we

⁸² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin, 2003), 104.

⁸³ “... the image of that infinite that ceaselessly draws thought in, and in which [thought] ceaselessly loses itself.” Germaine de Staël, *Corinne; ou l’Italie*, ed. Simone Ballayé (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 4.

can see Hume's idea resurface, that the mind is a flood of impressions, and the self at best a fiction.

This realisation sets Moore apart from many canonical Romantic autobiographers. Jean-Jacques Rousseau begins his *Confessions* (1782) in perfect faith that when all is revealed, his particularity will be confirmed: "Si je ne vaud pas mieux, au moins je suis autre."⁸⁴ Unlike Moore, he is not afraid to lay himself bare. "J'ai dit la vérité," he exclaims to his audience after reading the *Confessions* to them—though their sleepy reaction to this cry does leave him perturbed.⁸⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe ends *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-33) with a quotation from his own play, *Egmont* (1788):

Kind, Kind! nicht weiter! Wie von unsichtbaren Geistern gepeitscht, gehen die Sonnenpferde der Zeit mit unsers Schicksals leichtem Wagen durch, und uns bleibt nichts, als mutig gefaßt die Zügel fest zu halten und bald rechts, bald links, vom Steine hier, vom Sturze da, die Räder abzulenken. Wohin es geht, wer weiß es? Erinnert er sich doch kaum, woher er kam!⁸⁶

Goethe is not ignorant of himself but of his destiny. His mind is not a great sea but a brave hero who grasps the reins of life. William Wordsworth ends *The Prelude* in the firm faith that time will only perfect him: "the mind of man becomes | A thousand times more beautiful than the earth | On which he dwells" (*WW*, 588). Mary Wollstonecraft ends her *Scandinavian Letters* on a similar note of self-certainty:

Adieu! My spirit of observation seems to be fled—and I have been wandering round this dirty place, literally speaking, to kill time; though the thoughts, I would fain fly

⁸⁴ "If I'm not worthier, at least I'm different." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 1.5.

⁸⁵ "I have said the truth." *Ibid.*, 1.656.

⁸⁶ "Child! Child! no further! As if whipped by invisible ghosts, the sun-horses of time run away with the light chariot of our destiny, and nothing remains for us but to bravely grab the reins and hang on, turning the wheels left and right, away from rocks here and ravines there. Where it's going—who knows? He hardly remembers where he came from!" Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz, 14 vols (Munich: Beck, 1981), X.187.

from, lie too close to my heart to be easily shook off, or even beguiled, by any employment, except that of preparing for my journey to London.—God bless you!⁸⁷

Upon arriving in Dover, her “spirit of observation” disappears, and she is drawn back to the firm pillars of her identity: heart, home, and family. In his *Interesting Narrative* (1789), Olaudah Equiano finds that his selfhood is rooted in his Christianity. Having developed the habit of seeing “the hand of God in the minutest occurrence,” he can account for “every circumstance” of his life.⁸⁸ Everything fits into a grand and meaningful whole. In their different ways, Rousseau, Goethe, Wordsworth, Wollstonecraft and Equiano form a stable sense of identity. Moore, it appears, does not.

Moore applies this sceptical and uncertain sense of identity to his friend. Byron lacked a central “pivot of character” (II.782). The lordly poet was “multiform” (II.783), a boat tossed on the sea of thought and circumstance. This leads Moore to judge Byron’s moral derangement indulgently—“knowledge is ever the parent of tolerance”—and Moore finds himself unable to condemn a man whose deep inner chaos he has come to understand (II.806). Like Clare, Moore’s Byron has no single identity. As we saw in §4.1, Hume had held that a person could only be judged on the basis of a stable character. Moore discovers that Byron has no such identifiable character, and so rescues his tempestuous friend from damnation. Galt thinks that the austere and melancholy *Manfred* is Byron’s central poem. Moore thinks it is the expansive and digressive *Don Juan*. Richard Altick praises Moore for producing a

⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Scandinavian Letters*, 262.

⁸⁸ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 2003), 236.

“masterly portrait of a complex personality.”⁸⁹ It would be almost more accurate to call it a masterly portrait of a person too complex to have a personality.

We have seen in previous chapters how texts of self-deformation have a strange way of undoing themselves, and Moore's multiform *Byron* is no different. There is deep tension in his analysis. On the one hand, he adopted the “Life and Letters” format in order to root his analysis in Byron's own words: “the Life should consist, as much as possible, of extracts from Byron's Letters & Journals, making him tell his own story ...”⁹⁰ But on the other hand, Moore insists that Byron's own accounts of himself cannot be trusted. As he put it in *Rhymes on the Road* (1819):

This gifted Being wraps himself in night;
And keeping all that softens, and adorns,
And gilds his social nature hid from sight,
Turns but its darkness on a world he scorns.⁹¹

Byron liked to play up to the dark rumours about him, and shifted or concealed his character out of a “fancy for self-defamation” (II.790). He presented a “double aspect” to the world (I.393). At times, Moore suggests that Byron had a true, amiable self lurking beneath the darkness and scorn. In London, he could see Byron's “true colours,” and easily discovered that the delightful, friendly lord had little of the “fierce gloom and sternness” of his fictional creations (ibid.). But this argument would seem to undermine the reliability of the letters and journals on which the biography is based, and would seem also to undermine Moore's own argument that Byron had no “true” or single character.

⁸⁹ Richard Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 231.

⁹⁰ 28 May 1826. Moore, *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, III.939. See also Moore, *Byron*, II.647.

⁹¹ Moore, *Poetical Works*, ed. A. D. Godley (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 514.

At other times, Moore is less certain about the distinction between Byron's private and public selves: "It seemed as if, with the power of painting fierce and gloomy personages, he had also the ambition to be, himself, the dark 'sublime he drew' ..." (I.302) Byron may have falsified his amiable traits when he pretended to be mad, bad and dangerous to know, but by aspiring to match his reputation he may also have altered himself. The shaping power of self-image is a fiendishly difficult topic for the biographer, one that few biographers really tackle, according to Backscheider.⁹² Moore grapples with this problem throughout the biography, and is not always consistent on the point. But in the end, he concludes that Byron was capable of "chameleon-like changes" (II.648). Byron could adopt new poses almost at will, making experiments with himself, and though many of these poses were mere acting, it is ultimately impossible to find the one single true Byron among them.

Moore's sceptical sense of selfhood makes his prose tense and thought-provoking. The meanings of words become as difficult to pin down as Byron's personality, and no word more so than "self:" "It is, indeed, in the very nature and essence of genius to be for ever occupied intensely with Self, as the great centre and source of its strength." (I.591) Nearly every time Moore uses the term he capitalises it like this. And he never uses a determiner—it is always Self, never "the Self," "a Self" or "one's Self." Self is not an individual personality, but rather a "source" or "centre" of the mind's power. This quaint way of using the term is consistent with Moore's sense of the mind as a sea of thoughts and feelings, of the personality as something that can shift and change, of the individual as something chancy and contingent, which is impossible to pin down—especially in the case of Byron, who

⁹² Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, 117.

was in touch with the deepest "source" of Self, and destroyed his own individuality. Moore's quest for Self ends in paradox, as Moore doubts his own integrity, and brings all the evidence on which he has based his narration into question. It is this very doubt, however, which gives his biography its great dynamism and humanity.

Moore's *Byron* describes a person deformed in body and mind, a man whose bodily "lameness" haunted him through life, and whose "moral derangement" nearly cost him his fame. To save his friend from calumny, Moore set out to prove that Byron was not malformed but formless. His genius was so powerful, his sensibility so quick, his personality so chameleon, that there was no single Lord Byron whom the reader could submit to moral judgement. To make this case, Moore drew on Hume, for whom the self was an illusion, and D'Israeli, for whom genius was a power not to be reckoned with. To buttress his theory, he developed an effusive, intellectual prose style and a scientific approach to psychological analysis. He told an epic tale of extraordinary emotional fluctuation and decline, in which Byron was denied the possibility of a harmonious self-formation by the combined forces of nature, society, and circumstance, and was thrust into an exile that hurled him from self to self. In his search for his friend, Moore found that "Self" was a mysterious realm, and became sceptical that any of us have a coherent or knowable form.

Biography offers us a different view of the Romantic self, because it is historically particular. More than other writers, Moore saw the self as contingent and difficult to understand. Galt and Southey wrote in a concise and confident style very different to Moore's humble and speculative one. But it is nonetheless the case that all biographies describe historical individuals, whose minds are inaccessible and whose lives are always open to another interpretation. Autobiographers have

the power to shape their own lives, and are themselves shaped by the autobiographies in which they create a new self-image to live by. Biographies are rarely so self-reflexive and self-authorising,⁹³ and the biographer's subject is always just beyond the horizon. A powerful biography like Moore's can put the Romantic self in historical time, where things happen once and are borne away irretrievably. No self has a fixed or final form in biography, because no biography is the last.

There was one element of Byron's character, his sexuality, that Moore could not include in his decorous prose biography. Gothic themes of incest and bisexuality could have no place in a non-fiction narrative designed to resuscitate his friend's reputation—not to mention Moore's own reputation as a gentleman author. But in his Gothic poem, *The Loves of the Angels* (1823), Moore found a way to describe this darker and more sublime aspect of Byron's soul. One of the characters, Rubi, is Byron, and his tale of forbidden love is an allegory of Byron's liaison with Augusta.⁹⁴ Moore suggests that Byron often concealed his true self out of vanity, but in this poem, Moore suggests Byron may have had a different motive for self-falsification:

I felt
That every spark of that pure flame—
Pure, while among the stars I dwelt—
Was now, by my transgression, turn'd
Into gross, earthly fire, which burn'd,
Burn'd all it touched, as fast as eye
Could follow the fierce, ravening flashes ... (555, ll. 1380-6)

Revealing his angelic form to Lilis kills her and effects Rubi's banishment from heaven. He is scarred by the final kiss she gives him, carrying the ashen imprint of her lips on his brow for eternity. But his self-revelation was not purely wrong.

⁹³ Boswell's *Johnson* is perhaps an exception, since Boswell took it upon himself to shape the life of the man whose biography he wrote, taking Johnson to the Hebrides or asking him clever questions to "draw him out." But this also makes it a one-sided and eccentric—if delightful—book.

⁹⁴ Vail, *Literary Relationship*, 149-52.

Indeed, its great sublimity is evidence of Rubi's supremacy among all the angels, "Second alone to Him, whose light | Was, ev'n to theirs, as day to night ..." (543, ll. 448-9). And although Rubi seems convinced it was wrong to reveal himself, in the end the effects of his sin are good, because it gives God an opportunity to demonstrate his mercy:

... if Mercy *did not* hear [Rubi's repentance],
 Oh, God would *not* be what this bright
 And glorious universe of His,
 This world of beauty, goodness, light,
 And endless love, proclaims He *is!* (556, ll. 1484-8)

In poetry, Moore could indulge his Gothic imagination. He could explore the darkest and most sublime aspects of Byron's character. Byron's erotic attachment to his half-sister could become a divine passion and an opportunity for cosmic repentance. But even in such a concealed, allegorical form, Moore found it was difficult to contain Byron in print. *The Loves of the Angels* was condemned for its bold treatment of religion and morality, and Moore was forced to orientalise later editions, replacing God with Allah to allay the conservative backlash.⁹⁵

The Loves of the Angels reveals the Gothic strain that has thrummed through all our examples of self-deformation. Vivian's foolish attempt to Gothicise his family home precipitates the debt that enslaves him. Adeline is as harried as one of Ann Radcliffe's gothic heroines. Smith's sonnets muse on the moonlit graveyards and fruitless remorse of Gothic romance, and both she and Clare describe life as a dungeon. Lurking beneath Moore's biography is Byron's sublime passion, too frighteningly destructive to deal with fully in the text. In the following chapter, we will consider texts that bring these weird and frightening aspects of Romantic self-deformation to the fore: the Gothic tragedies of Joanna Baillie and Charles Harpur.

⁹⁵ Kelly, *Bard of Erin*, 372.

CHAPTER 5

DRAMA: THE HIDEOUS SOULS OF JOANNA BAILLIE AND CHARLES HARPUR

Les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause: et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la difformité.¹

THE DISORDER of passion, and the deformity of vice—for Jean Racine, the very essence of tragedy was self-deformation. Phèdre’s incestuous love for her stepson wrecks the state and destroys her life. Her lust is a deformity as hideous as Philoctetes’ foot, Richard III’s hunchback, the eyeless sockets of Oedipus, Gloucester, and Samson, or the spiritual blindness of Hedda Gabler and Willy Loman. Physical and moral deformity is an enduring theme in Western tragic drama—perhaps the most enduring theme. Except in the case of Clare’s unformed nature sonnets or Thomas Moore’s “multiform” Byron, there has been something tragic about all the deformed selves we have so far encountered.

Tragedy is necessarily bleak, and is probably the hardest of all genres to square with traditional, optimistic definitions of Romanticism. Romantic tragedy has accordingly inspired some of the most trenchant criticism ever penned. The most famous book on the topic is George Steiner’s *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), in

¹ “The passions are presented to the eyes only to show the disorder for which they are responsible; and vice is painted throughout in colours which make deformity known and hated.” Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, eds. Christian Delmas and Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 32.

which we learn that the Romantics slammed shut the “gates of hell,” advocated a “non-tragic” vision of life, and therefore killed tragedy for the modern world.² He concedes that nearly every British Romantic of note wrote tragedies—he mentions William Blake, Walter Scott, Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Savage Landor, Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, John Keats, and Thomas Lovell Beddoes. He might also have mentioned Frances Burney, Felicia Hemans, Mary Robinson, Ann Yearsley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Harriet Lee, Joanna Baillie, Catherine Gore and Mary Russell Mitford. The fact that so many Romantic writers were interested in tragedy might suggest that the Romantic vision of life was not *utterly* “non-tragic.” Indeed, Stendhal thought tragedy to be the very essence of Romanticism and therefore of modern literature:

Quel est l'ouvrage littéraire qui a le plus réussi en France depuis dix ans?
 Les romans de Walter Scott.
 Qu'est-ce que les romans de Walter Scott?
 De la tragédie romantique, entremêlée de longues descriptions.³

But Romantic tragedies all have a problem, argues Steiner: they are “dismally bad.”⁴ When faced with an incontestably brilliant Romantic tragedy, Goethe’s *Faust* (1806-32), he has another argument: it might be a brilliant play, but its redemptive ending means it isn’t much of a tragedy.⁵

Steiner should not be judged too harshly, because he is only repeating the views of many of the Romantics themselves. William Wordsworth, author of *The Borderers* (1797), called the German tragedies sweeping the British stage “sickly and stupid” (WW, 735). Coleridge, translator of Schiller and author of the immensely

² George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber, 1995), 127-28.

³ “Which literary works have had the greatest success in France for the last ten years? | The novels of Walter Scott. | What are the novels of Walter Scott? | Romantic tragedies, interspersed with long descriptions.” Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, 17.

⁴ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 122.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

successful tragedy *Remorse* (1813), thought Charles Maturin's *Bertram* (1816) a sorry piece of "jacobinical" dross (CW, VII.221). Sheridan, who produced the Gothic spectacular *Pizarro* (1799) to rave reviews and bumper crowds, parodied modern tragedy in *The Critic* (1779) and scornfully told Matthew Lewis that *The Castle Spectre* (1797) wasn't worth a sous.⁶ Lecturing in Berlin, Hegel thought that the recent efforts of Heinrich von Kleist and August von Kotzebue were miserable things, ruined by the "wretched coherence" of the heroes, with their "duality, raggedness, and lack of harmony."⁷ Even those Romantics who thought it was still possible to write a great tragedy could take a dismal view of contemporary theatre. Joanna Baillie blamed the renovations at Drury Lane and Covent Garden for her plays' lack of success on the stage.⁸ In such massive theatres, how could the audience be expected to hear good dialogue, and understand the minds of complex characters?⁹

In the twentieth century, while literary critics were busy ignoring Romantic tragedy in English, theatre historians were busy proving its lack of literary or dramatic merit. According to Allardyce Nicoll, the Romantics tried too hard to imitate Shakespeare, and the "dead hand of Elizabethanism" strangled their efforts.¹⁰ They were also too theoretical, writing tragedies to a preconceived mould rather than creating living works of dramatic art.¹¹ Michael Booth's classic study of

⁶ Jeffrey Cox, "Introduction," in Jeffrey N. Cox, ed. *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 2.

⁷ Georg Friedrich Hegel, *On Tragedy*, ed. Anne and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), 208.

⁸ "There are, I am told, who sharply criticise | Our modern theatres' unwieldy size." Charles Lamb, "Prologue," in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Remorse* (London: Pople, 1813), ix.

⁹ She makes this argument in her 1812 preface "To The Reader," in the third instalment of *Plays on the Passions*: reprinted in Joanna Baillie, *The Dramatic and Poetical Works* (London: Longman, 1851), 231. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Baillie's writings will be to this edition, indicated by the *JW* and page number.

¹⁰ Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), IV.162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV.156.

English melodrama is full of enthusiasm for the spectacle and vim of the Romantic stage, but even he claims that “When the romantic poets did attempt the drama, their plays were either so untheatrical as to be unactable, or else theatrical success was due to melodramatic content and spectacular production.”¹² Raymond Williams praises the Romantics for bringing a new “exploring energy” to the writing of tragedy, but genially admits the “failures” of their actual plays.¹³ It is no wonder, given this tide of criticism, that not a single British tragedy between Shakespeare and Shaw has survived as a part of the standard repertoire.

From a European perspective, this situation is bizarre. In nearly every other country in Europe, Romantic tragedy lies at the heart of the national theatre. In Germany, Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller are seen as the pinnacle of national playwriting, and the plays of Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner endure in the playhouse. In Poland, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki still command the stage—indeed, playing Konrad in Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (1823, 1833) is as much a rite of passage for young Polish actors as playing Hamlet is for British ones.¹⁴ In Moscow, theatregoers see masterpieces of Russian drama performed in a theatre named after Alexander Pushkin—who himself wrote five plays, all of them tragedies. In Italy, Vittorio Alfieri is on the school curriculum, and the Romantic operas of Giuseppe Verdi, with tragic plots culled from Scott, Schiller, Byron and Victor Hugo, are at the heart of the national theatre. Even in France, where the early modern tragedies of Racine and Pierre Corneille overshadow their Romantic successors, the tragedies of Hugo and Alfred de Musset continue to be widely read, staged and

¹² Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), 47.

¹³ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 94.

¹⁴ Charles S. Kraszewski, “Introduction,” in Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefather's Eve*, trans. Charles S. Kraszewski (London: Gloslav, 2016), Kindle edition.

studied. The poor British—and as we will see, Australian—playwrights of the period have not been so lucky.

Like the other genres we have examined, British Romantic tragedy has enjoyed a revival of academic interest since the 1980s. Four major anthologies of Romantic drama have been published, most of whose plays are tragedies,¹⁵ along with several massive databases of playscripts. Starting with Jeffrey Cox's *In the Shadows of Romance* (1987), monographs, edited collections and academic articles have started to flow, vindicating the literary qualities of these neglected texts. Cox, however, argues that this scholarship is yet to mature. He had set out to illuminate “the Romantic redefinition of tragedy,” but what “happen[ed] was that a wide range of scholars turned to the playwrights of the period in an act of recovery.”¹⁶ Through this process, Baillie has emerged as scholars' favourite playwright of the period—an opinion they share with a large number of Baillie's contemporaries. Anna Barbauld imagined that Baillie's drama would live long after Britain fell:

Then, loved Joanna, to admiring eyes
Thy storied groups in scenic pomp shall rise;
Their high-souled strains and Shakespeare's noble rage
Shall with alternate passion shake the stage.¹⁷

John Stuart Mill, meanwhile, thought *Constantine Paleologus* (1810) was the most powerful play since *Macbeth*.¹⁸ Like Barbauld and Mill, scholars today usually prefer Baillie's tragedies to her comedies and melodramas.

¹⁵ Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas*; John Franceschina, ed. *Sisters of Gore: Seven Gothic Melodramas by Women, 1790-1843* (New York and London: Garland, 1997); Paul Baines and Edward Burns, eds., *Five Romantic Plays, 1768-1821* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer, eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003).

¹⁶ Jeffrey N. Cox, “Running in the Shadows: Revisiting *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France*,” *European Romantic Review* 23, no. 3 (2012): 281.

¹⁷ Barbauld, *Works*, I.237.

¹⁸ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1873), 15.

In her most famous works, the *Plays on the Passions* (1798-1836), Baillie set out to portray self-deformation in all its grisly detail. As she explained in her celebrated “Introductory Discourse,” her tragedies would “delineate the progress of the higher passions,” as they “brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature, are borne down before them” (10). She would distinguish each passion’s “different stages of progression” (16), and reveal the “misery that ensues” when they seize control of the mind (11). Her protagonists are torn apart by their own inner energies. In *De Monfort* (1798), the hero drops dead from the power of his own hatred. In *Ethwald* (1802), ambition destroys the eponymous usurper, while *Romiero* (1836) is a latter-day Othello tortured to death by his jealousy. Meanwhile *Orra* (1812) and her counterpart Count Osterloo in *The Dream* (1812) are both destroyed by their fear of the dead (as we will see in §5.2). Baillie drew on the melodramatic Gothic conventions of contemporary theatre to highlight the agony of her protagonists.¹⁹ Her characters are medieval aristocrats, imprisoned in gloomy castles, forests and monasteries, weakened by their old-fashioned superstitions about aristocratic honour and the existence of the supernatural.

While Baillie was in Hampstead, finishing her series exploring the effects of passion on the human mind, another poet on the edge of the British world was taking the tradition of Gothic tragedy in a different direction. The young Australian poet, Charles Harpur, the son of an Irish highwayman and an English thief, was inspired by his older Romantic contemporaries to try and found the literature of his country. His first great attempt was *The Tragedy of Donohoe* (1835), in which he turned the real bushranger John Donohoe into a tragic hero and Gothic villain. Where Baillie argued that it was “passion” that deformed the tragic hero, Harpur

¹⁹ See Paul Ranger, “*Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast:*” *Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1991), 98-103.

suggested it was society. Donohoe, a convict, is abused by the man assigned to be his master in the penal settlement, who flings insults at his new charge. Suffering the “scorn and oppression of his fellow-man,” Donohoe flees into the bush and finally commits a terrible murder.²⁰ Baillie’s plays are mostly medieval, but Donohoe lives in the present day, among the wattles and stringybark of the Blue Mountains, on the edge of the growing urban society of which Harpur was a part. Donohoe’s claims against Harpur’s society are supported by the comic ineptitude and dull brutality of the play’s magistrates and policemen.

Self-deformation is the central concern of these plays. Scholars have been turned off by their Gothic trappings: the effusive language, extravagant emotions and Shakespearean echoes. These aesthetic deformities, however, are essential to the plays’ exploration of the self’s hideous and explosive dimensions. Though Gothic conventions are present in both Baillie and Harpur, they draw on different parts of the tradition. Baillie is of Ann Radcliffe’s school, with her literary sophistication, medieval setting, atmospheric effects and intense interest in characters’ states of feeling. Harpur is in the more marginal and radical tradition of William Godwin, with his present-day setting and overt political message. If Baillie’s tragic heroes resemble Victor Frankenstein, driven to madness and folly by quixotic desires, Harpur’s tragic hero resembles Frankenstein’s monster, parentless, degraded and despised until he lashes out in pain. Comparing these two playwrights, we can see the range of ways Romantic playwrights adapted tragic and Gothic traditions to portray self-deformation on stage.

²⁰ Charles Harpur, *Stalwart the Bushranger, with The Tragedy of Donohoe*, ed. Elizabeth Perkins (Sydney: Currency Press, 1987), 94.

The textual history of Harpur's play is complicated, and requires a brief introduction. He wrote the first version of the play in 1833 and '34. Hoping to get the play produced, he presented his neatly-written manuscript to Edward Smith Hall, who published substantial excerpts of it in his newspaper, *The Sydney Monitor*, in February 1835. These excerpts are all that remain of the original *Tragedy of Donohoe*. Harpur substantially reworked the play through the '30s and '40s, publishing a revised version in 1853 under the new title *The Bushrangers; a Play in Five Acts*.²¹ The protagonist, named Donohoe in the original play, was renamed Stalwart (several other characters were also renamed), and while the plot remained mostly the same, many of the scenes were rewritten. He continued to tinker with the play up to his death in 1867, leaving a "final version" in manuscript among his papers.²² In this version, entitled *Stalwart the Bushranger*, the plot is identical to the 1853, but Harpur versified the play's several prose speeches, and made some changes to its imagery and philosophy. As we will see in §5.3, these changes were not for the best. In what follows I refer mainly to the 1853 version, the earliest complete version and aesthetically the most satisfying one.

My discussion falls into three sections. In §5.1, I demonstrate that self-deformation was the salient theme of Romantic tragedy. Statistical analysis of the John Larpent Collection shows the rise of melodrama transformed the drama at the end of the eighteenth century. Romantic playwrights from across Europe seized on melodramatic conventions to make their tragedies more extravagant and psychological. For these playwrights, self-deformation was the very essence of the

²¹ Harpur, *The Bushrangers*. All references to the 1853 version will be to this edition, indicated by year and page number.

²² The 1867 version is available in Perkins's edition, n. 20, which also includes the surviving newspaper fragments of *The Tragedy of Donohoe* in the appendix. All references to these versions will be to this edition, indicated by the year of the version and page number.

tragic. Their protagonists are tragic because they deform their own souls and find themselves hideous. In §5.2, I turn to Baillie and Harpur specifically, comparing how this hideousness of soul comes about in their plays. Critics like Steiner and Eagleton claim that in Romantic tragedies, the protagonist's downfall is typically society's fault, rather than the protagonist's.²³ We have seen already that Baillie blamed passion instead. To address this debate, I use the popular digital technique of character network analysis to compare the plot structures of *The Bushrangers*, *Orra* and *The Dream*. While at first glance it seems that Harpur blames society, and Baillie the passions, for their characters' tragic fates, on closer inspection the social world of Harpur's play is more psychological than it first seems, and the psychological worlds of Baillie's plays are more social. In §5.3, I consider what Harpur and Baillie add to our philosophical understanding of the Romantic self. Since Hegel, it has been common to argue that Romantic tragedy depicts a "contingent" universe where actions are inherently meaningless.²⁴ Hegel makes an acute observation—God is silent in Harpur and Baillie's frightening plays. But in their most forceful and poetic moments, they have a vision of a mysterious and meaningful universe, a vision that retains its power in our secular and scientific age.

5.1 Romantic Catastrophe

What makes a tragedy "Romantic"? Baillie and Harpur were writing at a revolutionary period in the history of English drama. Huge renovations to the patent theatres of London and the proliferation of unlicensed venues meant that the British theatre was rapidly expanding,²⁵ while in Harpur's New South Wales, a transition

²³ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 127; Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 204-5.

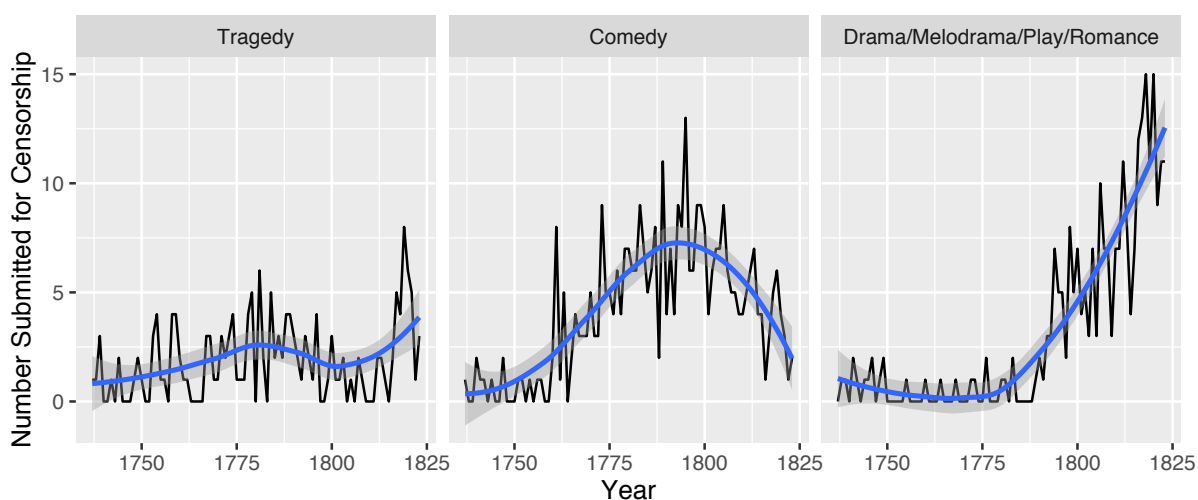
²⁴ Hegel, *On Tragedy*, 84.

²⁵ See Jane Moody, "The Theatrical Revolution, 1776–1843," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 199-208.

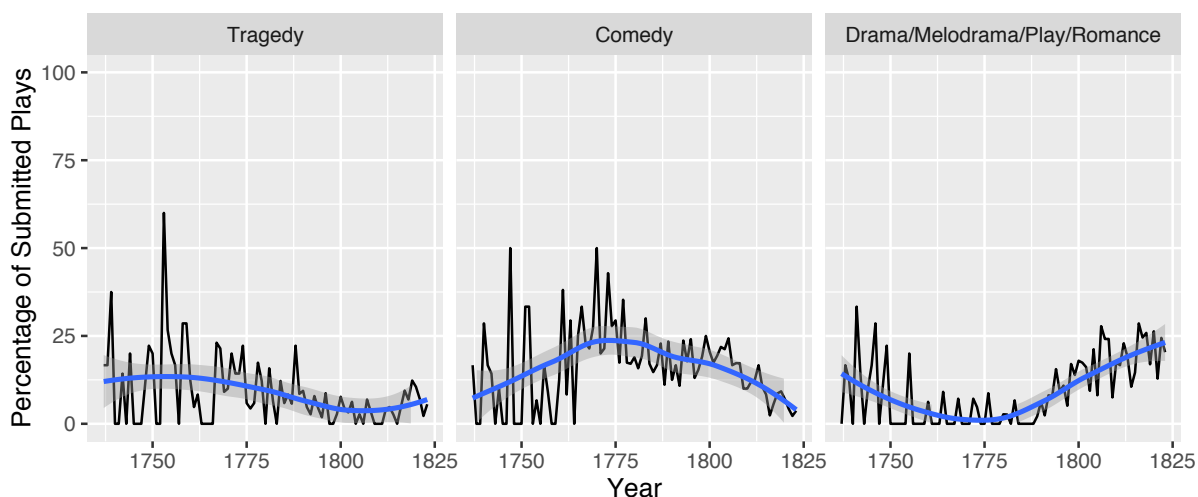
was underway from the amateur convict theatre of the early colony to the growing professional theatre of the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ As the theatre industry transformed to encompass a new, more popular audience, the genre-system of English drama transformed along with it, as shown in Figure 5.1:

Figure 5.1

Number of Plays Submitted for Inspection, 1737-1823



Percentage of Submitted Plays in Each Category, 1737-1823



Drama was becoming “Romantic” in a literal sense. These graphs show the number of plays in three main genres submitted to the Inspector of Plays between

²⁶ See Robert Jordan, *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia, 1788-1840* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002).

1737 and 1823.²⁷ I have not classified the plays into genres, but relied on the playwrights' own classifications in their titles or subtitles. The most striking pattern in the graphs is the explosion of new generic designations in the 1790s. While "tragedies" continued to be submitted to the inspector as often (or as seldom) as ever, "comedies" starkly declined, and were replaced by a chaos of new and exciting-sounding genres, including "dramatic romances," "musical dramas," "operatic romances," "grand romantic melodramas" and "dramatic legends," as well as more vaguely entitled "dramas" or "plays." This third category is usually referred to today as "melodrama." This new kind of play had two key features that influenced literary tragedy of the period: (1) mixture of themes and genres; and (2) heightened subjectivity.²⁸

(1) *Mixture of genres.* The great number of different names Romantic playwrights used for melodrama indicates how many different conventions they mixed. They combined wild adventure with family values, terrible violence with sentimental love.²⁹ This probably explains why they pushed comedy off the stage, though tragedy remained. A literary tragedy like *De Monfort* could draw on the Gothic elements of melodramas like *The Kentish Barons* (1791) or *The Miller and his Men* (1813) without compromising its serious tone or tragic conventions. But there is no room for a gloomy dungeon or capricious Oriental despot on the sunlit Bath streets of *The Rivals* (1775). When the conventions of gothic melodrama and

²⁷ The data comes from the catalogue for the John Larpent collection, held at the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA (MS number: mssLA 1-2503). The collection comprises the plays submitted for clearance by the Inspector of Plays between 1737 and 1823. It thus gives a good picture of what plays were actually being produced in British theatres of the period. The data is available here: "Eighteenth Century Drama | Key Data," *Eighteenth Century Drama*, Adam Matthew Digital, accessed 16 August 2017, <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-products/product/eighteenth-century-drama/key-data/>

²⁸ It must be admitted that a great student of English melodrama, Michael Booth, disagrees with both these points, arguing that melodrama has a small and coherent set of conventions, and is primarily interested in "externals" rather than psychology: Booth, *English Melodrama*, chap. 1 and 14-15.

²⁹ As Moody puts it, "Dramatic genres ... are rarely pure or unadulterated in the early nineteenth-century theatre." Moody, "Theatrical Revolution," 213.

comedy do intersect, the result is usually parody, as in *The Rovers* (1799) or *Northanger Abbey* (1817), or the comedy metamorphoses into a romantic tale of growth and adventure—i.e. a melodrama—as in Maria Edgeworth’s marvellous *Whim for Whim* (1798). This is the truth behind Frye’s claim that the Romantics rarely wrote “pure comedy.”³⁰ Melodrama enriched tragedy with new tropes and images, putting stories of quest and rebellion at the centre of the drama. But these same tropes and images seem to have killed eighteenth-century society comedy.

(2) *Heightened subjectivity*. The new melodramas were also intense and brooding plays. The very term melodrama, Ranger observes, means “musical drama,” and directors used the musical accompaniment of the action to make “overt statement[s] about the inner lives of the characters.”³¹ The most popular melodramas of the Romantic period were Gothic or Oriental, and their villains tended to indulge in “gloomy meditation,” revealing the “agony” of their tortured souls.³² These remorseful, self-obsessed Gothic antiheroes also found a home in literary tragedies of the period. From Goethe’s *Faust* and Mickiewicz’s *Konrad* to Hemans’ *di Procida* and Gore’s *Falkenstiern*, most of the heroes of Romantic tragedy are brooding Gothic introverts. This Gothic subjectivity has long been recognised as a central component of Romantic tragedy. Northrop Frye argues that Romantic tragedy is the “tragedy of self-awareness,” in which the protagonist falls away from nature to become an “isolated and subjective consciousness.”³³ Cox agrees: the

³⁰ Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism*, 45. He is quite wrong to conclude, however, that Austen’s novels are “pure comedy” of the kind he describes. We have learnt to recognise the romance and adventure of her heroines’ stories.

³¹ Ranger, *Terror and Pity*, 89. Booth disagrees, saying melodrama is usually more interested in “externals:” *English Melodrama*, 14-15.

³² Booth, *English Melodrama*, 80.

³³ Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism*, 40.

Romantic tragic hero is a quester who tries “to break through to the open world of the romantic imagination,” but fails.³⁴

When Romantic playwrights combined the old tradition of tragedy with the new tradition of Gothic melodrama, they developed a new sense of what it means for something to be “tragic.” Steiner argues that tragedy is always rooted in some notion of “catastrophe:” “Tragedies end badly.”³⁵ We usually describe something as tragic when it is the worst it can possibly be, when it is worse than merely sad or disappointing. In the remainder of this section, I consider the catastrophes of a number of Romantic plays, some of which their authors labelled “tragedies,” some of which they did not. When we compare these different plays, it becomes apparent that self-deformation, or to be more precise, hideousness of soul, was a defining feature of the tragic for the Romantics. The worst thing that can happen in these plays is not death or dishonour, but the perversion of one’s inward self.

Tragedy is relative. What may seem a terrible end by one standard of human achievement may seem holy and beautiful by another. To a certain kind of atheist, the death of an early Christian at the hands of the Romans may seem a squalid affair, the victory of tyranny over delusion. In Baillie’s play *The Martyr* (1826), by contrast, Cordenius’s death is a moment of cosmic bliss:

O, Thou, who didst upon the cross for us
A willing sufferer die, receive my soul!
Almighty God and Sire, supreme o’er all,
Pardon my sins and take me to Thyself!
Accept the last words of my earthly lips:
High hallelujah to Thy holy name! (527)

³⁴ Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance*, 3.

³⁵ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 8.

Baillie gives us no reason to doubt the salvation of Cordenius's soul. He calls on heaven to receive him, having committed no wrongs himself, absolutely certain of the nature, integrity and salvation of his soul. Despite its grisly end, Baillie called this play not a tragedy, but a "Drama." Cordenius's religious optimism takes the tragic sting out of his death. The situation is similar in Schiller's *Maid of Orleans* (1804). Like Cordenius, Johanna dies in a state of bliss, having undergone a similar spiritual transformation and discovered the virtue of mercy. Schiller called this ambiguously hopeful piece a "Romantic Tragedy." His *Maria Stuart* (1800) depicts martyrdom in a more negative light. It ends with the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, of whose Catholic devotion the play leaves us in no doubt. Unlike Cordenius or Johanna, however, she dies offstage, and her departure from the world reveals little but the pettiness of human motive. Her final speech is a jealous curse, spat in Leicester's face:

Kniel zu den Füßen der Elisabeth!
Mög' Euer Lohn nicht Eure Strafe werden!
Lebt wohl! – Jetzt hab ich nichts mehr auf der Erden!³⁶

Leicester is rooted to the spot as she is executed in the next room. He watches her pray and take confession, and it horrifies him: "Sie geht dahin, ein schon verklärter Geist, | Und *mir* bleibt die Verzweiflung der Verdammten."³⁷ Back in London, Queen Elizabeth finds that her foe's execution, which was supposed to secure her legitimacy, has alienated her dearest advisors. "Ich habe deinen edlern Teil | Nicht retten können," says Shrewsbury, forsaking her service.³⁸ Leicester has already

³⁶ "Kneel at the feet of Elisabeth! | May your prize not become your punishment! | Farewell! – Now I have nothing more on earth!" Friedrich von Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, 5 vols (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1962), II.678.

³⁷ "She goes within, an already transfigured soul, | And *to me* remain the doubts of the damned." Ibid.

³⁸ "I could not save your nobler part." Ibid, II.685.

departed for France, and the queen broods alone as the curtains fall. Schiller minced no words in his subtitle: *Maria Stuart* is a “Tragedy.”

It is sometimes said that the problem with Romantic tragedy is that it lacks a cosmic scale of values by which people’s actions can be judged. This is not the case with these three plays. Baillie and Schiller share a set of values: martyrdom is noble, freedom is beautiful, tyranny is dreadful, and it is wrong for these protagonists to die. And yet despite this common set of values, there is an important difference between *Maria Stuart* and the other two examples. The key ingredient is self-deformation. Cox identifies Schiller as the paradigmatic Romantic tragedian, and identifies “frustrated development” as his key theme: “For [his] characters, the world is a place of frustrations, of limitations that prevent them from fulfilling themselves.”³⁹ When they fail to realise their ideals in the world, they make a false bargain with it—as when Elizabeth chooses to execute Maria to uphold her own sovereignty. It is the “bad faith” and “self-falsification” of this false bargain that makes their downfall catastrophic.⁴⁰ Maria holds herself to be above earthly things, and is bitter in defeat. Elizabeth holds herself to be a just monarch, but falsifies herself by executing her kinswoman without trial. The lonely, silent queen finds her own soul hideous.

The importance of this ingredient was visible from the great distance of colonial Sydney. At the conclusion of Harpur’s tragedy,⁴¹ his antihero imagines the ghosts of his victims flocking round him, and vaunts his defiance of them:

³⁹ Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance*, 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The history of Harpur’s titles should give us some caution. The first version of his play was called a “Tragedy,” the second simply a “Play,” and the last had no label at all. But he never changed the ending.

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Hah, hah!

Well may you triumph now! Guilty! Yes, Guilty!

I did not plead Not Guilty! Mercy! (1853, 59)

There is a maniacal pessimism to these lines that is genuinely impressive. Like Schiller's Leicester or Elizabeth, Stalwart is consumed by self-loathing. He is in the grips of an identity crisis, in which he feels his guilt, but cannot accept that it is a part of his identity. He obsessively repeats the word "Guilty," turning a terrible and meaningful word of moral opprobrium into a mere sound. He scorns his victims when he says they "triumph" over him, implying that their rightful claims on his conscience are just an egotistical display. Of course, these victims are figments of his own fervid imagination. His final word, "Mercy!" transforms the gallant outlaw and Byronic scoffer into a pitiful weakling, contradicting his own name, "Stalwart." In the 1867 version of this speech, Stalwart cries "The play is over!" before delivering his self-lacerating monologue (1867, 82). Like Vivian, he concludes his sorry life with a keen sense of the self's artificiality. Harpur's obvious models for Stalwart, Shakespeare's Macbeth and Richard III, suffer no such identity crisis. In their final speeches, they accept who they are and what will happen to them. "I will not yield | To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet," cries Macbeth.⁴² "I have set my life upon a cast, | And I will stand the hazard of the die," cries Richard.⁴³ The deformed Stalwart, by contrast, minces his words, forsakes himself, and disintegrates.

In this way, *The Bushrangers* resembles Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819). Like Stalwart, Beatrice finally recognises her guilt (she has murdered her cruel father), but defies the law as Stalwart defies heaven. At the highpoint of her trial for murder, she cross-examines a witness brought against her:

⁴² William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. Johnathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 1914.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 1379.

tragedies, and her tragedies are themselves so different from one another that some push against any reasonable definition of the form. At the end of *Rayner* (1804), for instance, the innocent hero appears to be executed for a murder he did not commit, but then is saved at the last minute. He is ecstatic to be among the world of the living once more: "Surely 'tis a kind world I have return'd to; | There's sympathy and love in ev'ry heart." (418). Rayner's wrongful imprisonment, tortured conscience and threatened execution could be the stuff of tragedy, but his moral simplicity and the happy ending convert the whole into a typical Gothic melodrama. A mist of warm sentiment descends, and Rayner finds "the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams."⁴⁵ The effect is similar in *The Family Legend* (1810). Maclean's death, in full consciousness that he was "A poor, irresolute, and nerveless wretch" (506), is certainly tragic. But again, the focus on the play is more on his wife, Helen, and her heroic lover, Grey, who are free to marry once Maclean dies, and the play ends as a sentimental melodrama. *Constantine Palaeologus* is a different case. It is certainly tragic, but is in the Shakespearean mode, and at the moments of their death both Constantine and his wife Valeria are true to their natures. As Constantinople falls to the Ottomans, Constantine realises his "task is closed," throws off "the imperial purple" and dies "A noble soldier's death" (473). His wife Valeria heroically commits suicide to avoid becoming part of the sultan's harem. *Rayner* and *The Family Legend* are not particularly tragic; *Constantine Palaeologus* contradicts the idea of tragedy we have encountered in Schiller, Harpur and Shelley.

The tragedies in *Plays on the Passions*, however, all contain the crucial element of self-deformation. When the ambitious tyrant Ethwald dies at the end of *Ethwald Part Second* (1802), he has no last words. Instead one of his slayers

⁴⁵ Booth, *English Melodrama*, 14.

describes him: "... he dies sullenly, and to the wall | Turns his writh'd form and death-distorted visage." (197) Ethwald is weak, ill and bitter when the rebels storm into his bedroom to end his despotic rule. But his death brings no peace, and the rebels engage in the same kind of sordid politicking that mars Elizabeth's court in *Maria Stuart*. In all the tragedies on the passions, the protagonist is deformed by a ruling passion like Ethwald's ambition. In three of them, *Basil*, *Henriquez* and *Romiero*, passion drives the hero to suicide. In *De Monfort*, hatred drives him to murder, and grief makes him spontaneously drop dead. The two most interesting plays explore the passion of fear. In *The Dream*, Osterloo's fear gives him a lethal heart attack, while in *Orra*, the heroine's fear drives her mad, and she loses her grip on herself and the world.

In Baillie's plays, the self-deformation of passion almost always leads to intense self-loathing. When Basil, Henriquez, Romiero or De Monfort look within themselves, they see a hateful realm of dire passion, and they find the sight of themselves hideous:

DE MONFORT. ... I now am nothing.
I am a man of holy claims bereft;
Out of the pale of social kindred cast;
Nameless and horrible. (99)

In her "Introductory Discourse," Baillie claims that "it is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration" in her tragedies (16), but this is not how characters like De Monfort think. In their extreme self-loathing, they identify themselves with their fatal passion, and can see no way of destroying it but by destroying themselves.

We can see how important this element of self-loathing is to the tragic effect of Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* by comparing her *Henriquez* to Kleist's *Prinz*

Friedrich von Homburg (1821). These plays have strikingly similar plots. Both Henriquez and Homburg are correctly found guilty of a crime and sentenced to death. Both inspire pity in the hearts of all the other characters. Both are offered pardons—and refuse to accept them. Their refusals are very different, however. When the Elector gives Homburg the choice whether to accept his pardon, he feels he has no right to accept. It is not for a subject to evade the laws: the Elector “handle, wie er darf; | Mir ziemt’s hier zu verfahren, wie ich soll!”⁴⁶ He tells his fellow soldiers that the law is paramount:

Ruhig! Es ist mein unbeugsamer Wille!
 Ich will das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs,
 Das ich verletzt’ im Angesicht des Heers,
 Durch einen freien Tod verherrlichen!⁴⁷

Like Adeline, Homburg internalises society’s laws, but he does so freely and finds it uplifting. He is brave, and in a certain way, unrepentant. He says his crime was merely that he served his monarch “Mit übereiletem Eifer,” but that the law matters more than the individual.⁴⁸ Throughout the play, his optimism rarely fails him, though he quakes at the thought of death.

Baillie’s Henriquez, by contrast, is no dreamy youth. He commits murder in a jealous rage at the end of Act 1, and spends Acts 2, 3 and 4 brooding remorsefully, snapping at his friends, and allowing the innocent Antonio to take the rap for his crime. He loathes himself so much he comes to doubt the very possibility of having an authentic identity: “We are all masquers.” (367) Homburg is sure of his heart’s calling, but Henriquez feels only an incurable self-gnawing in his breast:

⁴⁶ “He acts as he *may*, | It suits me to proceed, as I *must*!” Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke* (Munich and Zurich: Droemer, 1965), 556.

⁴⁷ “Quiet! It is my unbendable will! | I want to ennoble the holy law of battle, | Which I injured in sight of the army, | Through a free death.” *Ibid.*, 567.

⁴⁸ “With excessively hasty eagerness.” *Ibid.*

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No; what can corporeal pain or penance do?
That which inflicts the mental wound, which rends
The hold of pride, wrenching the bent of nature;
'Tis that alone hath power. Yet from the effort
Nature starts back; my mind, stunn'd at the thought,
Loses the use of thought. (377)

The contradiction is clear: to satisfy his remorse, he must admit his guilt, and this means death. Homburg desires “einen freien Tod,” a “free death.”⁴⁹ Henriquez is not free, but the slave of internal forces. He realises that he can only atone through death, and makes the King swear not to pardon the murderer before confessing it is he. Had he clung to life, says Henriquez, he would “have shrunk aside, and been on earth | A sullen secret thing of wretchedness.” (380) But death restores his self-respect. This is the element of the play Carney misses when he interprets Henriquez as a Christian martyr on a quest for absolution, who “becomes more than he was before” in the moment of his death.⁵⁰ Time does not perfect Henriquez’s soul as the play progresses, turning him into the perfect Christian like Cordenius in *The Martyr*. Instead time deforms him, making his existence a burden.

Death is the only way Henriquez can see to resolve his self-contradictions. There is a happier and more obvious solution to the contradictions of Homburg’s situation. In the end, the Elector actually orders him to accept the pardon, which resolves the youth’s enthusiastic scruples about being an obedient subject: “Ist es ein Traum?”⁵¹ This option is not open to Henriquez, as his wife finds when she begs the King to pardon him:

LEONORA. A king, and not obey'd! deceitful shadow!
Doth not thy power o'er all things reign supreme?

⁴⁹ This is a play on “Freitod,” the German for “suicide.”

⁵⁰ Sean Carney, “The Passion of Joanna Baillie: Playwright as Martyr,” *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (2000): 249.

⁵¹ Kleist, *Werke*, 571.

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KING. Not o'er men's wills.—

This is a power heaven to itself retains,

And ne'er did delegate to mortal being. (381)

The King's law follows the logic of Henriquez's self-loathing, which can only be satisfied by self-destruction. Freedom in this dark play means death. Baillie called this terrible story of rage and remorse a "Tragedy." Kleist called his play in which the heart, the law, grace, justice, youth and age mystically converge in the very teeth of tragedy a "Schauspiel" ("Play").

Romantic tragedies drew on the quest-narratives and psychological themes of popular melodramas, twisting them into terrible tales of self-loathing and self-destruction. The tragic heroes of Harpur, Baillie, Shelley and Schiller become progressively more deformed, and they become progressively more conscious of their deformity. In many of these plays, this deformity drives the hero to murder: Stalwart and most of Baillie's protagonists become butchers of human flesh, as do for instance Goethe's Faust and Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1837). In other plays, essentially innocent characters are deformed into madness or death: Baillie's Orra and Count Osterloo are characters of this type, as is Byron's Manfred. The catastrophe of these plays comes when the hero looks into their own soul, and sees a vision of horror. In a moment of intense alienation, they find themselves hideous, killing themselves like Baillie's Count Basil, throwing themselves heedlessly into their final battle like Stalwart, or dying under the pure force of their own passion, like Orra or Osterloo. These heroes suffer terrible identity crises, whose only solution is oblivion.

It is often said that the Romantics aped Shakespeare, but his tragic heroes are normally much surer of their identities than their deformed Romantic

successors. Lear is “every inch a king.”⁵² Hamlet has “that within which passeth show.”⁵³ Cleopatra is “fire, and air: my other elements | I give to baser life.”⁵⁴ The tragic heroes of Romanticism can rarely define themselves so clearly. De Musset’s *Lorenzaccio* (1834) achieves the height of glory when he slays a tyrant. But his violence and deceit fill him with uncertainty:

Par le ciel! quel homme de cire suis-je donc! Le Vice, comme la robe de Déjanire, s’est-il si profondément incorporé à mes fibres, que je ne puisse plus répondre de ma langue, et que l’air qui sort de mes lèvres se fasse ruffian malgré moi?⁵⁵

It was just such men of “wax” that Hegel objected to, when he complained of the “raggedness” of Romantic characterisation.⁵⁶ In his ideal tragedy, characters should conflict with one another, not with themselves; each character should embody a different force, so that the dialogue and actions of the characters can portray the collision of different forces in the world—but many of the most fascinating Romantic protagonists are so twisted by inward contradictions that they cannot clearly embody a single force.

It is not obvious why this view of life is “non-tragic,” as Steiner suggests. It may be that Romantic tragedy is not tragic in the manner of Sophocles, Shakespeare or Racine. But there is something terrible in the destinies of characters like Harpur’s and Baillie’s. It is the catastrophe of non-existence. If you look within yourself, and see something you can only loathe or misunderstand, then in a sense you are already dead. We have seen how novelists, poets and biographers of the period explored this terrible condition. In the following two sections, we will see how Baillie and Harpur

⁵² Shakespeare, *Works*, 2058.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 1929.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2236.

⁵⁵ “By heaven! what a man of wax am I, then! Has Vice, like the robe of Deianira, so deeply incorporated itself in the fibres of my being, that I can’t answer for my own tongue, and that the air leaving my lips becomes a pimp despite me?” Alfred de Musset, *Lorenzaccio* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941), 91.

⁵⁶ See above, note 7.

explored it, by pitching their protagonists against society (§5.2) and introducing new metaphysical depths to the issue of self-deformation (§5.3).

5.2 Individual and Society

Aristotle had rooted tragedy in *hubris* and *harmatia*, in human pride and the dire deeds to which it drives us. Steiner argues that under the influence of Rousseau, the Romantics began to blame society for all the protagonist's wrongs instead.⁵⁷ Eagleton agrees: "... on the whole [the Romantics] would prefer to blame ruin and affliction on the powers which oppress the human subject, rather than contemplate any central flaw in that subject's constitution."⁵⁸ Eagleton cites *Manfred* as an example, but it is a strange choice. Manfred insists that he "was [his] own destroyer," not society, and is oppressed by nothing but his own guilty conscience (*BW*, 406). In her "Introductory Discourse," Baillie also contradicts Steiner and Eagleton:

It is a characteristick of the more powerful passions that they will encrease and nourish themselves on very slender aliment; it is from within that they are chiefly supplied with what they feed on; and it is in contending with opposite passions and affections of the mind that we least discover their strength, not with events. (10)

She claims that her tragic protagonists are deformed by inner forces. Society and oppression are at best a "slender aliment" for the passions that derange them. In *The Dream*, the good Count Osterloo may be imprisoned by the tyrannical Prior, but he drops dead of his own fear before the Prior's executioners can behead him.

There are plays, however, which do seem to fit Eagleton's description—like *The Bushrangers*. Stalwart admits he is "the accursed slave | Of lawless passion," much like Baillie's characters (1853, 28). But he blames society for this slavery:

⁵⁷ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 127.

⁵⁸ Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 204-5. Williams calls this "liberal tragedy," and agrees that it had its roots in Romanticism: Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, chap. 1.

DRAMA: THE HIDEOUS SOULS OF BAILLIE AND HARPUR

I, even I, am more
Unfortunate than guilty. Hear my story.
A villain's dupe at first, I found myself
An exile, and a tyrant's bondman;—one,
Who for some reason I could never learn,
Both feared and hated me;—and who, with all
The petty fretfulness of power so placed,
Was wont to solace the meanness of his hate,
And mask its utter cowardice, the while,
With hourly hurling the opprobrious term
Of *convict* in my teeth! I sought redress,
In vain! the Law was an oppressor too!
I murmured—and was scourged! Oh! 'twas too much!
Wrath thundered in my heart! Their bonds enringed
My limbs as with intolerable fire!—
I cast them off! I cursed my kind—and fled,
Outlawed but free, into the woods: where now
My name, notorious from my having baffled
The vigilance of the Police so long,
Is daily debited with such crimes as I
Nor do, nor would commit. (20)

Baillie's characters live in a mythic Gothic past of gloomy castles and deep, lonely woods. Stalwart describes the penal system of Harpur's own New South Wales, in which transported convicts were assigned to a master for a term of years, and could be punished severely for any infractions. The "tyrant," the "bondman," and the "*convict*" would have been members of Harpur's audience, had he managed to get the play produced in 1835. Stalwart's critique of this social order is rooted in the philosophy we encountered in Chapter 1. Mary Wollstonecraft, we saw, blamed the "very constitution of civil society" for the degradation of women. She also blamed it for the violence of criminals like Stalwart:

In fact, from what I saw, in the fortresses of Norway, I am more and more convinced that the same energy of character, which renders a man a daring villain, would have

DRAMA: THE HIDEOUS SOULS OF BAILLIE AND HARPUR

rendered him useful to society, had that society been well organized. When a strong mind is not disciplined by cultivation, it is a sense of injustice that renders it unjust.⁵⁹

Stalwart seems to fit the mould described by Steiner and Eagleton. He is a radical Rousseauian, who excoriates the society of Harpur and his readers, and argues that evil has a social rather than a metaphysical cause.

Stalwart is not the first Romantic bandit to rebel against society in this way, but it is remarkable that he is lower-class. Harpur based Stalwart on John Donohoe, a real bushranger active in New South Wales from 1828 to 1830, who was not only lower-class, but Irish.⁶⁰ The importance of Stalwart's social status is clear if we compare him to Victor Hugo's great bandit leader in *Hernani* (1829):

Je suis Jean d'Aragon, grand-maître d'Avis, né
Dans l'exil, fils proscrit d'un père assassiné
Par sentence du tien, roi Carlos de Castille!
Le meurtre est entre nous affaire de famille.
Vous avez l'échafaud, nous avons le poignard.
Donc le ciel m'a fait duc et l'exil montagnard.⁶¹

Both *Hernani* and Stalwart blame their exile for making them violent, both see the law as a mere tool of power, and both feel stripped of honour and dignity. But *Hernani*'s honour is not the same as Stalwart's. Hugo described his play as the poetic expression of "liberalism,"⁶² but his bandit hero seems to care more about aristocracy than equality. *Hernani* looks back to his birth and parentage to define himself. Stalwart looks back only to his fall into crime: "*at first*" he was "a villain's dupe." *Hernani* complains he has lost noble titles, Stalwart only that he has lost his

⁵⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Scandinavian Letters*, 208-09.

⁶⁰ See Elizabeth Perkins, "Introduction," Harpur, *Stalwart the Bushranger, with the Tragedy of Donohoe*, xxiii-xxvii.

⁶¹ "I am Juan of Aragon, Grandmaster of Aviz, born | In exile, outlawed son of a father assassinated | Under your sentence, King Carlos de Castile! | Murder, between us, is a family matter. | You have the scaffold, we have the sword. | So heaven made me a duke, and exile a mountain-dweller." Victor Hugo, *Hernani*, ed. Yves Gohin (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 160.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.

Christian name. Only a few of Hugo's readers share Hernani's aristocratic status. Every reader shares Stalwart's creaturely dignity.

Stalwart's class makes *The Bushrangers* strikingly innovative. Most canonical Gothic bandits are aristocrats: consider Karl Moor in *Die Räuber* (1782), Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1796), Leonardo in *Zofloya, or The Moor* (1804), Lanfranco in *The Old Oak Chest* (1816), or Franko, in Baillie's *Orra*. Stalwart belongs partly to a different tradition. During his brief and ignominious stint at Sydney's new Theatre Royal in the 1830s, Harpur seems to have acted in two melodramas, *The Miller and his Men* and *Mutiny at the Nore* (1830), whose villains are lower-class rebels.⁶³ Like Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* or Georg Büchner in *Woyzeck*, Harpur took this figure of the lower-class villain and turned them into the hero. It is quite possible that *The Tragedy of Donohoe* was the first literary tragedy in English with a lower-class protagonist.⁶⁴

It is easy to read Stalwart's speech as a left-wing revolt, the voice of Harpur, the "currency lad" of convict parentage crying out against the prejudices of an increasingly snobbish New South Wales.⁶⁵ Its satire seems even more cutting if we consider how Australian theatre had changed in Harpur's time. Theatre in the early colony had been largely a convict affair. Free settlers may have stumped up the cash, but most of the cast and crew were the scum of the earth. When Sydney got its first patent theatre in 1833, however, convicts were banished from the stage, even if they

⁶³ The "Mr Harpur" listed in the relevant documents could possibly be his brother, however: "Biography," *The Charles Harpur Critical Archive*, ed. Paul Eggert, Sydney University Press, accessed 16 August, 2017, <http://charlesharpur.org/harpur/tabs?tabset=biography&docid=english/harpur>

⁶⁴ Veronica Kelly, "The Melodrama of Defeat: Political Patterns in Some Colonial and Contemporary Australian Plays," *Southerly* 50, no. 2 (1990), ¶16.

⁶⁵ By 1834, when Harpur presented his play to the *Monitor*, 19.3% of the European population were free settlers, up from 6.5% in 1820, and they were coming to dominate colonial society: Noel Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy, Australia 1810-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37.

held a “ticket-of-leave” allowing them to work.⁶⁶ Harpur created his tortured convict antihero at just the moment when convicts ceased to be actors in Australia. This was perhaps one reason Harpur could never get the play produced. It is delightful to imagine the scandal that may have ensued, had the good burghers of Sydney been presented with this play about a Byronic convict murdering an innocent man and blaming free settlers for the crime.

At first glance, *The Bushrangers* seems to confirm Steiner and Eagleton’s theory. By contrast, Baillie’s two great plays on fear, *Orra* and *The Dream*, seem at first to contradict it utterly. In both these plays, the passion of fear seems to be self-acting and oblivious to external circumstances, in just the manner Baillie describes in her “Introductory Discourse.” Orra is addicted to ghost stories, and once she begins to sup of their horrors, she finds it hard to stop:

Yea, when the cold blood shoots through every vein:
When every pore upon my shrunken skin
A knotted knoll becomes, and to mine ears
Strange inward sounds awake, and to mine eyes
Rush stranger tears, there is a joy in fear. (242)

Orra’s fear is so powerful it alienates her from her own body: her ears pick up “strange” sounds, the tears that fill her eyes are “strangers.” It takes her out of herself and the world, and yet delights her. Osterloo is also a fearful addict of ghost stories. When a monk dreams of a murdered man, and Osterloo recognises it as Montera, whom he murdered himself years before, his guilty conscience awakes his fear:

That this smothered horror should burst upon me at last! And there be really such things as the darkened fancy imageth to itself, when the busy day is stilled.—An unseen world surrounds us: spirits and powers, and the invisible dead hover near us; while we in unconscious security— ... Am I truly awake? (268)

⁶⁶ Jordan, *Convict Theatres of Early Australia*, 179.

Osterloo is imprisoned in his own mind's "darkened fancy," and can no longer distinguish reality from thought. In both *Orra* and *The Dream*, passion alienates the protagonist from the material world of the body and of things, haunting them with images of death. They enter an "unseen world" apart from society, and rational characters like Theobald or Benedict are unable to call them back.

It seems that Harpur and Baillie represent two very different kinds of Romantic self-deformation. Stalwart is deformed by society, Orra and Osterloo by the energies of their own minds. As we consider the plays more closely, however, the picture becomes more complex. It is true that Stalwart blames society for his misdeeds, but there are reasons to doubt his sincerity. When he gives his great speech, he is wounded and on the run, and is trying to persuade the virtuous Ada to give him shelter. He lies to her, claiming to be no murderer, though he later admits to his friend Macblood that he has killed before (45). When he finishes his speech, he promises Ada he will forsake bushranging, find a "cave" and embrace "Solitude" like a hermit (21). He never does any of these things. His speech is certainly a revolutionary manifesto, but it is also a self-serving monologue marred by his own dire passions.

Similarly, it becomes apparent that Orra and Osterloo's fears have a basis in the social order. Cathrina feeds Orra's addiction by telling her ghost stories. She is being blackmailed to do so by Rudigere, an illegitimate son itching for Orra's inheritance. Orra finally goes mad when she thinks she sees a ghost—but her belief is well-founded. She is in Brunier's tower at midnight on Michelmas, the very place and time where one of Cathrina's ghosts is supposed to appear, when Theobald bursts in to rescue her disguised as the very ghost from the story. Orra is only in the tower because she is an orphan, and 14th-century laws allow her uncle to imprison

her. She only believes in ghosts, points out Baillie in her preface to the play, because she is a medieval woman without the benefit of modern education (228). Thus a whole range of social factors conspire to evoke her fear: women's honour, inheritance laws, patriarchal authority, and pervasive medieval superstitions.

Osterloo is a celebrated general, but he too is society's victim. The Prior abuses his clerical authority to imprison and summarily sentence Osterloo for Montera's murder. He intensifies Osterloo's fear of hell by giving him no time to repent. The other gloomy monks only make the situation worse by telling Osterloo about the perils of damnation. Even the monk Benedict, a sceptical humanist like Umberto Eco's William of Baskerville, is forced to conclude that hellfire does await the unabsolved: "Nature teaches this as well as revelation: we must believe it" (267). Osterloo's fear may come from his own mind, but it is nourished by the social order of the medieval monastery, in the broader context of the Holy Roman Empire. Baillie may have claimed that the passions feed on "slender aliment" in her plays, but both Orra and Osterloo apparently have good reason to be scared.

These plays are challenging to interpret, because there is a tension between their language and plot. Stalwart says he is society's victim, but the plot lays some of the fault at his door. Orra and Osterloo say they are trapped inside their own minds, but the plot traps them in the tyrannical order of feudal Europe. To unpick the complicated relationship between dialogue and plot in these novels, I use character network analysis. Network analysis is a mathematical method for modelling the interactions between entities. You can model anything as a network, provided you can define the "nodes," and the "edges" that join them.⁶⁷ Here, the

⁶⁷ These definitions are inevitably difficult and contestable in literary applications. They inevitably involve "questionable decisions:" Franco Moretti, "Network Theory, Plot Analysis," *New Left Review* 68 (2011), 81. I address this problem in Michael Falk, "Making Connections: Network Analysis, the

nodes are characters, and the edges between them represent their dialogue with one another (Figures 5.2-4).⁶⁸

Figure 5.2

The Bushrangers (1853)

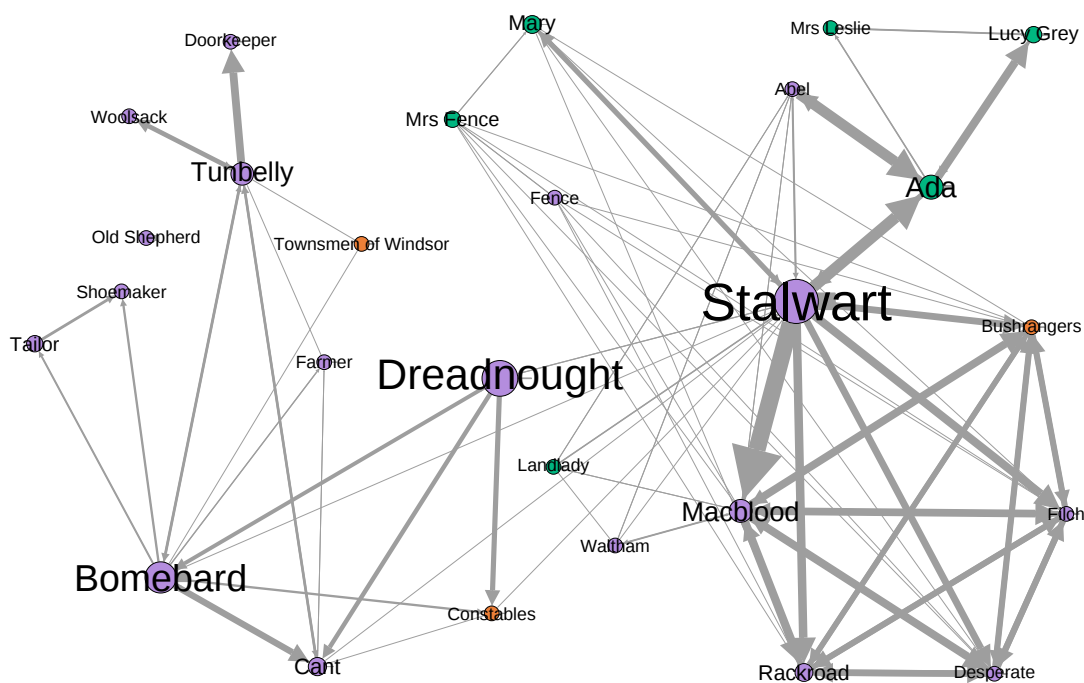


Figure 5.2 is the “graph” or network diagram of *The Bushrangers*. It shows a few key features of the model. The colour of the nodes indicates the gender of the character, defined as either “male,” “female” or “group.”⁶⁹ The thickness of the “edges” between the nodes represents the number of words spoken by the characters to one another, and the arrows indicate in which direction the dialogue is addressed. Stalwart says 1169 words to his accomplice Macblood, for instance, while Macblood says 264 words in return. Unfortunately this means that the arrow from Macblood

Bildungsroman, and the World of *the Absentee*,” *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 63, no. 2-3 (2016), 111-12.

⁶⁸ Data analysis was done using iGraph: Gabor Csardi, iGraph Package: Network Analysis and Visualization, Ver. 1.0.1, CRAN, Vienna. The images were produced in Gephi: M Bastian, S Heymann, and M Jacomy, “Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks,” in *3rd International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (San Jose, California, 2009).

⁶⁹ “Group” characters are those who are never referred to individually. They either act and speak *en masse*, or are identified purely as group members: “First bushranger,” “second attendant” etc.

back to Stalwart is completely obscured—it is impossible to represent all the information modelled by the network elegantly in a single graphic. Finally, the size of the nodes is relative to each characters’ “betweenness” score. Betweenness is a common “centrality” measure in network analysis, which measures how important each node is for connecting other nodes to one another in the network.⁷⁰ To calculate betweenness, you find the shortest paths between each node and every other, accounting for the “weight” or thickness of the edges. The more of these shortest paths a particular node lies on, the higher its betweenness. Franco Moretti has suggested characters with higher betweenness tend to be more powerful.⁷¹ Certainly the potent Stalwart and his adversary Dreadnought are the play’s most powerful figures.

When we compare the graph of *The Bushrangers* to *Orra* and *The Dream* (Figures 5.4-5), two key contrasts emerge. The first key is that Baillie’s plays are smaller and more unified, with a few key relationships dominating the structure. A tight network of four principal characters interact intensely, with a looser network of minor characters on the periphery. *The Dream* is anchored in the four-way relationship between Osterloo, Jerome, Benedict and the Prior. *Orra* is anchored in the four-way relationship between Orra, Rudigere, Hughobert and Cathrina. Harpur’s play, by contrast, is split into two barely connected worlds. On the left of the graph is the Windsor township, with its judge (Tunbelly), police (Bomebard, Cant) and townsfolk (Tailor, Shoemaker, Farmer). On the right is the bush, with its band of bushrangers (Macblood, Filch, Desperate, Rackroad), innkeepers (Landlady, the Fences) and idyllic foresters (Ada, Abel, Lucy Grey). Stalwart and

⁷⁰ See Linton C Freeman, “A Set of Measures of Centrality Based on Betweenness,” *Sociometry* 40, no. 1 (1977).

⁷¹ Franco Moretti, “Operationalizing’: Or, the Function of Measurement in Modern Literary Theory,” *New Left Review* 84 (2013): 109.

Dreadnought's slender relationship is the main bridge between these two worlds, and they only say 141 words to each other. The world of Harpur's play is as fractured as Baillie's are intense.

The second key contrast is more specific. In the bottom-right corner of Figure 5.2 there is a densely connected web of characters, Stalwart's band of bushrangers. There is no such web in either of Baillie's plays, nor elsewhere on Harpur's graph. We will see how this web represents a special kind of dialogue and characterisation, with important ramifications for Harpur's and Baillie's visions of society.

Figure 5.3

The Dream

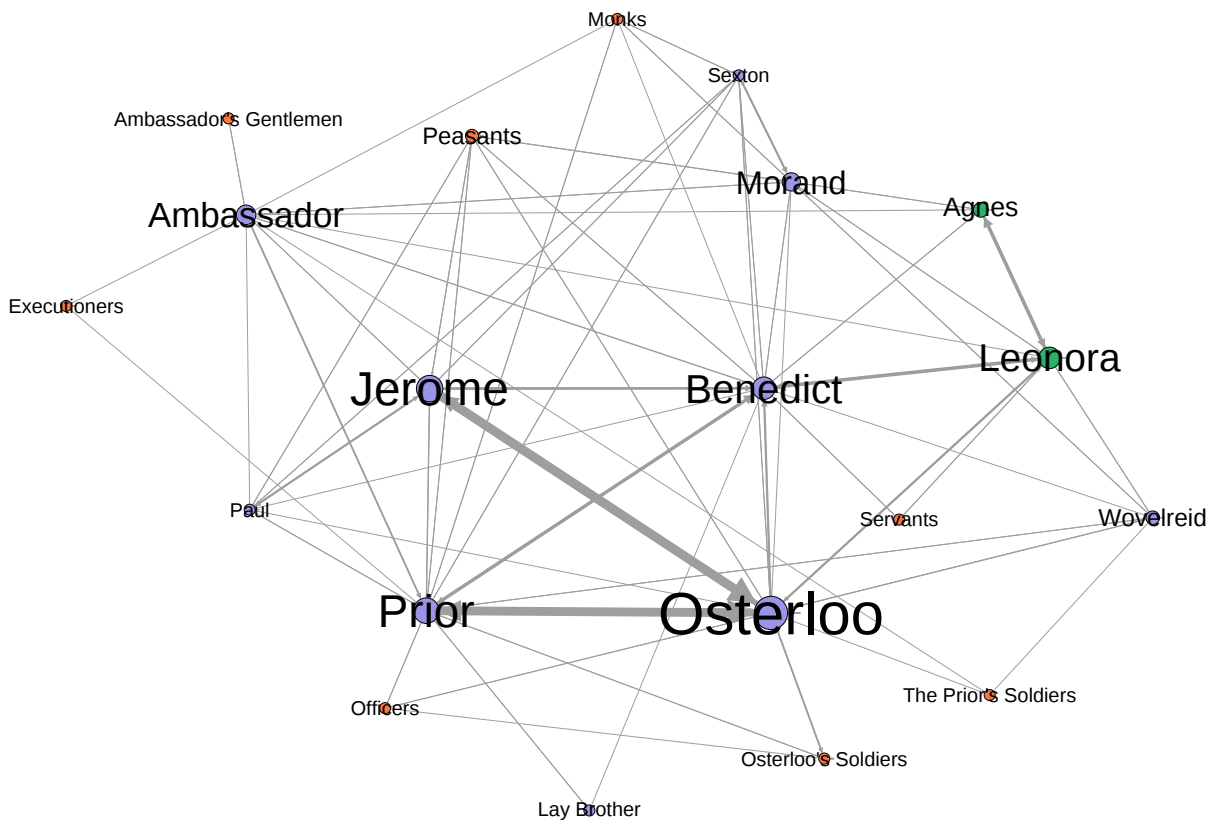
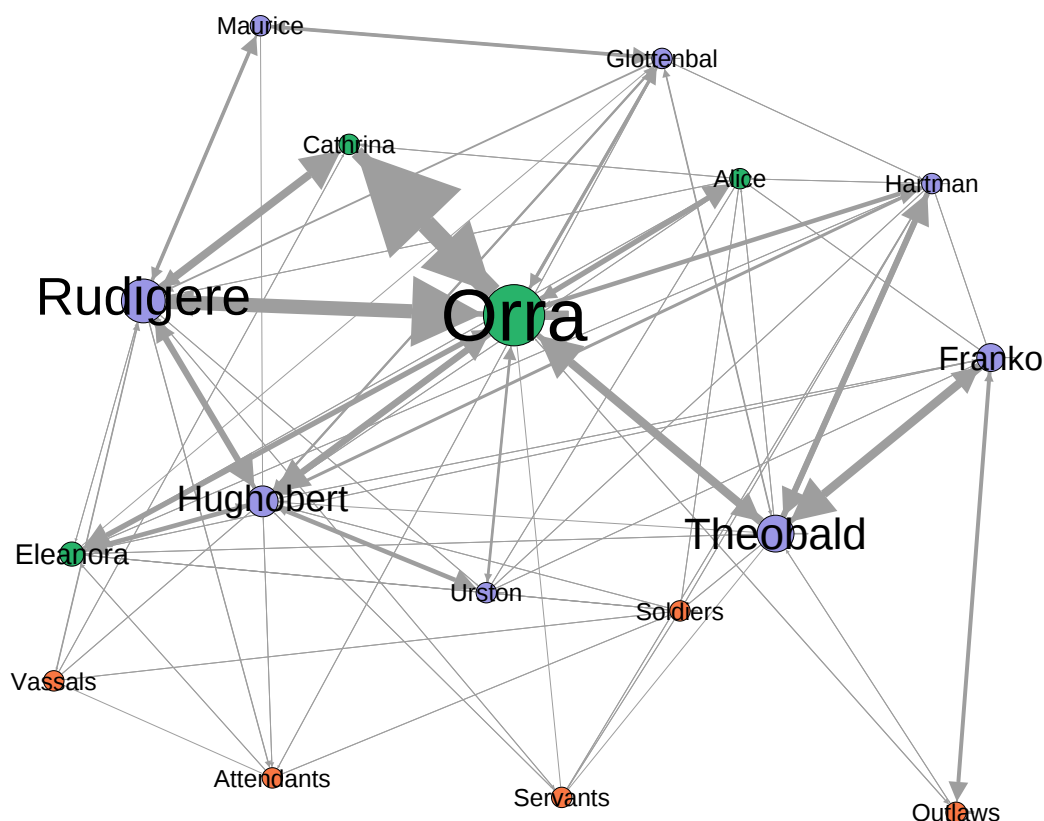


Figure 5.4

Orra



Baillie aspired for her plays to have a “simpler construction” (10), and network analysis reveals in what way she made them simpler. Neither her psychologically deep characters nor her twisting and turning plots are simple. What is simpler about these plays is their unified character-systems.⁷² Key characters are introduced early, and their unfolding relationships in a few key locations dominate the entire plot. Harpur takes a different approach. His play sprawls, constantly introducing new characters who do not know one another, and new settings separated in place and time. Table 5.1 puts these differences between Harpur and Baillie’s plays in comparative perspective.

⁷² I take this term from Alex Woloch, *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003). See especially the Introduction. See also Moretti, “Network Theory, Plot Analysis,” 82-84.

Table 5.1

Network structure: Baillie and Harpur compared

	Unification			Modularity	
	Nodes	Mean degree*	Density [†]	Classes	Score*
Baillie, <i>Orra</i>	17	9.53	60%	2	0.22
Baillie, <i>The Dream</i>	20	7.40	39%	6	0.22
Harpur, <i>The Bushrangers</i>	27	6.59	25%	6	0.41
Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i>	42	5.48	13%	8	0.40
Racine, <i>Iphigénie</i>	11	5.27	53%	4	0.23
Coleridge, <i>Remorse</i>	16	4.75	32%	9	0.28
Hemans, <i>Vespers of Palermo</i>	20	6.10	32%	13	0.15

*2 d.p., †0 d.p.

These statistics measure the size and structure of Baillie’s and Harpur’s fictional worlds. “Nodes” is simply the number of characters—though group characters, like the “peasants” of *The Dream* or *Vespers of Palermo* and the “bushrangers” of *The Bushrangers*, are treated as a single node for this analysis. “Mean degree” measures how many other characters each character interacts with. Each character in *Remorse*, for instance, speaks to or is spoken to by 4.75 other characters on average. “Density” measures how many of the possible connections in the network are actually present. If a network had only two nodes, A and B, then the density would be 100% if either A spoke to B (A → B) and/or B spoke to A (B → A). If neither spoke to the other, the density would be 0%. A play with fewer characters and higher mean degree and density can be said to have a more unified structure. The characters are tightly connected by webs of acquaintance, and will tend to form part of a single social world. The second group of statistics measures the “modularity” of each play. Using a “walktrap” algorithm, the computer sorts all the

characters of each play into “communities” of closely-related nodes.⁷³ “Classes” is the number of communities the algorithm discovered; the modularity score measures how distinct the communities are from one another. If the characters in the play tend to talk mostly to members of their own community, then the score will be higher. If the community structure of the play is more fluid, and the characters tend to interact outside their group, the score will be lower. In the divided world of Harpur’s play, the modularity is nearly twice as high as in the more unified worlds of Baillie’s.

It is often observed that the Romantics based their plays on Shakespeare’s models, rejecting the neoclassicism popular in the eighteenth century. We have already encountered Nicoll’s derisive reference to the “dead hand of Elizabethanism.”⁷⁴ During the period too, writers were highly aware of Shakespeare’s resurgent influence. When Harpur and his hero Keats turned their mind to the theatre, Shakespeare was their almost exclusive study.⁷⁵ Across the channel, *les classiques* sparred with *les romantiques*. We must reject Shakespeare and his “dramas monstrueux,” his “compositions désordonnées et gigantesques,” fumed the Academie Française. Shakespeare was the product of “un siècle de barbarie”!⁷⁶ Not so, cried the young Romantics of Paris—this is an age of revolution, and playwrights should follow the Englishman’s example, smashing the old rules of neoclassical decorum. One playwright who dissented from this hot

⁷³ To do this, the computer treats the network like a map, and randomly “walks” from node to node. The algorithm prefers to walk along the weightier edges. The idea is that short random walks should end up in the same community where they began. See Pascal Pons and Matthieu Latapy, “Computing Communities in Large Networks Using Random Walks,” *Journal of Graph Algorithms and Applications* 10, no. 2 (2006).

⁷⁴ Above, p. 234.

⁷⁵ Aileen Ward, *John Keats: The Making of a Poet* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), 151; J. Normington-Rawling, *Charles Harpur: An Australian* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962), 44.

⁷⁶ “... monstrous dramas ... oversized and disordered compositions ... a century of barbarism!” M. Auger, “Manifest contre le romantisme,” quoted in Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, 113.

⁷⁷

debate was Joanna Baillie. When she moved to Hampstead, she took advantage of the British Museum, reading both the Elizabethans and the great neoclassical playwrights of seventeenth-century France. She claimed, in a typically Romantic way, that she preferred nature to any of these literary models: “I did not find much in our old plays to interest me ... I proceeded in my work, following simply my own notions of real nature, I began to feel imaginary scenes & Theatrical representation.”⁷⁸ But the influence of both Shakespeare and Racine on her drama is obvious. She combines Shakespeare’s large casts and copious blank verse with Racine’s high density, low modularity, and constriction to a smaller range of locations—we will see, too, how much her idea of passion resembles Racine’s (§5.3).

Harpur, meanwhile, was more determinedly Shakespearean than most. The cast of *The Bushrangers* is large by the standards of Romantic tragedy, the density low and the modularity high. The pattern of characters’ interactions is fundamentally different in Harpur and Baillie. Harpur’s play is a chain of islands. Most of the characters barely interact with anyone outside their little circle of acquaintance. The successive scenes of the play lurch between these different worlds. In one scene, we might see Stalwart braving the wilds with his men, and in the next, see blustering Ned Bomebard big-note himself to the Windsor constabulary. Kelly describes this as “symmetrical character patterning.”⁷⁹ Baillie’s plays, by contrast, are as tight and claustrophobic as Racine’s, despite her large casts. She achieves this by throwing her characters together onstage (Racine prefers offstage action), and her characters thus all have a large circle of acquaintance relative to the size of the world in which they live.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Judith Slagle, *Joanna Baillie: A Literary Life* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 67.

⁷⁹ Kelly, “The Melodrama of Defeat,” ¶4.

These different plot structures result in different approaches to dialogue. In Harpur's expansive world, characters tend to speak a sociolect, the language of their class or occupation. In Baillie's claustrophobic worlds, characters tend to speak an idiolect, the language of their individual personality or psychology. We can see how differently Harpur and Baillie handle dialogue by examining the most distinctive words in each character's vocabulary.⁸⁰ Table 5.2 displays the 10 most distinctive words for the 5 most talkative characters in each play:

Table 5.2
Most distinctive words (tf-idf) by play and character

Play	Character	Words Spoken	Most Distinctive Words
<i>Orra</i>	Orra	4216	awake sounds awful dreadful earth air dark beneath its past
	Rudigere	2627	hour never agent price rigid thee here this blood will
	Hughobert	1629	son blind boy consequence dolt father's flatterers parts plighted stubborn
	Theobald	1542	none captain devoted Hartman honour'd ever sight crave devotion guarded
	Cathrina	1164	set story hide bed eve Michael's run since ancestor clotted
<i>The Dream</i>	Osterloo	2233	loved thou Albert art before thank did awake midnight your
	Jerome	1986	son Paul thy form imagination retire said frame satisfied thou
	Prior	1986	order your compelled die draw whole heaven thou lives halt
	Benedict	1113	fears brother thou guilty Jerome moved his most agitated confessed
	Leonora	1062	Agnes Benedict thou thy Osterloo his marriage rise didst door

⁸⁰ For *tf-idf*, see above, p. 7, n. 11. Moretti uses a similar approach, though he does not specify the particular algorithm: Moretti, "Operationalizing," 10-11.

Play	Character	Words Spoken	Most Distinctive Words
<i>The Bushrangers</i>	Stalwart	3897	horrible Mary her would maiden scorn she shame that blood
	Ada	1765	Abel not his wind promise heart you could fear indeed
	Bomebard	1665	says does jist walian Windsor ill Cant off yous here
	Tunbelly	1365	respect sir Ned mark you answer never chosen robberies rotundity
	Abel	1227	thy Ada sweet dark love how less just breathing dream

In her “Introductory Discourse,” Baillie argues that plays should be written in “the language of the agitated soul, which every age and nation understand” (3), anticipating Wordsworth’s famous claim that the language of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) expressed the “elementary feelings” of humankind (*WW*, 735). To portray the “agitated soul,” Baillie brings characters together whose aims and aspirations clash. In both *Orra* and *The Dream*, four of the five most talkative characters live together (the exceptions are Theobald and Leonora). They share a social situation. What differentiates the characters are their personalities and their position in the web of personal relationships. The bastard Rudigere fiercely desires legitimacy, and is driven to scheming, bribery and blackmail to improve his position: distinctive words include “blood,” “price” and “agent.” The tyrannical Prior rules the monastery with an iron fist, and is driven to execute Osterloo by an overwhelming desire for vengeance: “order,” “compelled” and “die” are distinctive words. Both *Orra* and *Osterloo* suffer the passion of fear, and the same word, “awake,” testifies to their shared symptom of insomnia.

Contemporaries found Baillie's language powerful and emotional: "It was yet interesting to find the meagre dialogue and feeble characters, which had so long shadowed the stage, suddenly invaded by bold diction and personages of muscular, if of unnatural proportions," recalled one reviewer in 1821.⁸¹ Her verse is usually fluid and exuberant:

HUGHOBERT. Art thou bewitch'd?
 Is he not young, well featured and well form'd?
 And dost thou put him in thy estimation
 With bones and sheeted clay?
 Beyond endurance is thy stubborn spirit.
 Right well thy father knew that all thy sex
 Stubborn and headstrong are; therefore, in wisdom,
 He vested me with power that might compel thee
 To what he will'd should be. (245)

Like Falkland in *Caleb Williams* (1793), Hughobert is a conservative aristocrat with a keen sense of honour. By refusing to marry his son Glottenbal, Orra succeeds in raising his passion, which he expresses in a tide of rhetorical questions, parallelisms, alliteration, inversions and lurid imagery of the human body (probably betraying the influence of Baillie's famous medical relatives, the Hunters). The other characters of the play speak in a similar style whenever they are impassioned. But they are impassioned by different situations for and for different reasons. Hughobert is incensed by his "stubborn" niece and "dolt" of a son, Theobald by his "devoted" love for Orra.

In *The Dream*, the monastery becomes a metaphor for the mind itself. The Prior is the rampant superego, obsessed with the moral law; Jerome is the mystical, dreaming spokesperson for our unconscious life; and Benedict is the rational

⁸¹ "Drury Lane," *The European magazine, and London review* 80 (1821): 567.

representative of the ego. These characters speak in prose, but their prose is as bold and copious as *Orra's* verse:

BENEDICT. ... But for the love of our holy saint, bethink you, ere it be too late, that though we may be saved from the pestilence by this bloody sacrifice, what will rescue our throats from the swords of Osterloo's soldiers, when they shall return, as they have threatened, to demand from us their General? (269)

This is Baillie's idea of the voice of reason, full of "holy saints," "pestilence," "bloody sacrifice" and "throats" cut by the swords of throning soldiers. Benedict is an enthusiastic rationalist. In the tense, psychological world of Baillie's plays, language pours from the soul, in a cascade of ever more gorgeous imagery. In this context, the protagonist's deformation can seem an essentially private and mental affair.

The fabric of Harpur's language is utterly different. The five most talkative characters in *The Bushrangers* inhabit different worlds and speak different dialects. Tunbelly and Bomebard are part of the Windsor establishment, Ada and Abel live in the forest, and Stalwart lives nowhere. Tunbelly with his "Sir" and "respect" and "rotundity" lives in a different linguistic universe to Ada and Abel with their intimate speech and natural imagery. But the best example of Harpur's socially inflected dialogue is Ned Bomebard, the cowardly constable:

My wife says, Glory's the foolishistus thing in all the wide world round, and that my fondness for it 'ill get me a death soonerer or laterer, and leave her a weeping widder without a dump! But she 'ticultates blasphybious words, and ought to lose her mortal tongue in consekence. And besides, amn't I the Walian Dog? Yes I am — there! (11)

Bomebard's loose syntax, faulty logic and misuse of words come straight out of Shakespeare. Here is the Australian successor to Dogberry or Elbow. Harpur's interest is different to Shakespeare's, however. Shakespeare's idiotic constables are images of mere stupidity, introduced for comic relief. Bomebard represents the hollowness of the social order. His bragging and brownnosing have made him the most respected policeman in Windsor. His best friend is the aptly-named Cant, a

fanatical Methodist who crudely applies pulpit language to every situation. Bomebard's entire identity is built on what others—like his wife—say about him: his most distinctive word is “says.” Like Edgeworth and Opie, Harpur has a sense of the shared and social elements of language. Stalwart lives in a socially stratified world. When he complains of the “petty fretfulness” of the powerful, he brings the anxious and loquacious Bomebard to mind.

Language and plot structure work together in Baillie and Harpur's plays. Baillie's smaller, denser plots and expressive language confine us within the mind. Harpur's larger, looser plot and social language brings an entire social and political order into the frame. Nonetheless, network analysis reveals how Baillie also wove a social dimension into her plays, using similar methods to Harpur.

The walktrap algorithm is remarkably good at detecting the social divisions of *The Bushrangers* (Table 5.3). Group 1 is Windsor, Group 2 is the bush, Group 3 are the bushrangers and the innkeepers who host them and Group 4 are Windsor's government officials. It is not surprising that these social divisions should be so marked in Harpur's highly fragmented play. What is surprising is how effectively the algorithm detects social classes in Baillie's plays (Tables 5.4-5).

Table 5.3

Modularity classes, *The Bushrangers*

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Groups 5, 6
Bomebard	Abel	Bushrangers	Doorkeeper	Old Shepherd
Cant	Ada	Desperate	Tunbelly	Townsfolk of Windsor
Constables	Lucy Grey	Filch	Woolsack	
Dreadnought	Mrs Leslie	Landlady		
Farmer		Macblood		
Shoemaker		Mary Fence		
Tailor		Mrs Fence		
		Old Fence		
		Rackroad		
		Stalwart		
		Walmer		

Table 5.4

Modularity Classes, *Orra*

	Group 1		Group 2
Alice	Attendants	Cathrina	Franko
Eleanora	Glottenbal	Hughobert	Hartman
Maurice	Orra	Rudigere	Outlaws
Servants	Soliders	Urston	Theobald
	Vassals		

Table 5.5

Modularity classes, *The Dream*

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Groups 4,5,6
Benedict	Ambassador	Agnes	Ambassador's
Jerome	Monks	Leonora	Gentlemen
Lay Brother	Morand		Executioners
Osterloo	Peasants		Servants
Osterloo's Officers	Prior's Soldiers		
Osterloo's Soldiers	Sexton		
Paul	Wovelreid		
Prior			

The algorithm correctly detects *Orra*'s simple social structure (Table 5.4): all the characters in Group 1 are members of Hughobert's household. Group 2 comprises the bourgeois characters and their rough allies, as the snobbish Hughobert makes clear:

HUGHOBERT. (*impatiently*) Proceed, I beg.
 When burghers gentle courtesy affect,
 It chafes me more than all their sturdy boasting.

HARTMAN. Then with a burgher's plainness, Hughobert,
 I'll try my tale to tell— (257)

Baillie is a typical Romantic liberal. In *Orra*, the forces of the new urban modernity are repressed, forced by an arrogant aristocracy to take shelter in nature and outlawry. The situation is similar in *The Dream* (Table 5.5). Osterloo is caught up in Group 1, the monastery, and the play's zone of death. Group 2 are the wider world outside the monastery: the local residents, the soldiery, the Empire. Group 3 represents a form of society so repressed in the play's social vision that it barely exists: the domestic society of women. Again, as in *The Dream*, it is the forces of bourgeois modernity that represent the play's moral centre: the state (Ambassador) and the private sphere (Leonora). The rational Benedict is the only monk who interacts with Leonora, and the Ambassador names him the new prior of the monastery in the play's final scene.

If Baillie's plays have a subtle social dimension, it is also the case the Harpur's play contains pockets of expressive language and deep psychology. One of these pockets is the band of bushrangers, who have an especially tight web of interactions between them, as we saw in Figure 5.2. Within this web, the bushrangers speak a special kind of communal, truthful language, the very opposite of Bomebard's:

RACKROAD. ... Our life is the devil without a leader that all rely on: and he had no fellow in the profession.

again intense and imperative; they reach out and test the universe itself. Society is identified as convention, and convention as the enemy of desire.”⁸² We have seen how Harpur and Baillie weave the intensity of passion into their plays, and how they represent oppressive social conventions. Williams points to another thread of these plays we have yet to examine: their metaphysical dimension, the testing of the universe itself. It is to this we now turn.

5.3 The Metaphysics of Passion

From Hegel to the present, scholars have agreed that Romantic tragedy is highly subjective. For Hegel, Romantic tragedy reflected a fundamental shift in Western culture. In the classical world, “universal” concepts like truth and justice were seen as part of a “pre-existing reality.” We moderns see such universal concepts as ideas in the human mind.⁸³ In classical tragedy, each character represented a different force in the order of the universe, and their downfall was the result of some insuperable contradiction in that order. In Romantic tragedy, each character represents the force of their own personality, and their downfall is the result of “a growth of the soul, a development of the *character* itself in its headlong movement, its running wild, its shattering in pieces or exhaustion.”⁸⁴ We have indeed seen how the tragic heroes of Romanticism shatter when the force of their personality collides with the stone wall of the world.

For some scholars, this subjectivity is the crucial flaw of Romantic tragedy. The beauty of real tragedy, says Steiner, is the way “Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods.”⁸⁵ This is why the Romantics killed tragedy when they

⁸² Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 94.

⁸³ Hegel, *On Tragedy*, 190-91.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁵ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 10.

shut the gates of hell. They replaced the spiteful gods with human passions, and the real objective hell with an unreal subjective hell of remorse. No longer could humans be ennobled by contact with something greater than them.

Steiner's attack on Romantic tragedy has recently been renewed, in Hans-Thies Lehmann's magisterial history of *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* (2016). For him, Romantic tragedy was the tragedy of "pure consciousness,"⁸⁶ and it was this interest in pure consciousness that made tragedy "impossible" in the period.⁸⁷ The problem was a mismatch between theme and technique. The major theme of tragedy, claims Lehmann, is transgression: the tragic hero embodies a "transgressive energy" that drives them to "self-endangerment" or "annihilation."⁸⁸ The conventional technique of the Romantic stage, he continues, was "dramatic,"⁸⁹ meaning that Romantic plays portrayed realistic human characters in realistic human settings, addressing realistic dialogue to one another.⁹⁰ This created a contradiction, because purely subjective transgression could not be portrayed effectively in the form of intersubjective dialogue. In previous periods of "dramatic" tragedy, the transgressor's dialogue might express a concrete ideal. But Romantic transgression is merely an "extreme subjectivity which exalts itself so much that it loses its personal quality and any accountable *telos*;" as a result, characters' speeches devolve into meaningless "streams of affect."⁹¹ This is why Schiller's plays are so childishly enthusiastic, and why the dialogue of Kleist and of Friedrich Hölderlin is so full of "fragments, doubt, ambiguity, gutted syntax, broken reflection

⁸⁶ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. Eric Butler (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 304.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁹ As opposed to the "pre-dramatic" theatre of antiquity or the "post-dramatic" theatre of our contemporary avant-garde. He describes this distinction in detail in *ibid.*, 210-28.

⁹⁰ He seems to ignore the development of mythological or allegorical drama in the period, of the kind represented by *Faust*, *Dziady* or Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

and synthesis deferred.”⁹² Lehmann does not agree with Steiner that tragedy died altogether in the Romantic period, but argues that “dramatic” tragedy certainly did.

Steiner and Lehmann hit upon a crucial problem, which has worried theorists of tragedy from Aristotle to the present. Tragedies depict awful human suffering. How can we watch and take pleasure in them without being evil or perverted?⁹³ Kierkegaard argues that the tragic hero always acts in the service of some “higher expression of the ethical,” which in some measure excuses their terrible deeds.⁹⁴ But Steiner and Lehmann deny there is any higher ethical realm that gives meaning to the rage and violence of Romantic tragedy. Baillie and Harpur may seem to agree with these critics, since they largely banish the supernatural from their plays, and explain their characters’ actions socially and psychologically. I hope to show, however, that their concept of passion, though certainly subjective, was not for that reason meaningless.

Their solution to the problem of meaning was to develop a metaphysics of passion, whose roots in Western drama go at least as far back as Racine. Racine was on the threshold of a more subjective tragedy. His plays often feature supernatural events, or prophecies and auguries that ascribe objective meaning to human actions. But these supernatural elements can seem to be elements of the characters themselves: “Je reconnus Vénus, et ses feux redoutables, | D’un sang qu’elle poursuit tourments inévitables,” says Phèdre when she lusts for her son-in-law.⁹⁵ Phèdre might say that she and her bloodline are “pursued” by a vengeful deity, but

⁹² Ibid., 318.

⁹³ For an amusing list of different answers presented down the ages, see Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 169.

⁹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1985), 87.

⁹⁵ “I recognise Venus, and her dreadful fires, | Inevitable torments in blood she pursues.” Racine, *Phèdre*, 48.

this “Venus” is equally Phèdre’s own godlike lust, pulsing in her own human veins.

Auerbach argues that Racine brought about a revolution in the literature of passion:

Die irdische Begierde, ... ist zum Range eines selbständigen, prinzipellen und autonomen Seeleninhalts, zu etwas an sich Bewunderungswürdigem und Erhabenen aufgestiegen und droht an die Stelle des Christentums und überhaupt jeder frommen Demut eine Art Metaphysik der Leidenschaften zu setzen.⁹⁶

Passion in Racine is neither religious nor ethical. Instead it is the “Kennzeichen höchster und sublimiertester Menschlichkeit,” an expression of the “vitality” and “instincts” of the human frame.⁹⁷ Baillie, Harpur and their contemporaries developed this metaphysics of passion, further stripping away the supernatural elements and introducing a harsh modern irony. Subjective passion is meaningful in their plays because it symbolises the grandeur of human nature; it is frightening and ironic because it is mysterious and uncontrollable.

Both Harpur and Baillie longed to include a supernatural element in their drama but found it almost impossible. Baillie addressed the problem directly in her preface to volume 3 of *Plays on the Passions*:

The first of these plays [*Orru*] is a Tragedy of five acts, the principal character of which is a woman, under the dominion of Superstitious Fear; and that particular species of it, (the fear of ghosts, or the returning dead,) which is so universal and inherent in our nature, that it can never be eradicated from the mind, let the progress of reason or philosophy be what it may. A brave and wise man of the nineteenth century, were he lodged for the night in a lone apartment where murder has been committed, would not so easily believe, as a brave and wise man of the fourteenth century, that the restless spirit from its grave might stalk around his bed and open his curtains in the stillness of midnight: but should circumstances arise to impress him with such a belief, he would feel the emotions of Fear as intensely, though firmly persuaded that such beings have no power to injure him. (228)

⁹⁶ “Earthly desire ... is raised to the rank of an independent, primary and autonomous component of the soul, to something wondrous and sublime, and threatens to set in the place of Christianity and indeed every devout kind of humility a kind of metaphysic of the passions.” Erich Auerbach, *Gesammelte Aufsätze Zur Romanischen Philologie* (Bern und Munich: Francke, 1967), 199.

⁹⁷ “... sign of the highest and most sublimated humanity ...” *ibid.*, 200.

Baillie struggles in this preface with two opposed impulses: her desire to appeal to our “inherent” belief in the supernatural and her sense that “the progress of reason or philosophy” has muted this belief. She struggles with this tension in the play itself, going to great lengths to prove that Orra’s fear is reasonable, even though we know there is really no ghost in Brunier’s tower. Some argue that Baillie tries to make us sympathise with her protagonists,⁹⁸ but in *Orra*, our perspective is sharply divided from the heroine’s. When she sees a ghost, we see Theobald in a costume. This scene would surely be unbearably comic in performance, vindicating those who find that Romantic subjectivity makes Romantic tragedy impossible.

Harpur had a similar embarrassment with the metaphysical aspects of *The Bushrangers*. In the 1835 version, three Furies appear and pass judgment on Donohoe’s foul deeds:

ALL. A maiden’s curse hath pierc’d heaven’s ear;
 ’Twas deeply wail’d o’er a murder’d man’s bier;
 And we’re free with might and main,
 To impress with the seal of Cain,
 The brow of the murderer! (1835, 107)

They are a strange presence in the play, which is otherwise realistic. Since the 1835 version exists only in extracts, it is not certain whether the Furies had any other scenes. It would seem, however, that unlike the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*, Harpur’s Furies never interact with any of the human characters and play no role in the unfolding of the plot. Harpur obviously came to feel they were an extraneous element, and cut them from later versions of the play.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Melissa M. Whalen, “The Suffering Stage: Joanna Baillie, Spectacle, and Sympathetic Education,” *European Romantic Review* 24, no. 6 (2013), esp. 665-66.

As Michael Ackland has shown, Harpur found better ways to weave religion through his drama.⁹⁹ The first major change was to the names of the characters: Donohoe becomes “Stalwart,” William (his victim) becomes “Abel,” and Mary (Abel’s fiancée) becomes “Ada.” The new names point to the universal significance of the drama. “Stalwart” is no longer a particular Irish convict, but represents the sublime of human nature. Similarly, “Abel” is no longer a particular victim, but a brother in the human race. It is no longer necessary for the Furies to swoop down and tell us that Stalwart is Cain. Harpur also modified the dialogue to draw out the metaphysical implications of Stalwart’s deeds. In the 1835 version, Stalwart explains his building passions thus:

She’s given me health; but with the gift inspir’d
A thousand rash desires, which goad me on
Toward a foul deed ... (1835, 95)

In the 1853, he gives a fuller explanation:

But I ever was,
And ever shall be, the accused slave
Of lawless passion!—She has given me health
And liberty, but with those gifts evoked
Desires iniquitous, that from their dark
Impulsive depths, like monstrous sea-swells, keep
Blindly upworking ... (1853, 28)

The new imagery is tense and powerful, recalling the sea-imagery we encountered in Moore and Byron. Stalwart’s vision of sublime nature roaring in the depths of his frame contrasts with Abel’s more tranquil imagery from two scenes before:

Now let us wander by the shining river,
And I will sing you there, aided by Echo,
A loving ditty of the olden time ...
We’ll mark the spangled fishes throng about

⁹⁹ See Michael Ackland, “Plot and Counter-Plot in Charles Harpur’s ‘The Bushrangers,’” *Australasian Drama Studies* 0, no. 8 (1986), 53-55; *That Shining Band: A Study of the Australian Colonial Verse Tradition* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994), 57-63.

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In happy revel, and compare them well
To swarms of brilliant love-lights flashing through
The silver vision of some glorious Bard,
When, flowing forth in everlasting verse,
It greens the course of Time. (1853, 24)

In *The Bushrangers*, the world is ruled by obscure natural forces, lying at the edge of consciousness. Nature is the sea, blind and lawless, bearing us on waves of passion to evil deeds and self-destruction. Or it is the river, green and shining, bearing us on the scales of fish to a vision of peace and brotherhood. There is a mysterious order that gives meaning to Stalwart's degradation. His deformity is not merely a mental illness or a social problem, but an expression of "man's uncontrolled, instinctual nature."¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere in his poetry, Harpur refers to this other realm as "Ideality," exploring it in visionary poems of startling power, like "The World and the Soul," *The Tower of the Dream* (1865) and his neglected epic, *The Witch of Hebron: A Rabbinical Legend* (1867). Stalwart glimpses Ideality, if mainly in its terrible aspect, and this is what raises him above the "Vermin that harbour in the sweaty wig | Of belly-swol'n Legality!" (53-4) The empty blusterers, Tunbelly and Bomebard, cannot judge Stalwart's crime. Only the idealists, Ada and Abel, have the right, and it is they whom Stalwart sees as he dies.

In the 1867 version, Harpur further amplified the metaphysical elements of the dialogue. The results are unfortunately rather strained. Ada, now called "Linda," interprets Abel's murder for us:

Alas, they shouldn't have killed him!
But 'twas the Furies did it. Men, who all
Are Adam's sons – *they* never slew a brother
So young and hopeful! No; I'll not believe it!
No, 'twas the Furies! (1867, 69)

¹⁰⁰ Ackland, *That Shining Band*, 59.

There are two unfortunate aspects of this speech. First, the Furies are nowhere to be seen in the play, and it is difficult to take this nineteenth-century girl seriously when she talks about them. Second, the claim that “Adam’s sons ... never slew a brother” is patently absurd, especially in a play whose main murder victim is called “Abel.” It is true that Ada/Linda is mad in this scene, but her sudden partial amnesia of the Bible and semi-conversion to Greek paganism are not very believable symptoms. Harpur did not believe in the Furies, any more than Baillie believed in ghosts. Like her, his metaphysical vision is far more compelling when it is rooted in natural imagery and an uncanny plot.

In *Orra*, as we saw, Baillie goes to great lengths to explain—even apologise for—Orra’s superstition. The situation is different in *The Dream*. In this uncanny play, none of the coincidences or ironies of the plot are ever explained. The “dream” of a title is a vision that occurs to the monk Jerome. He dreams of a murdered man, dreams that an imperial legion will shortly pass the monastery, and dreams that if one of the legion does a night’s penance for the murder in the monastery, then the pestilence currently gripping the district will end. As it happens, Osterloo’s legion does pass by, Osterloo did kill the very man in Jerome’s dream, and when they draw lots to see who will do the penance, Osterloo draws the black scroll from the vase. Despite all this, Benedict is sceptical: “had the hermit Baldwick never made his deathbed confession to thee, thou wouldst never have had such a dream to reveal,” he tells Jerome, accusing him of having “secret intelligence” of the legion’s arrival (266). The Sexton later confirms that Baldwick did indeed know the whole story of the murder. A second monk, Paul, who also had a vision, turns out to have dreamt something different. We never learn if Osterloo’s death ends the pestilence, or whether the lots were somehow rigged.

The uncanny atmosphere of *The Dream* envelops the characters' words and deeds in terrifying ambiguity, but such ambiguity is rare in Baillie's plays. In *Ethwald* she also experiments with ambiguous supernatural signs, though the ambiguity is less woven into the fabric of the plot. Her two "musical dramas," *The Beacon* (1812) and *The Phantom* (1836) also make wonderful use of mystery and coincidence. But in *Orra* and her other tragedies, supernatural occurrences are explained in advance. There is thus some truth to Michael Gamer's claim that Baillie's characters are usually "haunt[ed]" by nothing but "their own minds."¹⁰¹

Even in *Orra*, however, Baillie manages to reveal a terrible world of dark forces that lie beyond ordinary reality. The speeches of Orra's madness seem to be more than mere ravings, and they contain some of Baillie's most powerful poetry:

Take it away! It was the swathed dead!
I know its clammy, chill, and bony touch.

[Fixing her eyes fiercely on Eleanora.

Come not again; I'm strong and terrible now:
Mine eyes have look'd upon all dreadful things;
And when the earth yawns, and the hell-blast sounds,
I'll 'bide the trooping of unearthly steps
With stiff-clench'd, terrible strength.

[Holding her clenched hands over her head with an air of grandeur and defiance. (258)

This ecstasy could be interpreted simply as the symptom of a mental illness. But that would not do justice to the power of Orra's words. She speaks coherently and powerfully in the face of her visions, even if those visions are hallucinations. When Ophelia goes mad in *Hamlet*, she speaks pretty nonsense. When Büchner's *Woyzeck* reaches his lowest point, his speech flits illogically from topic to topic:

(*Er tanzt.*) So Käthe! setz dich! Ich hab heiß! heiß, (*er zieht den Rock aus*) es ist einmal so, der Teufel holt die eine und lässt die andre laufen. Käthe du bist heiß! Warum

¹⁰¹ Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 138.

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denn Käthe? Du wirst auch noch kalt werden. Sei vernünftig. Kannst du nicht singe?¹⁰²

Orra's words, by contrast, have the stamp of truth. If her mind is deranged, it is deranged by real and powerful forces. She might misrecognise them, thinking the "dreadful things" she sees are in the material rather than the spiritual realm, but she correctly recognises their incredible strength. As Brewer observes, these final speeches of Orra darkly echo her speeches earlier in the play, where she uses the power of her mind to imagine a more beautiful social order:¹⁰³

In short, I would, without another's leave,
Improve the low condition of my peasants,
And cherish them in peace. E'en now, methinks,
Each little cottage of my native vale
Swells out its earthen sides, up-heaves its roof,
Like to a hillock mov'd by lab'ring mole,
And with green trail-weeds clamb'ring up its walls,
Roses and ev'ry gay and fragrant plant,
Before my fancy stands, a fairy bower:
Ay, and within it too do fairies dwell. (241-2)

Listening to her description, Theobald says he can picture it "Distinctly; and most beautiful the sight!" (242) Just as in *The Bushrangers*, in *Orra* there are two forces which fill the minds of the great with power: the beautiful, harmonising force of the river or fairy bower, and the sublime, destructive force of the sea or of hell. Their imagery recalls Moore's analysis of Byron, when he describes the struggle between the good and evil aspects of the poetical Lord's nature. In the uncanny world of *The Dream*, these otherworldly forces seem to enter the material world in the form of

¹⁰² "(He dances.) So Kathy! Sit down! I'm hot! hot, (he takes his coat off) it's even so, the devil takes one and lets the other go. Kathy you're hot! Why then Kathy? You'll be cold too one day. Be reasonable. Can't you sing?" Georg Büchner, *Werke Der Freiheit: Woyzeck, Lenz, Danton's Tod, Leonce Und Lena* (Wiesbaden: Marix Verlag, 2013), 189.

¹⁰³ William D. Brewer, "The Liberating and Debilitating Imagination in Joanna Baillie's *Orra* and *the Dream*," *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (July 2008), <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/utopia/index.html>

pestilence, exhumed bodies and strange coincidence. In *Orra* and *The Bushrangers*, these forces flow through the imagery of the dialogue.

I have been arguing that these forces are in some sense “metaphysical,” that in Baillie’s and Harpur’s plays, “passion” is not simply a part of the mind, but forms a part of some mysterious wider reality.¹⁰⁴ From Judith Wright to the present, critics have observed this mystical element in Harpur’s poetry.¹⁰⁵ But it is not common to interpret Baillie this way. Though some readers find mysticism or paradox in Baillie’s plays,¹⁰⁶ it is more common to see her as a rational empiricist, a reader of Adam Smith, a materialist philosopher who saw “passion” as a mere emotion or biological fact.¹⁰⁷ Baillie herself encouraged such an interpretation of her plays. Her “Introductory Discourse” is written in the language of empiricist philosophy, and the original subtitle of *Plays on the Passions* claimed their aim was to “delineate the stronger passions *of the mind*” (my emphasis). Nonetheless, G. Wilson Knight suggests that there is no contradiction between the scientific and religious interpretations of Baillie’s plays. He praises her “diagnostic and scientific” style, but also argues that “[h]er avoidance of actual ghosts ... marks no disbelief in the other world but rather a reluctance to commit herself to any superstitious forms.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ I thus side with those critics who, as Cox puts it, “[see] the Gothic as unveiling or recovering some unmediated absolute that stands outside the boundaries of the natural and social orders ...” “Introduction,” in Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ See Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965), 17-18. It helps that “mystic” is one of Harpur’s favourite words.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Carney, 242-3; Julie Murray, “At the Surface of Romantic Interiority: Joanna Baillie’s *Orra*,” *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 56 (2009).

¹⁰⁷ Karen Dwyer says Baillie’s approach is “clinical” and “natural-historical:” “Joanna Baillie’s *Plays on the Passions* and the Spectacle of Medical Science,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 29, no. 1 (2000), 23. Julie Murray argues that Baillie describes “economic man:” “Governing Economic Man: Joanna Baillie’s Theatre of Utility,” *ELH* (2003), 1044. See also Whalen, “The Suffering Stage,” 669-71.

¹⁰⁸ G. Wilson Knight, *The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama* (London: Phoenix House, 1962), 210.

The final proof that Baillie and Harpur share a metaphysical vision lies in their complex use of the words “mind” and “soul.” Like Moore with his “character” and “genius,” Baillie and Harpur use these terms together to express multiple perspectives on conscious experience and the self. As we might expect, they tend to use “mind” to refer to characters’ thoughts and feelings, and “soul” to refer to their immortal part. At certain points, however, both Baillie and Harpur suggest that the soul is a higher form of consciousness with a complicated relationship to the mind. In *The Dream*, Osterloo’s deadly fear is explained in different ways. Osterloo tells the Prior that “the guilt of murder” is on his “soul,” which therefore “recoils with unutterable horror” from the thought of death (269). When he drops dead on the scaffold in the play’s final scene, the Prior offers a different interpretation: “No sorcery hath been practised on the deceased: his own mind has dealt with him alone, and produced the effects you behold.” (276) There is a strange swirl of ideas: Osterloo’s soul recoils from death, yet his mind hurtles him into it. The situation in *Orra* is similarly complex:

HARTMAN. She is not dead!

THEOBALD. Oh, no! it is not death!

HARTMAN. What meanst thou? Is she well?

THEOBALD. Her body is.

HARTMAN. And not her mind?—Oh! direst wreck of all! (258)

Losing your mind is like death, only worse. Theobald struggles to comprehend Orra’s madness. He addresses her as “poor troubled soul,” and tries to call her back to sanity by recalling her utopian visions from Act I (259). But in the end he despairs of communicating with her soul: “Her mind within itself holds a dark world | Of dismal phantasies and horrid forms!” (260) As in *The Dream*, it is unclear exactly how the wrecked mind and the troubled soul are related to one another. It is in these

final moments of *Orra* that Baillie achieves the uncanny ambiguity that makes *The Dream* so impressive. Has Orra's soul already crossed to the other side? Does she really gaze on hell? Or are the horrors she describes the fantasies of a diseased mind?

Harpur's treatment of soul and mind is more explicit. After Abel's death, Ada also goes mad, though her madness is quieter than Orra's:

Yes—I know you,
Your name is Lucy, and mine's Ada: nay,
My memory is good. And I remember, too,
The feast we had, under yon willow tree,
The day I promised to be Abel's bride.
They say I wept that day—and, if I did,
I *now* know why. (1853, 51)

Indeed, she claims she is not mad:

I'm only a little strange,
Having some living creature in my brain
That was not always there;—something that gnaws it. (50)

Theobald struggled to interpret Orra's madness, but Lucy is able to expound a comprehensive philosophy that explains her friend's mental condition:

Yet is she not
Quite mad, or in the way that most are mad,
Seeing her feelings, though distempered, keep
The old track still;—nay, even her reason trades
In sad realities, though lifted up
Into the cloudier region of her soul
By a wild-drifting fancy. (49)

The mind—"reason" and "feelings"—is just an earthly aspect of the soul. Ada's madness is not a derangement of the mind, but a retreat from the earthly realm into the soul's "cloudier regions." She has become, Lucy says, "An emblem of herself" (52). Harpur suggests that we live in two realms simultaneously. Death is a retreat from the soul's lower realms to its higher. For the deformed Stalwart, this may be a terrifying prospect. For the miserable Ada, it is a gentle movement.

Baillie's conception of the self is different. Orra's madness is not a gentle movement between realms of the soul, but a violent tear from the world of everything she knows. It fills her with power, but also with horror. Likewise, when Osterloo contemplates death, it does not take him into cloudier regions where he was already wont to dwell; instead, his soul recoils as his mind drags it into the next world. In Baillie's frightening vision of the universe, the self is a mystery, and terrible passions can set the mind and soul at war. The only end to such a war is ecstasy, paradox, the most horrific kind of deformity.

Of all the genres we have considered, Gothic tragedy portrays self-deformation most spectacularly. Vivian's and Adeline's sufferings are largely confined to the world of morality and social interaction. They are deformed by vice, as it pollutes their minds or provokes them to a dangerous quixotism. Smith's and Clare's disintegration takes place in the natural world. They are deformed by perception, as it draws them out into a shimmering reality of myriad things. Byron's derangement takes place on the lofty stage of history. This great and lonely man is deformed by melancholy, the product of his social isolation and explosive talent. Baillie and Harpur put their characters on an even loftier stage. There are vast forces at work. These forces ennoble characters like Stalwart, Ada, Orra and Osterloo. They reveal the paltriness of the social order, and its tyranny. But they also tear the self to pieces, sending Stalwart, Ada, Orra and Osterloo into the other world before their time. They try to be true to their impulses, and falsify or hate themselves. They rebel against the social order, and lose their freedom.

Self-deformation was the key to the Romantic redefinition of tragedy. Williams argues that "in Romantic tragedy man is guilty of the ultimate and

nameless crime of being himself,”¹⁰⁹ but it seems truer to say that the tragic heroes of Romanticism commit the crime of not being themselves. De Musset’s *Lorenzaccio* achieves a bloody eminence, only to find he is a man of wax. Hemans’ *di Procida* achieves the freedom of his people, but ends the play a miserable “dark soul,” holding his son’s blasted corpse.¹¹⁰ *Stalwart, Orra and Osterloo* are lifted above their peers by the sublimity of their passions. Like *Adeline Mowbary* or Moore’s *Byron*, they express the higher possibilities, even the divinity, of human nature. But in expressing this possibility, they pervert, destroy or deform themselves.

Their perversion is not merely the product of a faulty society, though most tragic heroes of the Romantic period are rebels against an unjust order. Baillie and Harpur have a complex moral vision. Blame is hard to apportion, because self-deformation is an unpredictable and uncontrollable process. We are trapped in social structures we have little power to alter, and our passions are beyond our ken. These are tense and thought-provoking plays. If they seem overblown, this probably has more to do with our theatrical tastes than with the plays’ inherent merits, in an age when the Anglo-American stage is neatly divided between traditionalist Ibsenian naturalism and post-dramatic experimentalism. One would think, however, that the new age of experimentalism would open new possibilities for staging these often enormous and extravagant plays. *Faust* was finally performed in its entirety only in 2000, and the four parts of *Dziady* only in 2015. We can only await the first immersive, site-specific, professional performance of *The Bushrangers* or *Prometheus Unbound*. Paul Ranger found it possible to stage *The Castle Spectre* and *Pizarro* successfully in the twentieth century.¹¹¹ Marjean

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 94

¹¹⁰ Hemans, *Works*, v.109.

¹¹¹ Ranger, *Terror and Pity*, 106.

Purinton has found Baillie's plays receive an enthusiastic response from a small, intimate audience—just as Baillie predicted.¹¹² It would be the ultimate vindication of the Romanticism of self-deformation if the disappointed literary playwrights of the British Romantic stage finally had their day behind the curtain, like their continental counterparts.

When the curtain rises on these plays, audiences will be confronted with a frightening vision of human nature in an arid modern world. To this frightening vision, the Gothic playwrights of the Romantic period offered the consolation of religion. Harpur's enlightened Christianity resembles that of *Faust*, *Manfred* or *The Maid of Orleans*, and has something in common with the spiritualised atheism of *Prometheus Unbound*. Baillie's mysterious, uncanny Christianity resembles the frightening atheism of Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (1835), the weird folk Catholicism of *Dziady*, or Hemans' vision of "another and more fearful world" in *Vespers of Palermo*.¹¹³ In the end, however, these playwrights lacked faith in their own religious nostrums. They could give the self a place in the universe, but they were finally convinced of little but its fragility, malignity and mystery:

That man was never born whose secret soul,
With all its motley treasure of dark thoughts,
Foul fantasies, vain musings, and wild dreams,
Was ever open'd to another's scan. (Baillie, *De Monfort*, 81)

Aber, (*er deutet ihr auf Stirn und Augen*) da da, was liegt hinter dem? Geh, wir haben grobe Sinne. Einander kennen? Wir müssten uns die Schädeldecken aufbrechen und die Gedanken einander aus den Hirnfasern zerren.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Marjean D. Purinton, "Pedagogy and the Passions: Teaching Joanna Baillie's Dramas," in *Joanna Baillie: Romantic Dramatist*, ed. Thomas C. Chronchunis (London: Routledge, 2004), 234-37. See also Isabella Imperiali, "From Darkness to Light: Science and Religion on Joanna Baillie's Stage," in *Women's Romantic Theatre and Drama: History, Agency, and Performativity*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Keir Elam (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 228.

¹¹³ Hemans, *Works*, v.25.

¹¹⁴ "But (*pointing at her forehead and eyes*) there there, what lies behind there? Go on, we have crude senses. Know each other? We'd have to crack our skulls open and rip each other's thoughts from the fibres of the brain." Büchner, *Dantons Tod*, in Büchner, 9.

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OVER FIVE chapters we have searched for the Romantic self, and discovered a strange and turbulent realm of drifting thoughts, volcanic passions and mystifying uncertainty. These selves have the wrong form, or have no form at all, and the texts that describe them are involuted and self-defeating in intriguing and beautiful ways. Their authors are sceptical of the “stable inner core of selfhood” that Dror Wahrman claims is the mainstay of Romantic culture.¹ Maria Edgeworth and John Clare are sceptical we have any such inner core. Charles Harpur and Joanna Baillie are sure we do, but it is unstable, made of magma, capable like the earth of both generation and destruction. These writers are also sceptical of Michel Foucault’s concept of “discipline,” the ethical principle of the well-formed self.² Amelia Opie and Charlotte Smith reveal the terrible costs of public surveillance, law and moral judgment. Thomas Moore suggests that self-discipline can falsify the highest energies of the human frame. Wherever we seek the self in these texts, it shrinks, recedes or explodes.

We are not the first seekers to fail in this way. In his brilliant memoir, *Footsteps* (1995), biographer Richard Holmes describes his own quest for the Romantic self. He first appears in 1964, at the age of eighteen, pursuing Robert Louis Stevenson through the mountain paths of Les Cevennes, hoping to “catch” this elusive identity from the past.³ In the next chapter he appears in Paris in 1968,

¹ See above, p. 23.

² See above, p. 24.

³ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Flamingo, 1995), 25.

running after Mary Wollstonecraft in an attempt to understand his own revolutionary situation. Next he is in Italy. It is 1972, and he is tracking the Shelleys, researching the book that will make him as a writer: *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974). His years in the footsteps of the Romantics have taught him a valuable lesson, that there is such a thing as “the integrity of human character.”⁴ Each of us does have a self, this self does have a form, and the biographer is able, however imperfectly, to discover this integral character and portray it in a book. At this point, it appears that Holmes has discovered the stable inner core of selfhood and the discipline that holds it together, and has arrived at a thoroughly conventional concept of Romantic culture.

But there is a twist in the tale. In the fourth and final chapter, Holmes is back in Paris, this time in the footsteps of Gérard de Nerval. Things are not going well. Holmes is in a strange headspace, and his friends are becoming concerned. He is trying to write a novel, but his inspiration vanishes. More and more obsessed with Nerval, he is drawn into a weird world that challenges both his sense of self and his sense of the biographer’s art:

Here at last began for me too the overflowing of irrational into the normal forms of biography. All the logical and traditional structures that I had learned so painstakingly—the chronology, the development of character, the structure of friendships, the sense of trust and the subject’s inner identity—began to twist and dissolve. It was becoming more and more difficult to tell, or to account for, Nerval’s life in the ordinary narrative, linear way. Sometimes it seemed that those haunting Tarot cards—La Lune, L’Etoile, La Tour—expressed much more about him than any critical commentary.⁵

Nerval was a Byronic shapeshifter, who wrote under numerous pseudonyms and whose writings are a disconcerting blend of fiction and autobiography. In the

⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

attempt to find him, Holmes lost his own moorings. His Nerval book—entitled *A Dream Biography*—was “confused” and he could never get it published.⁶ He would eventually return to conventional biography, but also began to write enchantingly sceptical books, like *Dr Johnson & Mr Savage* (1993) and *Footsteps* itself, books that describe the elusiveness of the self, and which are as “confused” or deformed in their structure as the Romantic-era texts we have considered in this study.

Holmes reveals why texts of self-deformation have historically been marginalised in Romantic scholarship. They are challenging texts, that threaten to undo the work of the critic. A self-reflexive text like *The Prelude* interprets itself, and the critic can rest their assessment of its value on the poet’s own sense of achievement. A certain kind of formalist can argue that the text guarantees its own aesthetic value through this self-reflection. A certain kind of historicist can claim that such a text embodies a coherent ideology which can be contextualised, and then praised or debunked. But the texts considered in this thesis resist these easy kinds of interpretation. Their form is deliberately incoherent. Their moral is deliberately self-contradictory. It is difficult to collect them into a canon representing a singular ideal of selfhood or a singular conception of literary form. In their contradictions and uncertainties, they challenge us to recognise that literature is “an intricate, diverse, stressful community, not a bland monolith.”⁷ They challenge us to answer Marilyn Butler’s call for a more “open literary history.”⁸

We can rise to meet this challenge. It is not necessary to jettison the concept of Romanticism, nor to stop studying literary periods, as some argue we should. The writers of the Romantic period may not form a school or movement, with a singular

⁶ Ibid., 275.

⁷ Butler, “Repossessing the Past,” 69.

⁸ See above, p. 6.

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and explicit set of ideals and aspirations, but they did form a remarkably small and coherent social network. All the writers we have considered knew one another or had mutual acquaintances—even Harpur, 17,000 kilometres away on the edge of the British world, was personally connected to the heart of literary London by friends like Nicol Drysdale Stenhouse (De Quincey's secretary) and Henry Parkes (who hobnobbed with Tennyson and the Brownings). These writers responded to the same public events, read books from the same emerging canon, and circulated their ideas in the same print and manuscript cultures.

The Romantics may not have shared the same solutions, but they certainly shared the same problems. There were the scars of secularisation, and the modern mind's increasing alienation from the world. Smith stared at nature and found it implacable. Baillie and Harpur trapped their protagonists in a frightening and uncanny universe. William Wordsworth, even in his most ringingly optimistic poems, had the sense that it is not now as it hath been of yore. There were the pressures of the new mass culture, the dissemination of print and the endless surveillance. Edgeworth's Vivian, Opie's Adeline and Moore's Byron all find themselves written down against their will. Their private identities are torn out and strewn about the world in letters, magazines and books. Even in their private closet, or in the depths of smoky Cumberland, or on the shores of Greece, they find it impossible to detach themselves from the sticky web of society. In *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot can only know himself in the pages of the Baronetage, and even his self-aware daughter Anne defines herself by reading sermons instead of Byron—or by telling others that she does so. These were common anxieties rooted in common experiences of war, globalisation, the march of science and industry, and the continued explosion of print. Some writers, like Clare, Moore and Smith, longed to

be rid of the burden of self-consciousness in this new world. Others, like Edgeworth, Opie, Baillie and Harpur, longed for a self-integrity they feared was impossible. The Wordsworthian or Austenian solution, of a stable identity rooted in deep facts of human nature and a small, knowable community, was another response. Our authors promoted this solution as well from time to time, as evidenced by Edgeworth's *Ormond* (1817), Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1793) or the tempting possibility Moore holds out that Byron may have, in different circumstances, achieved domestic happiness.

Despite the wide variety of their responses to these pressures, these writers agreed that there were two main processes of self-deformation. There was the threat of self-deformation from within, and there was the threat of self-deformation from without. From within, there was the terrible mysterious energy of humanity, whether in the form of Adeline's heroic "enthusiasm," Smith's titanic "sorrow," Moore's rippling "principle of Self" or the molten "passions" of Stalwart, Osterloo and Orra. Perhaps in a previous age, these could have been understood as the visitations of Satan, the curse of original sin, or the depravity of a transient earthly world. But these explanations did not appeal to our secularised writers, who believed these energies were rooted in our biological or instinctual nature, and who felt that however dangerous or self-destructive the passions were, they were not merely depraved, but also expressed our most sublime capabilities. Adeline hurtles enthusiastically towards renunciation and death, but she, like the other enthusiasts we have considered, is superior to the supposedly well-formed people around her. Where her enthusiasm comes from we never learn. It is simply who she is, and if we try to find its mysterious source, Moore and Harpur suggest, we will encounter nothing but the sea of our own ignorance. On this view, the self is indeed deep and

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natural, but it is dualistic, containing powerful good and evil principles that are in practice hard to distinguish.

From without, there was the threat of the teeming world, flooding in through the senses and filling the mind with foreign matter. Clare embraced this kind of self-deformity in hundreds of his most beautiful poems. But what drowns the self in his poems is cyclical nature. Vivian, by contrast, drowns in the “conventional language” of “what is called the WORLD,” a fate courted by Moore’s Byron, when he acts out the scandals and rumours and absurd heroics of the press. Vivian is drowned, and Byron swims, in the flood of the external world. Adeline, Smith and Stalwart are battered by it, tortured into self-destruction by the inescapable judgements of a totalitarian social system. On this view, the self is contingent, and each of us must try as we can to establish our own foundations in the stream of perception.

The small body of authors discussed in this thesis thus display great variety and great uniformity in their approaches to self-deformation. On the one hand, they agree that our sense of self rests on two foundations: on our deep, mysterious and spontaneous nature, and on the society that shapes our self-conceptions. On the other hand, they explore the deformation of this self in a wide variety of contexts, and take various attitudes towards it. The shallow Vivian is deformed in the most mundane way by a fashionably vicious society, while the mighty Orra is dragged into fiery ecstasy by the gravest tyranny and ignorance. Much of this difference comes down to genre. These novels put people in society, the poems put them in nature, the biographies in history, and the tragedies in the universe, in each case giving a different cast to the deformation of the self. But we have seen how even within a single genre, these same anxieties and conflicts can play out in very different ways. This variety should put paid to the notion, promoted by critics from T.E. Hulme to

Terry Eagleton, that the Romantics had simplistic Rousseauan theory of self-deformation, and blamed all human depravity on society. We have seen how often in these texts the very distinction between individual and society collapses.

These are profoundly “romantic” ideas about the self, in the sense the Romantics themselves would have used the word, to mean idealistic, extreme or extraordinary. Either the self is borne aloft by its own sublime energies, or it is a consciousness capacious enough to absorb the whole world. These anxieties about self-deformation have deep roots in eighteenth-century thought, which developed the crucial concepts of consciousness, of human nature, and of our earthly or secular destiny. There is nothing “secondary,” “negative” or “Gothic” (in the sense of un- or anti-Romantic) about these anxieties. They are present in the first edition of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784, and they are present in the final works of Clare, Edgeworth and Harpur in the late 1840s, ’50s and ’60s. And most importantly, they are present even in Wordsworth and Austen, disproving forever to the idea promoted by certain New Historicists and certain New Formalists alike that Austen, Wordsworth and their ilk avoided difficult ideological conflicts by enclosing them in the safe realm of private life and the human mind. Wordsworth’s cosmic marriage of mind and nature, and Austen’s more quotidian marriages of heart and head, are riven by these same anxieties of inner and outer deformity, however well they may seem on occasion to overcome them.

Once we recognise the centrality of these anxieties, we need to reconsider how we define the major genres of Romantic literature. The familiar notion that Romantic novels were manuals of self-improvement terminating in happy marriages is false. *Vivian* and *Adeline Mowbray* demonstrate that the *Bildungsroman* is characterised by a central theme—the perfection or imperfection

of the will in society—rather than by a central plot—the gradual maturation of the protagonist, ending with a happy marriage. Likewise, the classic notion of the Romantic lyric, in which the poet’s mind is “intervolved” with the external world, is rendered more complex by Smith and Clare. Smith records her utter alienation from the external world, while Clare often eliminates the poet’s mind from his sonnets altogether. Again a central theme—consciousness in nature—captures the main features of Romantic lyric better than a central plot—the internal quest leading upwards from raw experience to self-realisation. There is no need to re-define Romantic tragedy or biography, since they have so rarely been defined.⁹ It has been more common simply to dismiss these genres as failures, or to describe them according to more familiar concepts derived from the study of Romantic fiction or poetry. But in the wider context of Romantic self-deformation, the value of these texts becomes clearer. Moore’s vast book explores the dynamics of the historical self, and the Romantic tragedies of Baillie and Harpur draw on the ancient traditions of tragic drama to add philosophical depth to Romantic debates about the self.

These texts challenge us to rethink what it means for a writer or their work to be “central” to a period. The case could be made that all of these authors were marginal writers. Edgeworth was an Anglo-Irish spinster in Catholic Ireland, and Moore a Catholic Irish nationalist in Protestant London. Clare was labouring-class, Smith an impoverished gentlewoman, and Harpur the son of criminals, living in a violent frontier society that was struggling to decide whether it was a British prison or a free commonwealth. Baillie and Opie had less parlous social identities, perhaps, but Baillie was a Scotswoman in Hampstead, and Opie transformed through life from a young Jacobin into an austere Quaker. Both were also, of course, women.

⁹ Though it must also be said that Jeffrey Cox has already provided a powerful definition of Romantic tragedy. See above, §5.1.

These writers expressed their marginality in various ways, and it is tempting to argue that the vexed, debatable structure of their books are the direct result of their vexed, debatable positions in society.

But however marginal these writers were in society, they should not be marginal in our accounts of the period. Their anxieties were shared by the five gentlemen and one artisan who have traditionally formed the core of the British Romantic canon, and by the well-connected, self-certain titans of European Romanticism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Germaine Necker de Staël. Their experiments with form and their profound exploration of subjectivity give their work great aesthetic merit. Their engagements with contemporary political, social, cultural, scientific and philosophical issues give their work great historical interest. It is worth remembering that even the most apparently privileged of all the British Romantics, Lord Byron, was himself a radical bisexual with a physical deformity who was hounded into exile. It is worth remembering too that Romanticism has at various times, both then and since, been defined as a literature of revolt, and revolt can surely come only from the margins. It is probably best to set aside the question of centrality and marginality altogether. The best literary histories already describe British Romanticism as a pulsing nebula of interacting particles, rather than as a system of planets orbiting around the bright composite sun of Wordsworth and Austen.¹⁰

Digital methods and book history give us a new opportunity to write this kind of literary history. We have seen how digital methods can help us to cut through our preconceptions of literature. Data is a mute provocateur. Numbers and graphs

¹⁰ Two particularly fine examples are Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*, and William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

demand explanation. Turning literature into data estranges it and forces us test our definitions. A computer does not care if a text is canonical or marginal, primary or secondary, Romantic or Gothic. It will process the text and demand its human user to think. Digital methods also allow us to scale up our analysis, even in the confines of a single-authored study like this one. These were small corpora by the standards of “distant reading” or “macroanalysis:” 56 novels, 1,245 sonnets, four biographies and seven plays. But they were large corpora by the standards of close reading, and enabled us to dissolve the texts into the flow of language from which they came, distilling hitherto unrecognised patterns from them. There is still some consternation in academic circles about the advent of digital humanities, provoked largely by Franco Moretti’s call to give close reading a rest and read “distantly” instead. “Partly,” he insists, “this was meant as a joke.”¹¹ There is really no debate to be had between “close” and “distant” reading. Digital methods are simply new ways of shuffling between texts and archives, between individual examples and broad generalisations. The scholar can observe how a word is used in one sentence, and wonder how it is used elsewhere. They can observe the plot structure of one narrative, and wonder how it compares to others. Scholars have always performed tasks like this, but digital methods will allow us to perform them ever more powerfully, as book historians deliver us ever more complete and accurate bibliographical information, and as editors produce ever more accessible and richly-annotated digital texts.

I called this study *Frankenstein’s Siblings*, because each of the figures we have encountered seemed related somehow to the two main characters of Mary Shelley’s masterpiece. Some were inwardly malformed like her mad scientist; others

¹¹ Moretti, *Distant Reading*, 44.

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were creaturely victims overcome by the external world. Frankenstein and his creature madly love and madly hate one another, and the centuries-old confusion over which character is called “Frankenstein” is telling—Shelley’s two characters really *are* one another. In the first part of *Faust*, Mephistopheles and God meet in heaven, something that tickles Mephistopheles’ fancy:

Von Zeit zu Zeit seh ich den Alten gern
Und hüte mich, mit ihm zu brechen.
Es ist gar hübsch von einem großen Herrn,
So menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen.¹²

The two great forces of Faust’s destiny, the mighty God that uplifts him, and the pestilential demon that deforms him, are oddly at home with one another, chatting, joking and laying wagers over the fate of men’s souls.

In the end, it is this uncertainty about the deep foundations of identity that makes Romantic texts of self-deformation so fascinating. Identity, a Pakistani friend once told me, is what people will kill and die for.¹³ It is foolish to suppose that discussing 200-year-old books about rebellious aristocrats or women with common law spouses could be the solution to the terrible hatreds and resentments that divide us today. And yet these writers nonetheless model a gentler and more humane inquiry into the nature of our being.¹⁴ These texts can be dense and confused. They curl back on themselves. They refuse to give answers about who or what or why we are. Their words twist and shatter to the touch. The people they describe are burdened by life. “[J]e suis embarquée dans la vie sans mon consentement,” cried

¹² “From time to time I gladly see the oldie | And take care not break off our relations. | It is so sweet of such a mighty Lord | To talk so nicely with the very Devil.” Goethe, *Werke*, III.19

¹³ See the masterly analysis in Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (Allen Lane: London, 2006).

¹⁴ Ros Ballaster has recently called for a “new aesthetic turn” in feminist literary studies, on the basis that early women-authored texts about “suffering and oppression” can give us a new sense of our “being-in-the-world.” “Passing Judgement: The Place of the Aesthetic in Feminist Literary History,” in *Women’s Writing, 1660-1830: Feminisms and Futures*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (London: Palgrave, 2016), 29. I heartily agree.

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Madame de Sévigné.¹⁵ We are still thrust upon life unwillingly, and many of us are cast upon rocks in the squall. Our understanding of this condition may have changed over the last 200 years, but these texts retain the power to question, dazzle and provoke, and they challenge us never to rest in our struggle to unravel the mystery of ourselves.



¹⁵ "I was launched upon life without my consent." Madame de Sévigné, *Receuil des Lettres de Madame la Marquise de Sévigné, à Madame La Comtesse de Grignon, sa fille*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Verbeek, 1736), II.64.

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