**Forms Less Solid: Duration and the Romantic Long Form**

by

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more of my silly questions than I can count) and to my students, who continue to remind me why I wanted to pursue this degree in the first place.

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# ABSTRACT

*Forms Less Solid* argues that Romanticism's long forms trouble established assumptions about literary form through their thematic representation and formal recreation of duration and phenomenological experience. The formalist history these texts work against makes two primary claims: first, that literary form is inherently atemporal and thus averse to length, and, second, that British Romanticism uniformly promotes that vision of form (and, by extension, that Romantic form is equivalent to the Romantic lyric). *Forms Less Solid* argues, instead, for the unique, extended temporality of the Romantic long form by reading four Romantic and post-Romantic long-form works of poetry and fiction. This project reads Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head* (1807), William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816) as part of an alternative tradition that constructs length and duration as formal categories in their own right. These long forms employ what *Forms Less Solid* terms "durational modes": postures, figures, or attitudes that represent in content the embodied, spatiotemporal nature of lived experience and, in turn, recreate and perform that experience on the level of form. *Forms Less Solid* argues that durational form is the method by which these texts formalize their own embeddedness in time and space, a feature that emerges only as a result of the prolonged engagement these texts require from their readers.

The introductory first chapter details the converging literary and social histories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (the prospect tradition, industrialization, and the development of the Greater Romantic Lyric) that gave rise to the Romantic long form, along with relevant scholarly contexts. Chapter Two, on Smith's *Beachy Head*, argues that the poem's

formal and thematic expansiveness is replicated in its oscillations between scales of analysis, geographic elevations, and between main text and footnotes. That expansiveness is held in check by the poem's equal and opposite emphasis on representing the limitations of embodied experience. This chapter also uses Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) to demonstrate how Smith's long form emerges out of her previous engagement with atemporal form. Chapter Three reads Wordsworth's most "long and laborious" work, *The Excursion*, as a counterpoint to Wordsworth's great period poems. *The Excursion* is a self-reflective text designed to make the reader confront its own structural composition in the time of reading. Chapter Four explores *Aurora Leigh* as a post-Romantic text that reworks certain Romantic renderings (here represented by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Cowper) of the relationship between natural and domestic spaces. *Aurora Leigh* incorporates the gendered aspects of embodied experience into its protagonist's development as a Poetess and into its own formal configuration. Chapter Five reads Scott's *The Antiquary* as depicting a narrative time-sense that imitates the profession of its title and prioritizes local "accidents" over wholistic historical knowledge and narrative design. This chapter, as a result, reads *The Antiquary* as offering a formal and thematic counternarrative to Scott's most famous and genre-defining novel, *Waverley*. The sixth and final chapter, a short coda, reflects briefly on the wider contemporary and personal contexts that have informed this project.

**CHAPTER I**

**Introduction**

This project has two primary but interdependent aims. My first goal is to question a few fixtures of our thinking about literary form and British Romanticism: namely, that literary form is inherently atemporal and that Romanticism is if not the originary then the historically central moment in the formation of that atemporal conception of form. My second goal is to juxtapose to those fixed ideas an alternative model of the relationship between literary form, temporality, and Romanticism. I build that model on the evidence garnered through my reading of four Romantic and post-Romantic works of both poetry and fiction. These works – all of them long forms – foreground both length and duration as formal categories in their own right. By duration I mean both the physical extensiveness of the artwork and the reader's experience of stretched time.[1] The works in question are Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head* (1807), William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816).

This project's exploration of Romantic long forms relies on a few key argumentative premises. One is that time and form are not inherently incompatible entities, and thus that a text's temporal and structural extensiveness – its length – is worth our formal attention.[2] The corollary

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[1] Here I mention both length and duration in order to accentuate the slight but important difference between length – the line/word count or general bulkiness of a text that often acts as relatively simple but categorically nebulous denotation (the "long" in long poem, in particular, is often used to describe works that are otherwise hard to categorize) – and duration, which considers the temporal *experience* of length as, itself, a formal category. A text may, then, be objectively long without necessarily formalizing duration.

[2] As we will see, there is a long and very Romantic history of defining poetry and poetic form in opposition to length. Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria* that "a poem of any length neither can be, or ought

to that claim (and an obvious observation, one would think) is that literary long forms are not so

by accident nor for a lack of an organizational principle. Although the lengthiness of some works

goes hand in hand with certain incongruities and excesses, that disjuncture often gets taken up by

the work on a metafictional or reflexive level. The disunity between formal intentionality and the

seemingly or in fact adventitious disruptions of that logic, becomes, in these works, a rhetorically

and mimetically motivated feature, integral to the larger design of the work.

Another of this project's foundational principles is that the embodied, spatiotemporal

experience of reading (and writing) must come to bear on any apprehension of literary form.[3]

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to be, all poetry" Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria: Or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions," in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 495. Edgar Allan Poe famously echoes that sentiment in "The Poetic Principle" when he declares that the term "'long poem,' is simply a flat contradiction in terms." Edgar Allen Poe, "The Poetic Principle," in *Essays, English and American, with Introductions and Notes* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corp., 1938), 371. Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* defines the "poem" against the "story," the latter of which is tied to temporality and cause and effect (more on this later). Shelley argues that "parts" of a longer work, like a "single sentence" or "single word" may be "poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem" (515). Both Coleridge and Shelley are key players in a Romantic tradition that reads form as opposed to length and time. (Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).

       Going back even further, Aristotle's *Poetics* does of course consider the unity of time, but as an element of content and plot, not form. Aristotle prioritizes cause and effect over "episodic plot," as the former's unity is made evident by how events lead to a "inevitable or probable outcome" rather than mere sequence (107-08). Aristotle, "Poetics," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018). Catherine Gallagher gives a helpful summation of the direct line of influence from Aristotle's understanding of the unity of action to Shelley's *Defence* and to Romanticism's conception of form as atemporal. Catherine Gallagher, "Formalism and Time," *MLQ* 61, no. 1 (2000): 311.

[3] This is, essentially, an assertion of the connection between definitions of form often viewed as mutually exclusive: namely, form as a material, shaped body and form as an immaterial-quality, the essence or soul of some being or work. Each of the texts I study here may be read as in some way attempting to marry, or at least articulate the connections between, those two definitions. W. Tatariewicz's history of form in aesthetics also emphasizes how the term has come to contain many opposites. The two that Gallagher prioritizes (using Tatariewicz's definitions) are "Form A," which refers to the whole or overall structure of a work, and "Form B," denoting the style or sensory detail of a form. This style/structure dichotomy is compellingly similar to the material/essence dichotomy in form's more colloquial use. Tatarwiewicz's fourth definition of form is credited to Aristotle, meaning "the *conceptual essence* of an object" and opposed to the "accidental features of objects" (216). This the definition, from which the form-as-essence definition derives, and its opposition to "accident," will be important in my fifth chapter. See, W. Tatarkiewicz, "Form in the History of Aesthetics," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974 1973). See also, "Form, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2022), https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/73421?rskey=lbIunc&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed February o1, 2023).

       For more on this dynamic from a nineteenth-century perspective, see Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Throughout this project, I will argue that Romanticism's long forms are especially equipped to make readerly experience trouble assumptions about literary form in productive ways. One major goal of *Forms Less Solid* is to acknowledge the inescapably time-consuming and, however pleasurable, labor-intensive character of reading itself.[4] Duration is fundamental to the experience of reading, especially when the text is long and difficult, and thus disruptive to the fast-paced rhythms of modern life.[5] I believe that this – the time of reading – is one of literature's closest alignments to something like "real life," and that the Romantics (poets, novelists, and readers alike) put this understanding to work.[6] My argument for duration as a formal category is a claim for Romanticism's formalization of its own embeddedness in time and space. I consider time and space as conceptual dimensions, as physical realities, and as intertwined (such that temporal concerns necessarily become spatial and phenomenological concerns as well).

Each reading in this project is committed to recognizing what I am calling "durational modes" – postures, attitudes, or figures that stand in for each work's representation of the spatiotemporality of experience itself, and of the artwork's own formal construction.[7] My focus

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[4] As will be evident in my chapters on *Aurora Leigh* and *The Antiquary*, this is especially true of the even more prolonged readerly and intellectual engagement required for writing and literary scholarship. Part of my interest in these texts and in long forms more broadly is in how well the kind of reading they engender lines up with the equally durational labors of scholarly study. More broadly yet, I do, indeed, treat reading itself as a labor – as something that is and/or takes work – though not always in a negative sense. Christina Lupton's considerations of the luxuriousness of reading and reading time has been a counterpoint to my thinking in this respect, although her use of contingency remains central for me. Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

[5] The many rhythms of early- to post-modern life are vast and variable, a topic that I will barely jump into here. Later in this introduction I will lay out a few of the ways that conceptions of temporality and methods of measuring time were changing in the Romantic era, along with corresponding labor and life-rhythms, but my study will not aim for anything like a comprehensive treatment of that topic.

[6] This is also a truth that has become especially apparent after the Covid-19 pandemic, which was and is its own lesson in disruption and duration. With respect to both its topical interests and its period of composition, this dissertation could well be considered a Covid project.

[7] Some examples of these figures and postures are Smith's reclining, marking, and stretching speaker; the intimate and interactive act of "fronting" in *The Excursion*; Aurora's replications and reproductions of her own image and "selves" throughout *Aurora Leigh*; and *The Antiquary*'s representations of Oldbuck's antiquarianism, Elspeth's labored narration of her past, and other various "accidents."

on these durational modes is intended to draw out phenomenology's central role in these works'

diegetic and mimetic operations. Indeed, we will see phenomenology as, often, the primary link

between them, between the showing and telling modes of discourse. These modes are thus also

evidence of a broader trend in which the Romantic long form narrates its own formal structure in

and often as its very content. To steal a metaphor from Wordsworth, form casts the shadow of

itself – its own shape or figure – onto the poem's narrative representation of the physical and

social world, making it legible as another material entity *in* that world. In *Forms Less Solid*, we

will see form in both the more traditional sense as either an organizing structure or the minutiae

of style, and also as a movement, an actively connective tissue that comes into being *between*

style and structure, diegetic and mimetic, the textual and extra-textual. In this way, durational

form *is* accidental, but in the sense of its being a "befalling," an occurring, a happening that is,

like all such, a relation dependent upon its spatial and temporal coordinates.[8] This relationality is

a feature of length because it emerges only over time and in textual space, and as a byproduct of

the prolonged attentions these texts demand from their readers.[9]

       The main title of this study – *Forms Less Solid* – is a reference to Wordsworth, whose

poetry has been central to even the earliest iterations of this project. Wordsworth's actual phrase,

from *The Excursion*, is a "frame less solid," which he employs in an ambiguous reference both to

the fragile bodily "frame" of a local child and to the equally fragile stick houses the child has

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[8] Consider the etymology of "accident": Latin, *accidere* – "to fall, to happen"; Anglo-Norman and Middle French *accident* – "unfortunate occurrence or incident, vicissitude of fortune." The OED cites the earliest instances in Latin of "*accidēns* in the sense [of] 'attribute'" in reference to a Greek term used to contrast another meaning "substance." That Greek accident/substance dichotomy is the same Aristotle takes up in *Metaphysics*. This term will come into play more directly in my fifth chapter on Scott. "Accident, n.," in *OED Online*, December 2022, https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/1051?rskey=u8BnKk&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[9] This is not to say that lyrics or other short forms do not require readerly labor, only that long forms tend to make that labor more obvious. The physical bulk and the length of time it takes to get through even a first read make sensible to the reader the level of commitment the text demands.

constructed in an act of play.[10] The scene is short and easy to lose in the ocean of language that is

*The Excursion*. However, as I explain in Chapter Three, the scene can be read as a reflection on

the plot structure of *The Excursion* overall, figuring that structure as a series of pathways

between "frames." In the poem, "frames" is a term that signifies human bodies, built structures,

and textual forms alike. The "frames less solid" passage refers to all these formal entities as

delicate and flexible – things "less solid" – and thus maps closely onto my own conception of

durational form as the textual in-between, as a pathway or frame rather than a predetermined

whole.[11] In my title, I substitute Wordsworth's "frames" for "forms" so as to emphasize my

focus on poetic form and, at the same time, to link it to the fragility and mobility of the physical

body.

## Cultural and Historical Background

The works explored here arise out of a number of converging social and literary

histories.[12] I'll explore a few of those histories here, in order to contextualize those works and to

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[10] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2007), l. 2.447.

[11] In this way I am in alignment with Paul Ricoeur, who argues that the interaction of narrative time and reading time (and, by extension, the worlds of narrative and reader) makes the text like a "window" that both enacts closure and remains open to the reader. Ricoeur sees the text's intention as emerging only in the interaction between reader and narrative (100-101). My interest in the experience of time, the interaction of text and reader, and the juxtaposition of different temporalities in narrative coincides with Ricoeur's. However, Ricoeur reads narrative temporality in modernism as refiguring ordinary temporality, whereas I see Romantic long forms as working to recreate real-life temporal experience. Ricoeur's reading of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* has been an especially helpful explanation of the atemporality of modernist form. Paul Ricoeur, "The Fictive Experience of Time," in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[12] Scholarship from Mary Favret, Kevis Goodman, Amanda Jo Goldstein, and Lily Gurton-Wachter has already done much to explain why, culturally and historically, the Romantics might have been interested in representing something like duration, but these scholars are, on the whole less interested in how the era's changing time-sense and/or materialisms work outside of content or as a function of formal length. I am nonetheless deeply indebted to these scholars and will discuss their work in more detail in later chapters. See, in particular, Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialisms and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

map the thinking behind my own methodology. It has long been established that the innovations

emerging in the lead-up to and during large scale industrialization (e.g., the postal and

stagecoach services, factories, and railways) fundamentally altered Britain's infrastructure and

national character. As Sue Zemka explains, one of the major empiric shifts initiated by those

developments was in the "lived experience of time," which became more and more dominated by

Newtonian "abstract time." Zemka succinctly defines this new kind of time as "homogeneous,

quantifiable, and neutral…precise to the minute… [and] standardized across geographical space

by institutional practices."[13] This is not to say that pre-industrial Britain had no use for or

knowledge of abstract clock time (or of clocks themselves), but rather that its rise to prominence

in the nineteenth century put it into direct conflict with older temporal scales and practices.[14] E.P.

Thompson's seminal essay, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" (1967), explores

the importance of "task-orientation," a "notation of time" characterized not by abstract clock

time but instead by the relationship between different labors and their "'natural' rhythms."[15]

Thompson uses fishing communities as an example, as their work schedule would be dictated by

the natural rhythms of the tides rather than by the clock or anything resembling a standardized

factory workday: "the compulsion is nature's own."[16] Thompson reads task-orientation as both a

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[13] Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3. Zemka's focus is on how fascination with and representations of the moment or instant increase in the novels of the mid to late nineteenth-century even in respect to those of the Romantic era. She argues that novels "cultivate the interest-value of the moment" even though they still require significant reading time (9). The texts that I treat here do not struggle with this particular disjuncture between form and content. In other words, it would seem that for the Romantic long form, duration is still representable.

[14] Jonathan Sachs argues that Romantic era is unique for how it is caught between the increasing speed and brevity of modern time-sense, on one hand, and, on the other, the discovery of geologic deep time. This gives the era a "new sense of slowness." Sachs uses this term to plot a midway point between "deep time" and clock time, a middling phenomenon that overlaps with the "acceleration of contemporary life" (316). Sachs provides a helpful additional explanation as to why the Romantics would have had a conflicting understanding of time, and why a certain kind of "slowness," or even duration, would have emerged as a negotiation of that conflict. Jonathan Sachs, "Slow Time," *PMLA* 134, no. 2 (2019).

[15] E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (December 1967): 59–60.

[16] Thompson, 59–60.

labor and a spatiotemporal experience that by the end of the eighteenth century was in direct conflict with the "time-sense" of industrial society.[17]

There are a few elements of Thompson's analysis of task-orientated temporality that I would like to highlight before moving on. First, Thompson's analysis of both temporal systems is largely focused on labor practices. Industrialization synchronized and homogenized the work day, while non-industrial work was much more irregular and thus characterized by "bouts of intense labour and idleness."[18] Task-orientation's fluid relationship between labor and rest resulted in a parallel relationship between work and life in which "social intercourse and labor [were] intermingled."[19] Task-orientation often dissolved, or simply did not create in the first place, a clear line between labor and the other aspects of life. Second, that task-orientation is guided by "'natural' rhythms" highlights its reliance upon the local landscape and the laborers' access to it. The foremost of these rhythms would have been the rising and setting of the sun, a highly localized and geographically specific measurement of temporality. As Zemka points out, the shift from solar time to abstract time was perhaps the most important of these transitions.[20] Industrialization's break from a task-oriented sense of time is thus also a fracturing of that overt connection between time and place.

In both pre-industrial and industrial time-senses, labor and temporality are intimately connected, though to different effects. What separates task-orientation is the additional connection labor and time have to nature and landscape. My reading of Romantic long forms will also draw out the indelible relationship, and the continual oscillation, between the laboring body,

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[17] Thompson, 80.
[18] Thompson, 73.
[19] Thompson, 60.
[20] Zemka, 6.

time, and place. It is, in fact, that triad that will be the touchstone of formal duration. Romantic long forms evince a time-sense modeled after the other spatially-oriented modes of labor local to the places and landscapes the texts themselves describe and, in doing so, these poems project the act of reading as another such labor.[21] This, in turn, posits reading as the kind of prolonged pursuit that might also shift regularly between "bouts of intense labour and idleness." Although my chapter on Smith's *Beachy Head* will most closely explore this relationship between labor and rest, I regard all the works I discuss in this project as reflecting something like pre-industrial spatiotemporal experience and as committed both to representing that experience in content and recreating it in form.

That certain Romantic long forms define themselves against the emerging abstract temporality of an industrializing society reframes those works' relationship to particular literary and scholarly traditions as well. For example, Catherine Gallagher's essay "Formalism and Time" (2006), which implicates the Romantics in a long formalist history that has read form as inherently incompatible with length and time. Gallagher labels the most prominent formalist criticisms of the last two hundred years as either, on one hand, conceiving of form as the text's organizational superstructure, "which can be made apprehensible all at once" no matter its length.[22] On the other hand, form may refer to a text's style, its minute rhetorical details.[23] As much as those two formalisms refer to opposite scales of the text, Gallagher insists that both

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[21] Smith is keenly attuned to the local labors of Sussex, especially that of fishermen, farmers, trappers, and smugglers. She also makes a point of including "marking" as one of these efforts. As we will see, marking is for her a term that connects interpretation and reading. *The Excursion* makes a point of configuring walking (and, by extension, poetry) as guided by the movements of the sun and by an oscillation between movement and rest. Aurora Leigh compares her poetic practice directly to weaving and other comparable domestic labors. The Mucklebackits, a poor fishing family, occupy one of *The Antiquary*'s most important plot lines and represent a local labor that is in direct contrast with Oldbuck's scholarly pursuits.

[22] Gallagher, "Formalism and Time," 307.

[23] Gallagher, 306–7. Gallagher associates the digital humanities with the form-as-structure camp, and the Russian formalists with form-as-style.

versions see form as "arrest[ing] narrative flow, one by generalizing an enduring pattern…and the other by freezing a moment for analysis."[24] On either side of the spectrum, then, form as it has been rendered in modern literary scholarship is by definition the element of the text that most directly "contends against time."[25]

Gallagher opens her history with Romanticism and, in particular, with Percy Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, in which Shelley distinguishes form (the "poem") from the narrative "story" by defining the former (and its superiority) by reference to its timelessness, a-historicity, and its reference to the eternal.[26] Gallagher's focus is largely on how Shelley's influence extends into twentieth-century scholarship, but the de-temporalization of form is clearly evident in the work of the early Romantics as well. Coleridge's theory of organic wholes, in which the "*simultaneous intuition of the relations of parts*" is the key to aesthetic beauty and to the construction of the Greater Romantic Lyric, clearly belongs to this tradition.[27] This line of thought positions Romanticism's defining form – the lyric – as incompatible with experiences of duration and aligned instead with instantaneous apprehension and/or with the ephemera of the stylistic "moment." This emphasis on the moment and simultaneity corresponds with the fetishization of the moment that Zemka identifies in post-industrial time-sense. So although the Romantic lyric's atemporality may push against linearity and notions of historical progression made so palpable by the triumph of clock time over task-orientation, the Romantic lyric does not so much rethink temporality as seek to escape from it.

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[24] Gallagher, 307.
[25] Gallagher, 307–8.
[26] Gallagher, 310-11.
[27] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism (1814)," in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 349.

That new atemporal formalist commitment converges, rather strangely, with Romanticism's own reworking of the eighteenth-century prospect tradition. In that earlier tradition, represented most often by James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), the poem's speaker stands from a literally and socially elevated position (often associated with aristocratic country house) and looks out upon the landscape below. The view is stable and secure but emotionally and physically removed – it is only Thomson's disembodied eye that interacts in any way with the forms and figures he sees below. As John Barrell explains, Thomson's legacy is thus as one who "sees landscape as not something he is *in*, but which is all around him, *out there*, his eye wanders but his own position is fixed."[28] As the century progresses, that distance between speaker and landscape is gradually reduced, as the speakers in Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747) and "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) and William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), among others, engage more and more directly with the landscapes and people they describe. By the end of the century and the arrival of the French Revolution, which drastically increased the number of people moving or being forced to move throughout the English and French countrysides, the aloofness of the prospect tradition gives way to the pre- and early-Romantic impulse to move into and wander through the landscape.[29]

Both Garbrielle Starr and Ingrid Horrocks characterize the transition from the eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poem to Romanticism by its changing depictions of affect and embodiment.[30] As Gabrielle Starr explains, the eighteenth century was a period in which intimacy itself was being redefined, a trend evidenced by the transition from the Thomsonian

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[28] Barrell, John. *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (1972). 21.

[29] Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 17.

[30] G. Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

disembodied, wandering eye to the more directly tactile and embodied experiences of later poets.[31] Horrocks takes this one step further in her argument for the specifically gendered nature of that transition, which she argues was chiefly initiated by the women writers of the latter half of the century. Horrocks figures those women writers as particularly attuned to the potential for mobility and sympathy that wandering through landscape creates but, also, to its potential dangers – abandoning the protection of the prospect view's physical distance also meant exposing oneself to affective, financial, and physical vulnerability or danger, particularly for the female speaker or subject.[32] The Romantics take up this tactile, embodied relationship with nature and stage similar encounters with other wandering subjects but often dilute its gendered implications. In my fourth chapter, I read Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) as a post-Romantic text that works, in part, to reaffirm the gendered and domestic aspects of this tradition.

The transformations of the loco-descriptive tradition throughout the eighteenth century have much to do with the emergence of Romanticism in general, but here I am primarily interested in it as a foundation for Romanticism's own emphasis on walking or wandering, local community, landscape, and phenomenological experiences of and within those landscapes. This new intimate, haptic relationship with the landscape – which often looks like a kind of topographical close reading – is aligned, I argue, with a spatiotemporal orientation similar to Thompson's description of task-orientation; both are guided primarily by local knowledge and

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[31] Starr sees this as part of a larger inter-generic effort to determine how new literatures should be read and to articulate the connections between "the world of the reader and the world of the read" (7). Similarly, Elaine Auyoung argues that nineteenth-century novels use the reader's embodied experience to make novels "feel real." Like both scholars, I read embodied experience as a bridge between the reader and the fictional world. I differ, however, from Auyoung in that she still largely thinks about length as a function of simultaneous action. Elaine Auyoung, *When Fiction Feels Real: Representation and the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[32] Horrocks, 7-9.

ongoing kinds of labor. In these texts, the labor is that of walking, storytelling, observing, and writing. This pattern both coincides and conflicts with that other emerging interest, on the formal level: namely, the lyric and atemporality. I read the Romantic long form (and its renewed attention to length and duration) as signaling and seeking to rework the incompatibility of these two impulses and their temporalities. The formal changes devised by Charlotte Smith between *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) and *Beachy Head* (1806) offer a strong case study for the era's negotiation of its conflicting thematic and formal commitments. I read this negotiation as one of the major ways that Romanticism's long forms grow out of and directly respond to their unique historical and literary contexts.

Before moving on, let me note one related topic that I also take up briefly in Chapter Two: namely, M.H. Abrams' influential history of the Greater Romantic Lyric. Abrams' genealogy of the form begins with the eighteenth-century loco-descriptive tradition. His interest has less to do with that traditions' psychophysical remove than with their reliance on the medieval concept of the "*paysage moralisé*," in which God is said to have "designed the universe analogically," directly relating the natural world to the spiritual.[33] The prospect poem emerges from this analogical structure of thought, in which nature can be "read" as another Holy Scripture, available to any and all who live and move within it – an epistemology founded upon human-divine relationality. When Samuel Taylor Coleridge develops the Greater Romantic Lyric, he effectively converts this divinely-inspired landscape into one that instead manifests as the inscription of the secular, individual, and historically-located mind. The loco-descriptive poem's commitment to analogy – and, as a result, to knowledge as a public entity – is

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[33] M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), 209.

transformed in the Romantic lyric into an equal and opposite commitment to private knowledge and memory, inscribed onto representations of nature.

The a-historicity of the lyric's representations of nature has long been under debate, a debate I will not enter into here. I mention it only to highlight how lyric poetry's transpositional move (the laying of the image of the mind over that of the landscape) is already, to some degree, atemporal and even aspatial in its two-dimensionality (that is, nature becomes a flat surface more than a three-dimensional place). While I do read the long forms that are central to this project as following Romanticism's thematic move away from the prospect view and into the landscape, I also read them as restoring a degree of that tradition's commitment to analogical thought. At the same time, these works convert that commitment into a spatiotemporal mode that dramatizes its departure from both the classicism of the original model and its Christian doctrinarism. Analogy becomes a way of formulating real and imagined interactions, and of prioritizing juxtaposition over substitution. Analogical thought is central to the works I read and, as a result, to the way I read them. It is, moreover, a method I have generalized into a critical position, one in which scholarship becomes another extended posture, a gesture, a reaching out and holding together, a way of making connections.

**Critical Contexts**

I am far from the first to explore the strange states (generic, historical, phenomenological, and interpretive) that the long forms of the nineteenth century narrate in content and formally embody. Monique R. Morgan's *Narrative Means, Lyrical Ends* (2009) focuses on how long poems like Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24) and *Aurora Leigh* function as generic hybrids.

Morgan argues that each long poem "uses narrative techniques to create lyrical effects."[34] She defines the lyric mode by its atemporality, and argues that, in the long poem, it works to subvert what she calls the "retrospective" impulse of narrative closure and to promote a lyrically "simultaneous" reading experience. For Morgan, lyric becomes the dominant mode of the poetry, so that the long poem is always working to achieve "lyric ends." Elisha Cohn's *Still Life* (2016) argues that depictions of inattention, absorption, and non-reflection, all of which she connects to reading and writing, offer a certain "relief" from the progression of narrative, but without actually thwarting closure.[35] Here narrative is still dominant, but lyric offers a reprieve from linearity and telos. Anne C. McCarthy's *Awful Parenthesis* (2018) defines lyrical "suspension" as a "form of hovering, the alternation of resistance and yielding" that allows for states of "not-knowing" and resists closure.[36]

All three of these scholars appear, in their introductions at least, to be offering an analysis of something like the experience of length – Morgan even makes an argument for and about long poems in particular.[37] But all three present moments or modes of "suspension," pause, stillness,

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[34] Monique R. Morgan, *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 2.

[35] Elisha Cohn, *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

[36] Anne C. McCarthy, *Awful Parenthesis: Suspension and the Sublime in Romantic and Victorian Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 4. McCarthy's emphasis on "not-knowing" puts her in conversation with a recent line of Romantic scholarship that emphasizes Romantic poets' inability to articulate certain kinds of knowledge or, more often, their refusal to make claims upon the world. Nearly every chapter in this project touches on that theme at some point, but my emphasis on analogical thought will be a counterbalance to this line of thinking. For examples of this tradition closer to my own thinking, see also Anne-Lise Francois, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Anahid Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[37] For other similar studies of length and narrative suspension in the novel, see Amy M. King, "Dilatory Description and the Pleasures of Accumulation: Toward a History of Novelistic Length," in *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011); Suzanne Keen, *Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kyle McAuley, "Imaginative Geographies in Scott and Austen," *The Wordsworth Circle* 52, no. 3 (Summer 2021); Amit S. Yahav, *Feeling Time: Duration, the Novel, and Eighteenth-Century Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). As the title indicates, Yahav's project is probably the closest, topically, to mine. Yahav argues for felt time as important to eighteenth-century conceptions of aesthetic pleasure and that the primacy of clock time should not automatically be

and so forth as defined in relation to an understanding of lyric as aligned with atemporality, disembodiment, or simultaneity.[38] That definition of lyric is itself sympathetic to a critical view of form as a "refugee" from time, not able to thwart the march of time or narrative closure completely but to escape from it temporarily.[39] Even in McCarthy's analysis, which is the closest to my own, "suspension" is about escape, about a relief from knowledge or articulation that can result in an "infinite capacity for experience."[40] These critics conceive of lyric within longer narratives as a retreat into the infinite and away from time and narrative, and it is the purpose of the scholarship to pick out those lyric moments and prioritize them as the true mode, "end," or, really, the authentic form of the texts they read (both Morgan and McCarthy ultimately claim that the texts they analyze are "essentially" lyrical). This is an almost verbatim description of the formalist method that Gallagher describes as fundamentally unable to account for length and for time, found in critical works all claiming to theorize and account for the experience of length or reading time in long poems and novels. In short, Morgan, McCarthy, and Cohn translate Gallagher's form vs. time dichotomy into a lyric vs. narrative debate, ostensibly in the service of solving the problem Gallagher identifies (i.e., accounting for length) but in reality just rehashing it under different terms (this is especially obvious when we remember that Shelley's original terms in *Defense of Poetry* for what we have come to call "form" and "time" are "poem" and "story," respectively).[41] The circumvention of the problem of length or duration through

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assumed in eighteenth-century novels. However, Yahav still argues for the novel's durational pauses as essentially escapist, a way of getting out of modern clock time (3, 9).

[38] "Simultaneity" is an important term in Coleridge's organic vision of form and also for Joseph Frank, whose essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" I explore in more detail below. Frank uses simultaneity as the formal and temporal opposite of sequential narration. This term is employed frequently in the scholarship I discuss here, but rarely with reference to this history. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts," *The Sewanee Review* 53, no. 2 (Spring 1945).

[39] Gallagher, "Formalism and Time," 308.

[40] McCarthy, *Awful Parenthesis: Suspension and the Sublime in Romantic and Victorian Poetry*, 86.

[41] Tilottama Rajan's *Romantic Narrative* has been the most helpful exception to the rule in this scholarship. Rajan also focuses on the narrative/lyric divide but resists both the association of narrative with the novel and of

discussions of lyrical moments *within* long-form texts is the primary source of my own dissatisfaction with this line of scholarship.[42]

     *Forms Less Solid* takes up works similar to those treated by the critics above but is keen to explore how such works (Romantic and post-Romantic long-form texts) represent and theorize length and duration on a formal level that is different from what we take to be lyrical. My move here is not a return to a full-on structuralist approach – in effect, another and an extreme instance of the temporality-incompatible formalism I am keen to get past. I fluctuate between form-as-structure and form-as-style, moving between them instead of prioritizing one over the other. In my reading, formal length and the experience of duration (for readers and characters alike) are *made out of* – they come into being *through* – the work's oscillations between various temporalities, between the phenomenological and rhetorical dimensions, and between structure and style. It is this movement-in-place that I identify as a durational mode. By movement-in-place, I mean the sustained pacing between different scales and kinds of analysis, a mode of critical analysis that is (crucially, I believe) reflected in the very content or mimetic dimension of these artworks. What I describe, then, is both a readerly movement and a textual one. It amounts

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Romanticism with lyric. Rajan argues for a "poetics of narrative that unbinds the closure of plot" and a corresponding vision of poetry as an agent of narrative and mimetic unraveling or dissipation (xv-xvi). Rajan's conception of poetry and narrative is derived directly from Shelley's *Defence*, but *Romantic Narrative*'s unique orientation toward the categories of narrative and lyric and its reading of certain long-form narratives as committed to self-reflection, to refusing closure, and to revealing internal or formal discord have greatly influenced my thinking. Tilottama Rajan, *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[42] At the other end of the spectrum, Ted Underwood uses Gallagher and Joseph Frank's essays as jumping off points for an argument in favor of distant reading. Underwood sees distant reading as the alternative to the kind of criticism Gallagher argues arises out of Walter Pater and Shelley's vision of form as moments of stylistic and rhetorical atemporality, moments that it is the job of the critic to identify through, after the New Criticism, the employment of close reading. Distant reading is Underwood's alternative, overlooking the fact that one of Gallagher's primary examples of our obsession with compressing time into space is scholars' use of charts and graphs. Even so, Underwood's analysis does not do much to provide an alternative definition or reading *of form*, only a different form of reading – projects that are or could be aligned but are not identical. *Forms Less Solid* is committed to a much closer reading method, in an attempt to follow, to move with, the extended and minute oscillations of the texts it studies. Ted Underwood, "Why Literary Time Is Measured in Minutes," *ELH* 85, no. 2 (2018).

to a critical posture already inscribed within and initiated by the text, so that it becomes difficult

to separate content from form, text from critic.[43] These oscillations between scales, positions,

and categories are an enactment of the process of reading in real time, a way of making time felt

– often as something that is disorienting, laborious, or physically and psychologically expansive

– and a way of making time formal. Note that by attending to these fluctuations, we discern a

counter tradition within the very period that Gallagher identifies as separating duration from

aesthetics.

Throughout *Forms Less Solid*, I make claims for the long form's spatiality in relation to

its temporality, for how these works often present themselves as "like" particular places,

landscapes, or built structures with respect to their cultivation of a prolonged, inhabitation-like,

embodied attentiveness (or, as not just "like" places but *as* veritable places themselves). I want to

be clear about the fact that when I describe any form as "spatial" I mean something quite

different from the kind of spatial form for which Joseph Frank argues in his classic essay,

"Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945). Frank reads modernist literature as spatial in that

"the reader is intended to apprehend [the] work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a

sequence."[44] Here space is two-dimensional, a picture or surface that presents multiple events

occurring simultaneously, much like the non-representational modernist paintings of the same

era (or, like some non-perspectival pre-modernist paintings).[45] This is another conception of

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[43] The long form tracks its own diegetic motions in its mimetic representations. This is one way the text at once recognizes itself as an object in the world and de-naturalizes its representations of that world, and so is also an example of the return to analogy I argue for above: the text and the world are related to one another but are not interchangeable.

[44] Frank, 225.

[45] The fair scene in *Madame Bovary* (1856) is Frank's earliest example of "spatial form," as the scene moves through different levels of society brought together at the fair and in a single moment, the narration of which takes the reader through space, through the elevations of the scene, rather than through a temporal sequence. This is the "spatialization of form in the novel" that Joyce and Proust take up as the governing structure for their own works (whereas it is employed in only one scene in Flaubert) (231). The other notable example is non-naturalist modernist painting, which uses two-dimensional forms as a way of avoiding temporality, because depth puts an image in time.

form outside of time, but it is also a rendering of space that is sharply at odds with the lived

experience of it. Frank's is a non-mimetic, abstract vision of the spatial in which the art object

reveals itself as a flat surface. Further, Frank's model of reading is also atemporal: his emphasis

is on re-reading, prioritized in modernism because it provides a premonition of the text as a

whole. If, on the other hand, the long forms I study ever offer a vision of the "whole," it only as a

temporary view that arises from within that readerly movement-in-place, within the ongoing

labor of reading. The spatiality of the long forms I confront in this study is neither two-

dimensional (as in the flat plane of nonrepresentational or non-naturalistic artwork) nor

consistently three-dimensional (and, as it were, "lifelike"). Rather, the spatial character of these

long forms changes as we read, alternately revealing the text as a surface and as a

phenomenological, three-dimensional place, *and* as the uncharted, unnamed kind of space *in*

*between* surface and depth. It is the ongoing interaction between reader and text in time that

gives way to this more varied sense of space and place.[46]

My model of formal spatiality follows more closely in the footsteps of Herbert Tucker's

concept of "poetic spacetime." Tucker's term operates, first of all, as a recognition of the

increasingly entangled conceptions of space and time in the nineteenth century. Tucker tracks the

ways that, especially in geology and other natural sciences, people were learning to "interpret

time as the meaning of space," while in everyday practice "space turned out to be the meaning of

time" (this is most evident in relation to the railroad, where travelers were learning to translate

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That is the visual equivalent of how Frank reads Joyce in particular, whose aim in *Ulysses* is to juxtapose individual scenes without reference to their sequence (234). The novel's structure becomes the surface upon which disparate parts are made visible all at once.

[46] My own language will often toggle between "space" and "place" – two terms that represent the most abstract and particular, respectively, bounds of spatial experience – in order to follow that changing textual dimensionality. The abstract idea of space is still important to this project – it is difficult, I will admit, to think of any text, which is always already a somewhat abstract thing, outside of that category. But as I hope my analysis of Frank has shown, any interest I have in space is always tied to immediate and localized renderings of embodiment and temporality.

"minutes into miles").[47] Tucker's study shows that the Romantic long form's integration of the spatial and temporal is in fact representative of a larger cultural and intellectual trend that would gain speed as the century went on. My reading of these works is attuned to this contemporary development. Tucker, moreover, reads poetic spacetime as the formal, self-referential project by which nineteenth-century poetry makes space and time the interpretations of one another. Tucker reads these texts as modelling in form their own thematic spatiotemporal concerns, and vice versa – these poems often describe a built structure so as to point out that they are "conspicuously built structures in their own right."[48] In this sense, all four of the works I study could be described as modeling something like poetic spacetime. Tucker, however, does not consider length as a formal category by which this phenomenon might also emerge. *Forms Less Solid* builds upon Tucker's analysis by taking into account the particularly dynamic formal structures, the extended spatiotemporalities of embodied experience, and the correspondingly expansive readerly temporalities that each emerge as a function of length. Formal duration thus nuances and expands the concept of poetic spacetime that Tucker identifies.

Finally, I should note that "place" is, in many ways, the better term for the kind of embodied spatial thinking I will describe throughout this project. Edward S. Casey's *Getting Back Into Place* (1993) has been central to my own understanding of the phenomenology of place, a phenomenology that I read in all four of the long forms examined here. Casey defines "place" as a space bounded by the body on the "near side" and horizon on the "far side"; place is essentially that which "takes place between the body and landscape."[49] In poetic and prose

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[47] Herbert F. Tucker, "Of Monuments and Moments: Spacetime in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *MLQ* 58, no. 3 (September 1997): 271.
[48] Tucker, 278.
[49] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 46, 29.

fiction representations of landscape that I study, landscape is often the device by which the phenomenology of reading and the body of the reader make themselves felt. Casey's dynamic concept of place would urge us to read the long form as configuring itself as a "place" that *takes place*, or becomes "implaced,"[50] between the reading body and the written landscape.[51] Even without that rendering of text-as-place, Casey's emphasis on the body's role in defining place is an important claim for the difference between place on the one hand and empty, abstract space on the other.[52] Notice how both Casey and Thompson use the body and its movements or labors to distinguish spatiotemporal experience from abstract time and space: once again, the body, place, and time are the coordinates that triangulate something like lived experience.

**Chapter Summaries**

After this introduction, *Forms Less Solid* is organized into four chapters, each of which will focus on one Romantic or Post-Romantic long-form text that exemplifies durational form. In Chapter Two, "The Nature of the Ground: Formal Extensions in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*" I argue that even before the organic, atemporal Romantic formalism of Coleridge and Shelley had fully emerged, Charlotte Smith had already brought form and time together into a working relationship. *Beachy Head*'s success at representing and formalizing duration is the

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[50] Casey uses "implacement" to describe the active and distinctly *mobile* act of "getting into place." When I describe duration and reading both as a kinds of movement, implacement is close to what I have in mind (xiii).

[51] Andrew Franta has recently modeled another way of thinking about the text as a kind of place. In *Systems Failure* (2019), Franta begins with a fascinating argument about how Uncle Toby's model maps in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759) become a site for fantasy and play rather than for directly recreating reality, which is what Toby originally sets out to do. This is how Franta reads the early novel itself as operating: it is a form that moves toward fiction and play in its (failed) attempts to represent reality. Implicit in this argument is the idea that the novel becomes a place in its own right – like a model map in the garden – that exists in addition and in reference, but not identically, to real places. This is yet another way of imagining certain texts as analogically constructed. Andrew Franta, *Systems Failure: The Uses of Disorder in English Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

[52] This is perhaps Casey's main contributions to the philosophy of place. Casey credits both Heidegger and Bachelard with bringing a new emphasis to the "importance of dwelling places," but argues that neither thinks adequately about the body's role "in the experience of significant places" (xv). This is largely why Casey has been so useful for me.

product of the poem's careful management of the tension between the temporal abundance of length – exemplified by the vastness of the poem's historical and geological considerations – and, on the other hand, the limitations of that abundance – made manifest in the poem's equal fascination with the overt gaps in contemporary scientific and historical records. *Beachy Head*'s impulse or orientation, as a poetic body, is toward expansion, toward length, but the poem's counterbalancing commitment to representing embodied experience (most often enacted by the speaker's habits of reclining, marking, and stretching) keep that impulse in check. *Beachy Head*'s continual oscillation between the many modes, scales, elevations, and perspectives represented and performed throughout the work become its method of making time felt, of integrating duration into form and content. I also read *Beachy Head*'s durational form as emerging out of and in opposition to Smith's first poetic work, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800). I use *Elegiac Sonnets* to contrast Smith's use of the sonnet and long form and to draw out Smith's own articulation of the problematics of atemporal form. Because the transition from *Elegiac Sonnets* to *Beachy Head* demonstrates so well the broader development of the Romantic long form, Chapter Two will in many ways serve as an extended introduction to *Forms Less Solid* as a whole.

In Chapter Three, "Scenes Revisited: Wordsworth's *Excursion* and 'The Forms of Things,'" I read William Wordsworth's most "long and laborious" work, *The Excursion*, as bounded by various "frames." Wordsworth uses the frame, as a term and a metaphor, to link the poem's key themes and figures: this includes the structure of the poetic "cathedral" Wordsworth uses to describe the poem's overarching structure in his prefatory essay, the literal cathedral featured in Book V, Margaret's ruined cottage, the speaker's and other characters' bodily figures, and the poem's recurring fascination with the much "less solid" but essentially connective

figures of shade and shadow. As the poem goes on, these things often appear to morph into one another, as if the poem is continually fluctuating from one vision of form to the next. Those fluctuations are one way that the poem takes into account the time of reading and its labor, and so positions the reader as one form or body among the poem's many others. The "attentive Reader" for which Wordsworth longs in the preface is, then, attuned to these formal movements and to the poem's emerging status as a self-reflective text whose work is primarily to confront, and to make the reader confront, its own flexible, shifting, expansive structure. As a result, I read *The Excursion* as a counterpoint to conceptualizations of Wordsworth as a poet whose goal is always to naturalize his own style or to elide the traces of construction and design in his poetry. *The Excursion* is a durational form and a unique element of the Wordsworthian cannon because of its attempts to make evident the "forms of things."

Chapter Four, "Between the House and Landscape: *Aurora Leigh* as a Many-Faced Form," reads *Aurora Leigh* as a formally and thematically "double-faced" text that attempts to reconcile the Romantic poets' tradition of movement through landscape with Aurora's own, distinctly gendered, sense of the house as having a creative and reflective power of its own. *Aurora Leigh*'s theorization of the interplay between the landscape and the domestic space mirrors its theorization of itself as a spatial entity in its own right. *Aurora Leigh's* spatiality is another method of representing and formalizing extended temporalities – the experience of duration is, here, one of poetic and domestic inhabitation. In addition, I read *Aurora Leigh*'s interest in its own composition and in Aurora's corresponding development as a poetess to its fascination with faces, portraiture, reflection, and women's bodies. The verse-novel's reproductions of the feminine image and body transform the text into a self-reflective surface – a text of many Auroras – that also mimics its protagonist's own method of authorial reproduction.

As with all the texts I analyze in this project, *Aurora Leigh's* construction of its formal structure is intimately related to and defined by its equivalent prioritization of embodied, spatiotemporal experience. In contrast to Smith and Wordsworth, however, Barrett Browning explicitly genders that embodied experience, incorporating the gendered body and gendered spaces into the text's configuration of itself and of duration.

The fifth chapter, "Everyday Accidents: Plots of Place in Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary*," reads *The Antiquary* as a local narrative, one that derives its structure from the landscape and topography of its setting more than from cause and effect or narrative progression. In keeping with that central focus on locality and place, Scott uses spatial compression – the small town of Fairport, limited landscape views, crowded domestic spaces, and so on – to make evident the physically weighty, embodied nature of certain durational experiences. The novel's spatial limitations are counterbalanced by the opposite overabundance of temporalities, a tension Scott uses to bring into focus the many conflicting measurements and conceptualizations of time existing together at the end of the eighteenth century. *The Antiquary* makes no attempt to marry those temporalities, a narrative time-sense derived from the titular antiquarian profession that itself prioritizes the details and fragments of the past over comprehensive historical narrative. The novel's formal and narrative movements are characterized by the conversion of "intention" into "accident," in which intentional design or narration turns into contingency, happenstance, even physical harm. As a result, *The Antiquary*, the third and final installment in the original *Waverley* trilogy, narrates the novel form as breaking down or, at least, as incapable of providing comprehensive claims to knowledge. Although *The Antiquary* is the only novel I study and is thus the apparent outlier of this project, I close with this chapter because it takes my earlier claim about durational form as accidental seriously, a claim that it extends to the act of scholarly study

itself. This chapter is, then, partly an attempt to theorize *Forms Less Solid*'s own relationship

with duration and its status as a work of literary scholarship (and as a dissertation). The sixth and

final chapter is a short coda that reflects on the broader social and personal contexts that have

influenced this project since its earliest days.

# CHAPTER II

## The "Nature of the Ground": Formal Extensions in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*

This chapter argues that Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head* (1807) is a poem that formalizes duration, and that it does so by counterbalancing its own formal length with representations of phenomenological experience. The poem's extensiveness is a function of its literal, formal length and of the broad historical and geological catalog that makes up much of its content.[53] The poem's phenomenology, on the other hand, manifests in the postures and physical interactions of its embodied speaker and the local figures featured throughout the poem. The foremost of those postures is the speaker's opening position of recline, in which the speaker's own extended body accesses multiple temporalities and interactive modes and initiates the poem's own formal extensiveness. At the same time, the text maintains a pointed awareness of the perceptive limitations of those bodies, and of their resemblance, especially in that position of recline, to the many other non-living bodies whose remains are buried into the historical and geological makeup of the cliff-face. *Beachy Head*, as a result, is a long poem whose formal and conceptual expansiveness is registered and grounded by the sensations and limitations of the mortal, physical body in the world. Smith's final masterpiece is a durational form – a text that acknowledges temporal experience as unavoidable and, also, asks the reader to endure its own

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[53] At 730 lines, *Beachy Head* is what we might somewhat imprecisely call a "long poem," in that it is long enough to be overtly non-lyrical but not long or narrative enough to be considered an epic (broadly speaking). *Beachy Head* is not even the longest Romantic long poem, in terms of line count, featured in this project, never mind of the entire period. However, its relative lack of an organizing principle (even lacking the separation into books we see in both *The Excursion* and *Aurora Leigh*) and the abundance of footnotes give this poem a nebulousness that makes it difficult to categorize as anything other than, simply, "long."

lengthiness – because it filters its vast historical, local, and scientific knowledge through the relentless temporality of embodiment and lived experience.

In light of these temporal concerns, this chapter also positions *Beachy Head* as an early example of a Romantic-era formalist tradition that stands as an alternative to what we have come to know as Romantic formalism. In the latter tradition, poetic form is often conflated with lyrical atemporality, often as defined by Coleridge's theory of organic wholes, in which the "*simultaneous intuition of the relations of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole*" is key to aesthetic beauty.[54] From Coleridge to Shelley to the present day, Romanticism has been seen to define form as operating outside of time because it, ideally, organizes the text (whether on the level of style or structure) so, as Catherine Gallagher notes, to make it "apprehensible all at once."[55] This vision of form brings the text outside of time, both because it removes the reader from the time of reading and because it serves as an entryway into the most "eternal" parts of the text. Length and duration are thus categories that are nearly incomprehensible to a formalism for which form itself always "contends against time."[56] Just as this tradition had emerged in what we now call the Greater Romantic Lyric, and at the end of her own life, Smith negotiates a very different relationship between form and time.[57] The posthumously published *Beachy Head* is the result.

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[54] Coleridge, "Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism (1814)," 349.

[55] Gallagher, "Formalism and Time," 306.

[56] Gallagher, 307. Gallagher notes that even though literary scholarship has traditionally defined form in two conflicting ways – either as the details of style or the overall organizing structure – both of those definitions are in some way opposed to time, either because they freeze narrative in order to analyze the stylistic moment or because they condense it into a single image or superstructure.

[57] Smith died on October 28th, 1806 after an extended period of illness and before the publication of *Beachy Head*. Especially considering the poem's fragmented ending (which is also about the hermit Darby's death), both *Beachy Head* and Smith alike seem to take on death and its mystery – its erasure of knowledge and experience – not only as another aspect of embodied temporal experience but, also, as an agent of closure, as the rock (so to speak) that the poem breaks itself against.

That negotiation and *Beachy Head*'s resulting formal expansiveness manifests as the culmination and response to formal and thematic problems integral to Smith's early poetry. Smith's own awareness of the particular limitation of an atemporal conception of form thus also predates the Romantics' rendering of it. This is best evidenced by Smith's first collection of poetry, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800). Thematically, *Elegiac Sonnets* operates around a central breakdown of community and imaginative relief and, more broadly, of the relationship between form and content. These discontinuities are the *Sonnets*' central organizing structures, and they work well for a collection whose aim is the depiction of the unending restlessness and despondency of communal isolation.[58] They also tee up *Beachy Head*'s reworking of the relationship between form and time. *Elegiac Sonnets* is, as a result, both the formal negative and the prerequisite for Smith's final masterpiece, and thus also for this chapter.

The sonnets are best characterized by their repeated employment of a relatively straightforward formula that hinges on false comparisons: Smith's speaker observes a natural phenomenon, another person, or some event or interaction and describes the scene or compares it to something else. At the stanza's final turn, however, Smith's speaker refuses that comparison for herself, laments the loss of a similar relationship, or emphasizes her own isolation from the scene at hand. Sonnet 54 is a prime example:

<div style="text-align:center">

Sonnet LIV
*The sleeping woodman. Written in April 1790*
</div>

Ye copses wild, where April bids arise
The vernal grasses, and the early flowers;
My soul depress'd – from human converse flies
To the lone shelter of your pathless bowers.

Lo! – where the Woodman, with his toil oppress'd,
His careless head on bark and moss reclined,

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[58] By "communal" I refer to these speakers' unrealized fantasy of open intellectual exchange, of mutual and beneficial social and natural interaction. It may also be read as a fantasy of stability, in which the wandering I describe below might be curbed or stilled by a rootedness in place, by locality.

Lull'd by the song of birds, the murmuring wind,
Has sunk to calm tho' momentary rest.

Ah! Would 'twere mine in Spring's green lap to find
Such transient respite from the ills I bear!
Would I could taste, like this unthinking hind,
A sweet forgetfulness of human care,
Till the last sleep these weary eyes shall close,
And Death receive me to his long repose.[59]

The poem sets the reader up for a like-to-like comparison between speaker and Woodman, but ends as a false or failed analogy. The Woodman's relationship to both nature and to his "momentary rest" is easy, "careless," and intimate, and the speaker employs it as a representative of what she desires but does not have: "Would 'twere mine." Speaker and Woodman are revealed as two incomparable entities because their relationships to nature and to their own labor are incommensurate. That relational break – both between Woodman and speaker, and between speaker and the natural scene – is the sonnet's foundational structuring principle. It enacts a purposeful rupturing of analogy that signals both an exclusion from nature and from metaphor, from poetic language as a socially connective tissue. It is also an overt deconstruction of the analogical system of thought that is so fundamental to the eighteenth-century prospect poem's own rendering of nature as a public entity, another tradition that bears heavily on this collection (*Elegiac Sonnets* thus toggles tantalizingly between the two major poetic traditions bookending the eighteenth century).[60] Neither nature nor contemporary poetic tradition are accessible resources in Smith's rendering of the sonnet form.

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[59] Charlotte Smith, "Elegiac Sonnets," in *Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works*, ed. Claire Knowles and Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2017).

[60] In M.H. Abrams' history of the development of Greater Romantic Lyric, he identifies the eighteenth century loco-descriptive poem as the Romantic form's most important predecessor. Early local poems such as John Denham's "Cooper's Hill" combine descriptions of landscape with meditations upon it, just as the later Romantic iteration would, but rely on the medieval concept of the "*paysage moralisé*," the belief that God had "designed the universe analogically, relating the physical, moral, and spiritual realms by an elaborate system of correspondences." The idea is that nature reveals, in its visible form, the character and morality of the "divine Architect," so that it may literally

The result of this formal and thematic rupture is a series of exclusions – from rest, nature, poetry, imagination, community, and even certain temporalities. Rest is perhaps chief among these: the speaker's primary lament in Sonnet 54 is that she cannot find "transient respite" or "momentary rest" from her physical and emotional exertions. Ingrid Horrocks argues that this restlessness is the prevailing attitude of the entire collection. Horrocks labels *Elegiac Sonnets* as a "wandering" text that evokes a certain "tedium, monotony, [and] unconnectedness" both for the sonnets' speakers and for the reader as well (a figure who, in reading these repetitive laments over two volumes and twenty years of composition, is also not offered much respite or relief from these "ills").[61] One major consequence of this general restlessness, which Horrocks connects to a corresponding lack of sheltering natural spaces, is a failure of both poetry and of imagination to provide escape of any kind. The only thing left to do, for both the speaker and for the collection as a whole, is simply to keep going, to wander indefinitely without hope for change or end. Rest is *Elegiac Sonnets*' great other; it is the ever-receding horizon of a wandering form.

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be read and interpreted as another Holy Scripture, a direct imprint of the relationship between God and the physical world (209). The prospect poem takes up this belief and, with it, an analogical structure of thought. Which is to say, it takes up an essentially *relational* structure of thought: to analogize is to say that the relationship between two things is like the relationship between two other things, and so each may tell us something about the other. Analogy is, in short, a relational and communal approach to knowledge, and it lies at the heart of the prospect tradition. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric."

[61] Horrocks's work has been a crucial text for this project, in part because it considers *Elegiac Sonnets* alongside and as having similar problems as traditional long poems like Thomson's *The Seasons* and Cowper's *The Task* and aims to consider *Elegiac Sonnets* as "an aggregate or sequence rather than as a collection of discreet poems" (79). Reading *Sonnets* as an aggregate is, I think, a logical way to approach this text. However, I want to point out the fact that although Horrocks is not thinking overtly about formal length, her understanding of *Sonnets* as "wandering" has much to do with the number of poems it includes and with the long period of time over which Smith continues to edit and add to it – this is what makes it a difficult or unwieldy and thus "wandering" text on a formal level and not just in content (81). This understanding of length is similar to Paul Jaussen's contemporaneous (and equally compelling) consideration of formal length, whose main focus and conception of the long poem has to do with poems changed or added to over extended periods of a poet's life. This is, I hope to show, a rather different understanding of formal length than what I am arguing for, as both Jaussen and Horrocks are thinking about time in terms of biography and publication – basically, about how time *affects* form, how it acts upon it externally – and less about how temporal experience is represented, manipulated, and recreated within the poems themselves. See, Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*: Paul Jaussen, *Writing in Real Time: Emergent Poetics from Whitman to the Digital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

The relentless, painful restlessness that Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* both describes and reproduces for the reader is, I suggest, a problem *of form*. Like Horrocks, I read Smith's works as characterized by a wearying repetitive motion that does not and cannot bring about change or even envision it. However, whereas Horrocks sees homology between the structure of these poems and their narrative and narratorial content, I see a tension between form and content. *Elegiac Sonnets*' speakers and readers are both constantly in motion and searching for relief, but are doing so in a form – the sonnet – that cannot, by its very nature, offer much change or variation, that cannot move with them. The sonnets' only real avenue for generating length, change, or duration – in short, for embodying time – is via accretion, it simply adds on more of the same, more sonnets. The result is, in Horrocks' own words, a collection that is determined by "repetition, [and] a failure to move forward."[62] Restless content in static form makes for a repetitive, ongoing present and a collection of poetry that is long in line count but not capable of manifesting change, rest, or even the relief of closure. In this way the sonnets do actually operate under a vision of form that resembles what Gallagher identifies as coming into prominence in the Romantic era: namely, a formal exclusion of time and, by extension, of death. However – and this is key – in Smith's rendering, that exclusion does not in fact provide an escape into the atemporal or eternal, or even into death. Instead, the text turns toward social isolation, repetition, intellectual and physical exhaustion, and exclusion from nature. *Elegiac Sonnets* is thus a purposeful and prescient exploration of the limitations of any form that "contends against time."[63]

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[62] Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*, 81.

[63] The problems *Elegiac Sonnets* encounters on a formal level do, of course, work exceptionally well in service of the thematic goals of the text as a whole – namely, to emulate the equally limiting melancholia, loneliness, and hopelessness that Smith herself, her speakers, and women in literature generally experience even if they are not physically constricted. In short, that tension between form and content reinforces *Elegiac Sonnets*' success as a project. I have drawn out that text's formal difficulties, though, because they are the problems of form with which

Smith's consideration of both analogical thought and of atemporal form is thus thoroughly articulated by the composition of *Beachy Head* and her death in 1806. The result is a poem whose primary aim is to represent duration and to recreate it as a function of the convergence of form and content. This is *Beachy Head*'s major project, and in doing so it reimagines its own and its speaker's relationships to many of the things – community, death, nature, physical rest – that are causes for despair and isolation in *Elegiac Sonnets*. *Beachy Head*'s success in this endeavor is due, firstly, to how it manages the tension between temporal abundance (length, history, geologic time) and its limitations (death, exhaustion, non-knowledge, and doubt). Second, the poem draws an important parallel between its own and another kind of "form": that of the human body, which is always and inescapably grounded in time and space (that pesky bodily form is, after all, what makes the experience of reading a long poem so, well, *long*). This is perhaps the most central of Smith's forms, as it is the reclining, viewing, moving body that is both the point of access to and the horizon of *Beachy Head*'s formal expansions.[64] These considerations make *Beachy Head* an exemplary durational form, "long" in a way that has less to do with line count than with extended temporal experience.

As the body and phenomenological experience are *Beachy Head*'s gateways into the landscape and time, they will be this chapter's as well. I have organized this chapter into three sections, each focusing on one of the three terms I have identified as among the poem's primary durational postures or modes, its signals for a certain kind of being in time (and, by extension,

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Smith wrestles for the entirety of her poetic career, culminating in a poem whose primary formal goal is to reposition or rework the problematics *Elegiac Sonnets* sets in motion.

[64] Tim Ingold's interest in landscape is as a record the lives lived within it, and argues that the "body and landscape are complimentary terms" (which he also associates with form). Ingold defines embodiment as "a movement of *incorporation* rather than inscription…a movement wherein forms themselves are generated" (57). Ingold's understanding of the spatiotemporality of landscape and of its forms as emerging in the midst of movement is very much aligned with my own reading of Smith's rendering of landscape and embodiment. Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (October 1993).

place). The first term, "recline," argues for bodily repose and extension as a communal, active, and multitemporal state. Part One is representative of the poem's broader understanding of the body as the link between various physical forms – human, topographical, poetic – and its more abstract conceptions of history, locality, and knowledge. The second, "mark," describes a digging into and interpretation of the ground that the poem both depicts and acts out, particularly in the footnotes, which I argue become spaces where doubt and death are revealed and allowed to coexist with what is happening above ground, in the poem proper. The third section focuses on forms that are "stretch'd" thin, a visual and physical extension associated with creativity and indicative of the grander ambitions of the poem as it attempts to stretch its own form and discursive and mimetic scope as far as possible. These three embodied positions outline both the speaker's interactions with the landscape *and* the poem's narrational rendering of its own formal structure.

As a result, these three modes articulate yet another major tenant of this chapter: that there is a direct correlation (an analogical relation) in content between the speaker's bodily form and the topography of the Sussex landscape and, formally, between the reading eye/body upon which the poem's expansiveness exerts the most tangible pressure and the poem's own form (articulated in both structure and style). *Beachy Head* thus restores, in its form and content, the mode of analogical thought that is so dysfunctional in *Elegiac Sonnets*. The speaker's opening position of recline, in particular, is a posture of communal and physical openness, an embodied expression of the interactivity and extended temporality that will characterize the rest of the poem. The reclining speaker lies parallel, literally and figuratively, to the dead, to history, to the cliff, to the local community, and to geological deep time. This analogical posture is so because

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it accentuates the connection between one mode, temporality, or subject to another.[65] In *Beachy Head*, Smith constructs formal length upon a relational scaffolding: the poem could go on and on because the connections to be made are as vast and various as is the inventory of the earth. Which means, too, that *Beachy Head* is about recognizing a similar kind of public nature and history as are so prominent in the prospect poems of Thomson and Denham.[66] In *Beachy Head*, the past is communal and natural, a history in which all are, literally, embedded. The reclining, marking, stretching speaker offers a more democratic rendering of the prospect view and posits historical and natural knowledge as a raw material that is, at least in part, accessible to anyone who dwells within the landscape.

Breaking up the chapter according to the speaker's opening acts and postures emphasizes and mimics Smith's way of collecting disparate metaphors, postures, and phrases, and allowing key terms and images to build up into a larger poetic mass, a process that itself mimics the slow piling up of rocks, shells, bones, and vegetation that made up Beachy Head as a geologic formation. This is just one of the many ways Smith works to unite the poem's structure to that of the cliff, to the point that it becomes difficult to separate the poem's representations of the cliff from its representations of itself. *Beachy Head* is perpetually aware of its own inability to

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[65] Amanda Jo Goldstein's *Sweet Science* proposes a similar view of Romantic poetry's understanding of the world via Lucretian materialism, in which the world is understood as naturally figurative. Goldstein argues that Lucretian thought was revived in the Romantic period "as a means to resist the reorganization of knowledge that was increasingly invalidating – we might say *fictionalizing* – poetic connections to the natural and social world" (4). Goodman approaches Romanticism from a different angle than I, but *Sweet Science* is an important supplement to my thinking about Romanticism's staging of the relation between the real world and the poetic. Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialisms and the New Logics of Life*.

  Celeste Langan's *Romantic Vagrancy* is a reminder of the more negative potential of analogical thought. Langan argues that the logic of analogy is that of perpetual connection and relation, and so also connects that logic to liberalism, which analogically relates the political, economic, and private subject. The potential for infinite regress is something we see in this chapter and throughout *Forms Less Solid*, but that is curbed by embodied experience and these text's equal and opposite emphasis on doubt, non-knowledge, and death. Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

[66] John Denham's "Cooper's Hill" (1641) and Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730). For Abrams, "Cooper's Hill" is the primary source text for this kind of thinking.

provide the reader with a comprehensive view of either of those unwieldy forms – poetic or

geological – and so uses the slow condensation of metaphor to gesture, at least, toward a vision

of the whole that the poem cannot fully realize (if we think of the "whole" as both the overall

structure of the poem and the infinitely expanding natural, historical, and political landscape in

which Beachy Head is embedded). Smith counters this limitation of vision with a simultaneous

and equally ambitious attention to detail, as we see in her scientifically-oriented footnotes,

stylistic precision, and in her speaker's tactile relationship to the earth.[67] The poem is

consistently alternating between the long view and a deliberate nearsightedness, a movement that

allows for this accumulation of natural detail and temporal expansion at the same time that it

refuses scientific and historical clarity.

Beachy Head's revival of analogical thinking puts into a new perspective a particular

vein of recent Romantic scholarship which focuses on Romantic texts' refusal or inability to

strive after knowledge or, seen another way, on Romanticism's pursuit of a particular kind of

non-knowledge (what Anahid Nersessian calls "nescience").[68] This trend is most often read as a

consequence of the trauma of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars and, on a broader

scale, of living within the disorienting vastness of an emerging global economy. In much of this

scholarship, all that is left for these texts to do is gesture to the unknowability of modern

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[67] Kristen M. Girten argues that Smith's interest in the tactile experience of place challenges the prominent aesthetic
theories of the eighteenth century that "associate aesthetic pleasure with physical distance," emphasizing instead an
aesthetic that relies on closeness and physical touch. This is another legacy of the turn from the eighteenth-century
prospect view and the growing prioritization of mobility. Kristin M. Girten, "Charlotte Smith's Tactile Poetics," *The
Eighteenth Century* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 215.

[68] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life*, 3. For other relevant works in line with this thinking,
see also Francois, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*; Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism
and the Making of Modern Wartime*; Kevis Goodman, "Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological
Poetics and the Grounds of the Present," *ELH* 81, no. 3 (2014); Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the
Poetics of Attention*; Emily Rohrbach, *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation* (New
York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to
Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

experience. *Beachy Head* is indeed a Romantic text that indexes how much of history and human experience has been lost and that openly doubts much of the established "knowledge" of modern science. At the same time, however, Smith's emphasis on relation and analogy shows her reworking a tradition in which at least some amount of natural and historical knowledge is available everywhere, at all times, to everyone, *even as* that relationality is proven to extend beyond the capacities of any single person or poem. To be sure, an expanding global economy exacerbates that sense of vastness, proving once and for all that there is no real boundary between local and global, this landscape and the next, self and other, and so on.[69] But this does not make knowing, itself, impossible: an analogical worldview means recognizing that nothing can be known completely, but everywhere there is something to be known. *Beachy Head*'s simultaneous formal expansiveness and attention to detail is a testament to that fact. The poem's attempt to register that which cannot be known or articulated is, then, only half the story.

For Smith, long form poetry does not provide a fixed point of view but is instead, like both the speaker's body and the cliff upon which she reclines, something that *moves*, and whose movements we as readers are meant to feel as part of our own embodied experience. *Beachy Head*'s most overt departure from both the prospect and lyric traditions out of and against which it emerges is its refusal of a stable perspective, realized through its unrelenting oscillation between modes and scales. The poem's fluctuation between diegetic and mimetic modes, between elevations and temporalities, between minute and grand scales of geological and historical analysis, between main text and footnote, are all part of the wave-like motion of

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[69] Miranda Burgess's work on the development of Britain's canal system in the period provides important background on how the canals made even Britain's interior feel newly exposed, newly connected to the rest of the world and the global market. Burgess argues that this develops into a "Romantic poetics of anxiety," in which feeling itself is rendered as a spatial entity. Miranda Burgess, "Transport: Mobility, Anxiety, and the Romantic Poetics of Feeling," *Studies in Romanticism* 49, no. 2 (2010): 232. See also, Miranda Burgess, "Transporting Frankenstein: Mary Shelley's Mobile Figures," *European Romantic Review* 25, no. 3 (2014): 247–65.

expansion and contraction that replicates something like the real-life experience of duration, of felt time, of being a bodily form in and made by the world. Very rarely, in life or in poetry, is true "simultaneous intuition" possible – we may allow the trees to be lost for the forest, or vice versa, but they cannot be seen all at once. *Beachy Head*'s oscillatory movements are an attempt to move between perspectives over time, and so are, also, an acknowledgement of the limitations of that static "all at once" and its fetishization in traditional Romantic formalism.

## Reclining

*Beachy Head*'s speaker opens the poem by extending both her body and her vision across the landscape. In doing so, she positions her own reclining body as the connective tissue by which the poem will reimagine its own and its speaker's relationships to nature, rest, historical and scientific record, death, and other entities made largely inaccessible by Smith's earlier poetry. The speaker's opening recline is the method, the embodied movement, by which the poem first makes these unifying efforts.

> On thy stupendous rock sublime!
> That o'er the channel rear'd, half way at sea
> The mariner at early morning hails,
> I would recline, while Fancy should go forth,
> And represent the strange and awful hour
> Of vast concussion;

(1-6)

That "I would recline" enacts *Beachy Head*'s initial claim for its speaker's connective positionality, and it has two principal components. One is temporal – the modal "would" – and one spatial and phenomenological – the "recline" itself. I will go in order, and consider the temporal first. What is perhaps most strange and surprising about this reclined speaker is that she is not actually on the "stupendous rock sublime," at least not in the poem's present. She reports

that she "*would* recline" on the clifftop and "*would* mark" the first signs of the sunrise, naming

the act of recline as part of the habitual past (rather than, that is, the present moment of

reading).[70] This stands as a stark departure from *Elegiac Sonnets*, where nearly every feeling and

embodied action is limited to the conventional lyric "now," a present moment that overwhelms

and excludes other temporalities.[71] In *Beachy Head*, the speaker's immediate physical position

remains obscure; the speaker tells us only that she *used to* recline on the cliff on a regular, but

now past tense, basis.[72] We must resist our learned impulse to read the poem's opening as

depicting a singular event or a particular moment of repose at all. What we see and feel in the

opening scene is instead a compilation of the speaker's many visits to that summit. And it is this

summoning of a multiplicity of days on and the corresponding memories of the cliffside, brought

together under the speaker's repeatedly reclined form, that gives the poem's opening a layered

complexity unusual for the meditative-descriptive poetic genre.

In sync with that modal "would," the poem's temporal reflections expand in the lines

immediately following the opening movement:

> I would recline, while Fancy should go forth,
> And represent the strange and awful hour
> Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent
> Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,
> Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between
> The rifted shores"

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[70] Charlotte Smith, "Beachy Head," in *Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works*, ed. Claire Knowles and Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2017), ll. 12–13.

[71] Nearly all of Smith's earlier poetry adheres to the lyric tradition of placing its speakers and the act of composition itself into a very specific time frame: Sonnet 42 is "composed during a walk on the Downs, in November, 1787"; Sonnet 45 is composed "on leaving a part of Sussex"; Sonnet 59 in "Sept. 1791, during a remarkable thunderstorm." The moment of wandering, labor, and imaginative or poetic failure is nearly always the lyric present. Horrocks's opening observation that *Elegiac Sonnets* imbues a sense of its "endlessness" onto the reader herself is a symptom, I think, of the text's inability to imagine or write outside of the restlessness of the present moment and corresponding inability to resolve, rather than just to reiterate, its internal tensions (83).

[72] This is one way that *Beachy* Head differs from *Aurora Leigh*, or really one way that Barrett Browning builds on Smith – we might think of *Aurora Leigh* as reintroducing the specifically gendered feminine body back into landscape.

Fancy's representation of the "vast concussion" that originally separated England from France pulls the poem into a prehistoric era, accessible only through the unique movements of Fancy. In a single line the poem passes from a recent and personal past to the almost unrepresentable past of the Biblical and of geologic deep time. Also "hanging" ominously on the horizon is the "dubious spot" of the overloaded merchant ship, "bound to the orient climates" where the same sun "matures the spice" of a different, more distant place.[73] The markers of change in India's agricultural cycle, like the time it takes nutmeg to "burst from its pod," appear just within the outer limits of Beachy Head's visible horizon, as do, by consequence, the weighty and nefarious signs of Imperialism's broader global temporalities.[74] All of these temporal scales are contained within the prospect visible to the speaker as she reclines on the cliff, so that looking out also comes to mean looking *into* multiple renderings of the past and present. In addition, the fact that the speaker "would recline" brings her personal past – her old habits, so to speak – into relation with a much grander vision of the past, but it also gives a tentative nod to a future in which she "would," potentially, be able to recline on the cliffs again. Smith separates this multifaceted past action from the present without foreclosing on the possibility that it might also be part of the future. Already, time is one of *this* landscape's most abundant resources.[75]

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[73] Smith, "Beachy Head," ll. 40–45.

[74] Smith, l. 47.

[75] Many others have commented on how Smith combines temporalities in *Beachy Head*. Jonathan Sachs argues that Smith enacts a kind of movement that "in crisscrossing the landscape works like Lyell's geology to excavate that which is invisible and hence to turn up new understandings of time. See, Sachs, "Slow Time," 322. Theresa Kelley's "Romantic Histories" argues that the poem attempts to move between the two most popular forms of contemporary historiography, the first being the "large, supervisory project" of the "grand march of history," and the second the more "narrative description of minutae," Theresa M. Kelley, "Romantic Histories," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59, no. 3 (2004): 287. Kevis Goodman's "Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological Poetics and the Grounds of the Present" argues for how Smith thinks about the local everyday along with the broader and less comprehensible temporal scales of geology and of modern global economics. These are just a few of the many studies that acknowledge how many temporal scales Smith operates within.

But *Beachy Head's* departure from the rest of Smith's poetry is as much about position as it is about time. Fantasies, scenes, and physical states of rest and repose (or any relief from physical exertion or emotional distress at all) are largely unavailable to Smith's previous speakers. *Beachy Head*, however, opens with a speaker whose first description is of herself reclined on, rather than walking along, the clifftop. Unlike the ceaseless wanderers with whom Smith's readers are acquainted, the speaker is instead a figure who, at the poem's outset, envisions the landscape as a scene of physical repose, or, at least, as affording the time and space to do so. That affordance holds true throughout the entire poem, as the reclining speaker's position is mimicked by many others as the poem progresses: a "pensive lover of uncultur'd flowers" reclines in the "whispering shade," while the "herdsman of the hill" lays on one of "numerous tumuli," and later a nameless poet sits in contemplation "stretch'd upon the mountain turf / with folded arms."[76] Unlike Sonnet 54, in which the reclined Woodman acts as a foil for the weary speaker, these figures serve to reimagine and to reembody this speaker's opening posture. In this sense the reclining speaker is just one among many who rests or reclines upon various high points in the landscape to look out at the scenes beyond. In other words, "recline," like the "would" that precedes it, registers a multitude, this time of reclining figures whose own forms reference the posture that initiates the poem itself.

Paradoxically, this seemingly inactive posture not only jumpstarts the poem as a whole but puts the speaker into contact with other local laborers. The opening stanza maintains an acute awareness of the schedules and perspectives of the local fishermen and mariners, one of whom actually appears before the speaker: "On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime! / That o'er the channel rear'd, half way at sea / The mariner at early morning hails, / I would recline…" The

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[76] Smith, "Beachy Head," ll. 358–59; 399–400, note 1; 521–22.

poem's first view of the cliffs comes, then, from the mariner "half way at sea" between France

and England and, syntactically, between the "rock sublime" and the "I" of the speaker. Later,

Smith marks the transition from the "paler light" of late evening to night with the fishermen who

now "hail their comrades, from their daily task / returning; and make ready for their own."[77] The

movements of the sun and its light signal a change in tides – "the night tide commencing" – and

the transposition of the nighttime fishermen and their daytime compatriots. Also in this scene is

the "lone shepherd, and his baying dog" who drive the "bleating flock" to the crest of the cliff in

early morning, their cries mixing with those of the "ever restless" birds that reside in the

cliffside.[78] All of this the speaker views while lying on the clifftop, a pastime that the "would" in

"I would recline" has already established as a habitual action and as an imaginatively and

poetically active stance. Smith thus positions her speaker as just one of many local figures going

about her "daily task," even if her habits are less obviously physically active than others'. This

viewing-in-recline emerges as a regular and, perhaps even more importantly, a *communal* act,

one that takes stock of and participates in a larger schedule of daily labor on and below the

cliffs.[79]

    Strongly inflected by the multi-temporal and multi-positional nature of the poem's

opening "I would recline," *Beachy Head* projects rest (and the recline which embodies it) in a

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[77] Smith, ll. 100–03.

[78] Smith, ll. 25–28.

[79] This marks yet another major departure from the *Sonnets*. In that text, the speakers' perpetual wandering separates them from those figures in the surrounding locales who, like the Woodman, do manage to find rest. In Sonnet 9 a local shepherd lies "on the turf reclined" and seems removed from the "pangs" that plague the speaker; Sonnet 62's speaker is the only one awake and on the move in a town where all the other "village labourers rest" (9, ln.1-5; 62, ln.3). Smith's speakers are never the only ones who exert themselves or who travel through the local landscape, but they are isolated in their inability to *stop* doing so. They envision rest and relief only as it is available for others and only as it outlines the imaginative and phenomenological limits of the surrounding landscape. The exclusion from rest is also an exclusion from various local communities. For Horrocks, this exclusionary effect is the method by which Smith "registers her growing sense of the potential failure of social sympathy," as it relates both to her exclusion from the contemporary literary community and the nation's collective lack of political sympathy for the kinds of figures she describes in depth in *The Emigrants* (98).

surprising way. It suggests the opposite of mental stupor or luxurious repose; instead, Smith

loads the posture with imaginative energy and both social and temporal possibilities of

interaction. The verb, "recline," and the special kind of rest it connotes, turns out to be the sharp

opposite of Horrocks's wandering, characterized as that is by social isolation and creative

weariness (which is another kind of disengagement, as the sonnets themselves describe).[80] It is

also distinguished from the equally removed but leisurely and privileged position embodied by

the traditional prospect poem's speaker, who is not subject to the despondent wanderings

featured in the *Sonnets* but who, elevated as he is by class and position, does not interact with the

locals he describes or physically move through the landscape. The recline offers, by contrast, a

democratic and communal perspective that still manages to evade the despondency and

exhaustion so prominent in Smith's earlier poetry. *Beachy Head* thus figures true poetic rest as a

slow-moving but dynamic and interactive state.

Take, as another example, the "sheep-path' passage in which the speaker contrasts the

"fond day dreams" of her youth with the more despondent recent past:

> *I* once was happy, when while yet a child,
> I learn'd to love these upland solitudes,
> And when elastic as the mountain air,
> To my light spirit, care was yet unknown
> And evil unforeseen; – Early it came,
> And childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned,
> A guiltless exile, silently to sigh,
> While Memory, with faithful pencil, drew
> The contrast; and regretting, I compar'd
> With the polluted smoky atmosphere
> And dark and stifling streets, the southern hills

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[80] Sonnet 9 focuses on a shepherd "on the turf reclined," but depicts him as someone who "lies idly gazing" with a "vacant mind" reciting a pastoral tale (1-3). Sonnet 54 describes a sleeping woodman who lies with his "careless head on bark and moss reclined" and is thus an "unthinking hind" blessed with "sweet forgetfulness" (6, 11-12). Both are good examples of how *Elegiac Sonnets* thinks of rest and recline not as avenues for communal belonging but as leading to "vacant mind[s]" and imaginative withdrawal. These figures are the subjects of fantasy for weary speakers who long for escape and death, but are evidence of how the sonnets struggle to imagine any kind of rest that is not just another kind of social or intellectual disengagement.

That to the setting Sun, their graceful heads
Rearing, o'erlook the frith, where Vecta breaks
With her white rocks, the strong impetuous tide,
When western winds the vast Atlantic urge
To thunder on the coast – Haunts of my youth!
Scenes of fond day dreams, I behold ye yet!
Where 'twas so pleasant by thy northern slopes
To climb the winding sheep-path, aided oft
By scattered thorns: whose spiny branches bore
Small wooly tufts, spoils of the vagrant lamb
There seeking shelter from the noon-day sun;
And pleasant, seated on the short soft turf,
To look beneath upon the hollow way
While heavily upward mov'd the labouring wain,
And stalking slowly by, the sturdy hind
To ease his panting team, stopp'd with a stone
The grating wheel.

(ln. 282-309)

Although *Beachy Head's* speaker is certainly not immune to the kinds of despondency and regret that are so central to Smith's oeuvre, here she explains the difference between then and now (i.e., the "haunts of youth" versus her more recent experience in the city) in a way that enriches our sense of the special quality of Smith's "recline" and of her rendering of rest more generally.

Much like the clifftop upon which the speaker would recline, the "winding sheep-path" that was once the setting for physical rest and "fond day dreams" also allows for multiple temporalities to coexist. The path is obscure, its thorny plants bearing "small wooly tufts, spoils of the vagrant lamb," serving as the speaker's only guide. The traces of what made the path – sheep in search of shelter from the sun – remain as part of its current physical makeup.[81] Smith's language underscores the path's status as a carved-out space, an avenue for movement and travel formed only by the daily acts of labor of human and other living things (a good example of the kind of marking discussed later in this chapter). At the sheep-path, the past of this past-tense visit

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[81] By "current," I reference the speaker's youthful visits to the scene, the internal present of the reminiscence.

to the hill lingers in physical form. Some remnant of previous travelers, those "small wooly tufts," remains, but as a reference to what is absent: first, the sheep, but now also the childish freedom of the speaker, for whom this scene is a reminder of how she "once was happy" but is no more. Memory itself hangs over this narrow path, and it catches and snags, like a tuft of wool, among the finer details of landscape and prior experience. Even as the speaker's present moment is haunted by "care," the sheep-path remains as an emblem of repose and happiness because of how it allows various memories, daily activities, and temporalities to coexist in a single space. The path manifests as a space in which the past itself lingers on as a perceivable, if not fully accessible, presence.

This entire stanza explores the kind of inter-temporal and inter-experiential lingering described above. In this state, "Memory" is well equipped to draw "the contrast" between the speaker's various states of happiness and discontent. The speaker identifies her previous and now lost state of happiness by its weightlessness, by how it made her spirit "light" and "elastic," able to adapt and expand. A lighter, happier youth enables her to fit in, so to speak; she was a child who "learn'd to love these upland solitudes" and thus to move and find shelter among them. Shelter is indeed a prominent theme here, inscribed in the sharp contrast that develops between the "polluted smoky atmosphere" of the more urban space the speaker would know later and her depiction of the Sussex landscape as *itself* shielded from the most violent storms by "Vecta," or the Isle of Wight, "which breaks the force of the waves when they are driven by the south winds against this long and open coast."[82] The coast remains "open" because it is both a sheltered *and* a sheltering landscape, shielded itself and, especially in relation to France, a shield in its own right.

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[82] Smith, "Beachy Head," n. 1, ln. 294 p.173.

The stanza opens with the speaker's memory of a particular place and its way of drawing, "with faithful pencil…the contrast" between a childish "light spirit" and the much heavier weight of "care" that would loom later. It is, in short, largely about how this affective weightiness, or lack thereof, mimics the surrounding environment's own distribution of natural forces and of labor. But the stanza ends quite abruptly, leaving the speaker in the midst of the sheep-path, "seated on the short soft turf" and looking out at the prospect below. In the midst of her own repose, she watches as a wagon and team go "heavily upward" with the driving farmhand who walks "slowly by," the weight of the wagon slowing their progress considerably. In order to "ease his panting team," the farmhand stops "with a stone / the grating wheel." The image – of a stone wedged between the wheel of a heavy wagon and the ground so as to provide relief to the horses – is posed at the stanza's end, effectively framing the stanza with images of heaviness.

The closing image of a wagon balanced precariously on a stone suggests a moment of relief, of "ease," for the "panting team," but only just so – the stone can only hold the wagon in place for so long. A real tension arises in these lines, generated by the friction between stone and wheel, which presses down heavily upon the stone but is also weighed down by both the contents of the wagon and the forces of gravity, strong enough for the stone to be necessary in the first place. All of this makes for a highly particular, minute physical interaction between a stone and wheel, but it emphasizes the fact that everything in this scene is somehow under pressure, even when at rest. Like the Isle of Wight, the stone bears the weight of larger forces, opening up a space for momentary ease in the midst of pervasive pressure and movement. This passage, even more than the opening lines, constructs rest and recline as a shifting of weight, a temporary redistribution of pressure, of labor, and of care, all in a landscape that is itself shifting and fracturing. Care, on the other hand, is oppressive in its *lack* of tension – the city offers only a

"polluted and smoky atmosphere / and dark and stifling streets," with no hope for a wider view, for movement, or true change. The uplands of Beachy Head offer a form of relief that takes place in the midst of broader ongoing activities and arises *out of* movement and an engagement with nature and community.

The passage concludes with yet another shifting of weight, this time formal. The stanza ends mid-line, teetering on the hillside with the "grating wheel," but the poem resumes its upward climb in the next stanza:

> …stopped with a stone
> The grating wheel.
>
> Advancing higher still
> The prospect widens, and the village church
> But little, o'er the lowly roofs around
> Rears its gray belfry, and its simple vane;
> Those lowly roofs of thatch are half conceal'd
> By the rude arms of trees, lovely in spring,
> When on each bough, the rosy tinctur'd bloom
> Sits thick, and promises autumnal plenty.
>
> (ln. 309-16)

The sheep-path stanza ends within a pocket of temporary repose for the speaker and farm team alike. The next stanza picks up both the line and the ascent – "Advancing higher still / the prospect widens" – but it leaves behind the first person past tense memory of the sheep-path and moves instead into the present tense diegetic mode. It is no longer the younger version of the speaker who is moving "higher still" but the impersonal view of the poem itself, as if it leaves the younger speaker sitting in the sheep-path and takes on the labor of the climb for itself, this time in the present moment of reading. The poem's view, and by extension the reader's view, now moves on to a wider prospect, but the highly particularized memory that initiated the ascent does not. The stanza break, which describes the moment of rest in the midst of movement and

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transference, thus is itself a shift from a mimetic, first-person narrative to something more like the traditional prospect poem, to a more impersonal diegetic mode in which the movement through landscape is performed by the poem's disembodied eye more than by an embodied speaker. This is another kind of shifting of weight, another transference of movement and labor, this time from the speaker to the reader and poem. The move lasts until the perspective shifts again about fifty lines later when the speaker re-invokes her memory and the personal "I." This fluctuation between modes is a *formal* movement, one that takes as its model the everyday, natural movements the poem has already gone to lengths to describe.

This shift in narrative mode is no different, really, from the wagon's transference of its weight from the horses to the stone. And that shift is, remember, the very thing that enables something like rest or recline. It generates a moment of relief for speaker and reader alike. Notice, too, how far from *Elegiac Sonnets* we have come, as it is now the poem's form that, rather literally, does the moving, and in so doing generates an even better kind of relief than the sonnets could envision. All of these shifting forms make for what I call a "durational mode." The speaker's opening recline and her younger self's moment of watchful rest are active but not exhausting states of being, both of which are generated by and take part in the temporally extensive movements of the poem's narrational content, the land mass of Beachy Head itself, and the smaller but still impactful local bodies (human and animal) whose activities inform the everyday. These movements and postures are then reenacted in form as well as content. In either dimension of the text, these reclining postures register and embody ways of living in and with time, and with all of *Beachy Head*'s shifting forms.

**Marking**

I would recline: while Fancy should go forth,

And represent the strange and awful hour
Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent
Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,
Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between
The rifled shores, and from the continent
Eternally divided this green isle.
Imperial lord of the high southern coast!
From thy projecting head-land *I would mark*
Far in the east the shades of night disperse,
Melting and thinned, as from the dark blue wave
Emerging, brilliant rays of arrowy light
Dart from the horizon; when the glorious sun
Just lifts above its resplendent orb.

(4-17, emphasis mine)

If the opening phrase, "I would recline," addresses the first half of the two-headed monster that is

form's traditional aversion to time and death, the speaker's parallel declaration that "I would

mark" addresses the second. Much like the instances of recline and repose above, Smith

constructs "marking" as an active and interactive mode, this time chiefly intellectual and creative

but, as we will see, also connected with other more literal and embodied kinds of marking,

scarring, and digging. Such practices are the basis of Smith's push for a particular sort of

readerly and poetic cultivation, one in which various doubts, absences, and the "remains of men"

and animals are unearthed or made visible as part of the essential makeup of both Beachy Head's

rocky mass and of *Beachy Head*'s poetic formation, which is itself built up by Smith's extensive

subterrain of footnotes. Learning to navigate both the real and poetic landscape, learning the

"nature of the ground," means becoming acquainted with such death-like things, and marking is

the process by which they are made visible, even if not fully reanimated.

When the speaker reclines on the "stupendous summit, rock sublime!" she

simultaneously sends "Fancy" forth to "represent" to her and to us the loud and violent tearing

apart of the British Isles from France by the arm of the "Omnipotent" in that "strange and awful

hour" before recorded history. But after this flight of fancy, Smith almost seems to start the poem again, bringing it back into the modern age with another exclamatory statement about the cliff's sublimity and with a reaffirmation of the speaker's position and activities on it: "Imperial lord of the high southern coast! / From thy projecting head-land I would mark / Far in the east the shades of night disperse." Smith once again presents her speaker as positioned on the highest tip of the cliff and as engaged in a habitual past action, that "I would mark." But this time the visions of Fancy are replaced with a more literal vision, and the tearing apart of continents with the more immediate separation of light and darkness as the sun rises. In the first ten lines the Omnipotent, who "stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills," is the one who touches and impresses the landscape, actually tearing it apart and permanently altering it. But in this second iteration, it is the speaker's "I" who "mark[s]" change upon the horizon – human observation and imagination impress upon or "mark" the surrounding prospect. Smith's transition between the acts of reclining and marking is also a display of their parallel relationship.

Throughout the poem, Smith often describes visual and imaginative activity like we see in this opening passage in physically impressive terms: Memory can "retrace" the period of Norman invasion and "drew / the contrast" between the speaker's past and present in the sheep-path scene; the antiquary "may trace, or fancy he can trace" the lines of Roman encampments; the hermit Darby finds little that "mark'd to him the seasons of change" from below the cliffs.[83] Looking out at landscape is also a way of changing it, of discovering something new about it, or of putting one's "mark" upon it. That "I would mark" is an aesthetic mode, one that cannot help but reveal itself as an active force of spatial reorganization and reinterpretation.

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[83] Smith, ll. 120, 281, 678.

But the opening scene also contributes to the general emphasis on the cliff's own susceptibility to *being* marked, its vulnerability to erosion, impression, and fragmentation. The birds whose movements the speaker traces from the clifftop also "scar" the cliff's "sides precipitous" when they come to live as "inmates" within it.[84] The poem opens with the birds and ends with their human counterpart, the hermit Darby, who like them lives in a natural cave in the cliffside "mined by wintry tides." He has "dug in the chalk a sepulchre" for fishermen killed at sea, which will later memorialize Darby himself after he is killed in a storm so intense that "the bellowing cliffs were shook / even to their stony base, and fragments fell / Flashing and thundering on the angry flood."[85] The chalky rock fragments and falls, is "mined" by tides and birds, and is dug into and carved out by a hermit. The cliff face is soft, impressionable, even unstable, at the same time that it acts as the "imperial lord of the high southern coast," an immovable obstacle that has been the first defense against invaders throughout history. If one of the speaker's primary stances is as a figure who marks and changes the landscape, she is not alone. Objects and animals in this place score and snag upon one another, exerting pressure and, as a result of the cliff's own malleability, leave traces of themselves behind. Beachy Head's topography is the record of this multitude of interactions.

In addition, *Beachy Head* functions as the flat surface or template for "marking" in another sense, for the observer's noticing, interpreting, and navigating the intricacies of the landscape. In the sheep-path episode, the speaker partially attributes her childhood happiness to the fact that she had "learn'd to love these upland solitudes," already so familiar with the area that she can, as in the poem's opening, recall its minute details even when absent from it. The

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[84] Smith, ll. 20–21.
[85] Smith, ll. 712–13, 717–18.

same is also true for Darby, who from all his time walking the beach "learn'd to augur from the clouds of heaven, / and from the changing colours of the sea, / and sullen murmurs of the hollow cliffs…When tempests were approaching."[86] The poem's most prominent figures are those who have learned to read the landscape over extended periods of time. For Smith, this knowledge is uniquely local, the result of a life lived in or above the cliffs.

Indeed, it is that local knowledge, as much as any feat of geology, that makes Beachy Head such a strong defensive fixture. Smith's longest and most involved footnote on the Scandinavian invaders of the middle ages ends with the observation that the "skeletons of an armed man and horse were found a few years since, which are believed to have belonged to the Normans, as a party of their horse, deceived in the nature of the ground, perished in the morass."[87] The skeletal remains act as proof that the Normans were defeated by the land itself and by their lack of knowledge about it. Anyone who is "deceived in the nature of the ground" runs the risk of falling victim to it. The same is true for the coastline, as the Battle of Beachy Head was, in Smith's footnoted recounting, less of a defeat for the English than it might have been because the French, "from ignorance of the coast" could not take full advantage of their victory.[88] In war, intimate knowledge of the landscape gives locals an automatic strategic advantage. In Smith's poem, landscape becomes the primary subject of interpretation. The implication, then, is that something about the practice of reading poetry lines up with this local practice of reading landscape (and, of course, with writing about it, which is another kind of

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[86] Smith, ll. 691–96.

[87] Smith, n. 4, ln. 126, p. 168. Notice how many timelines are a part of this last bit of the footnote – the evidence found is of an invasion from the 11th century, but its discovery is also part of the recent history of "a few years since." This is another kind of recent and local knowledge.

[88] Smith, n. 1, ln. 158, p. 169.

marking). The poetic project becomes a project of localization; it acts as an extended introduction to the "nature of the ground."

Even for those not in the midst of battle, the gradations of the ground are difficult to navigate. In the poem's present moment, its scene of writing, the possibility remains that one might sink into the "morass"or be misled by the "false fire" of the will-o'-the-wisp in the marshlands.[89] The poem maintains the feeling that, like those Norman invaders, any traveler might stray off track or sink beneath the surface of the ground without warning. Even when these sudden changes in topography are not quite so dangerous, the landscape is shown to be full of immediate and distant variations: the far-off "Kentish hills" are the background of an elevated prospect view, while "nearer, undulate the wooded heights."[90] Many of the reclining figures we have noted are positioned on "tumps," "turfy knoll[s]," "tumuli" and other small hills and mounds that pepper the larger, equally various groups of hills, mountains, and changing topsoil.[91] The ground has also been altered by local agricultural practices, even in the places where natural variation is less distinct, as in "the downs, especially to the south, where they are less abrupt, are in many places under the plough," the soil turned over and impressed upon by local farmers.[92] Those fields are treacherous for other nonhuman species, as the local shepherds watch carefully  "to keep the flocks from trespassing" and for small birds caught in "square holes cut in the turf" designed to catch the birds and protect the harvest.[93] The local ground is naturally and synthetically varied, shifting abruptly and sometimes treacherously for animals and humans alike. To know and move across this landscape makes for difficult and rigorous work.

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[89] Smith, n. 1, ln. 158, p.169; n. 1, ln. 256, p. 172.
[90] Smith, ll. 486–87.
[91] Smith, ll. 360, 400, n.1, ln.402, p.177.
[92] Smith, n. 5, ln. 458, p. 180.
[93] Smith, n. 5, ln. 458, n.6, ln. 460, p.180.

Much of the above information about the undulations and difficulties of traversing the ground comes from Smith's footnotes, creating a reading experience as varied and challenging for the eye as is the landscape for local travelers. Smith's footnotes mimic in yet more extensive ways much of what happens above ground, both in the poem and on the clifftop. Just after the passage on shells, fossils, and "other objects more minute," which also includes a substantial footnote on Smith's exploration of the "crumbling chalk" and its fossil formations, Smith pivots to those figures in the landscape whose "daily task[s]" have nothing to do with "such inquiry":

> Since from whence
> These fossil forms are seen, is but conjecture,
> Food for vague theories, or vain dispute,
> While to his daily task the peasant goes,
> Unheeding such inquiry; with no care
> But that the kindly change of sun and shower,
> Fit for this toil the earth he cultivates.
> As little recks the herdsman of the hill,
> Who on some turfy knoll, idly reclined,
> Watches his wether flock; that deep beneath
> Rest the remains of men, of whom is left
> No traces in the records of mankind,
> Save what these half obliterated mounds
> And half fill'd trenches doubtfully impart
> To some lone antiquary; who on times remote,
> Since which two thousand years have roll'd away,
> Loves to contemplate. He perhaps may trace,
> Or fancy he can trace, the oblong square
> Where the mail'd legions, under Claudius, rear'd
> The rampire, or excavated fossé delved;
> What time the huge unwieldy Elephant
> Auxiliary reluctant, hither led
> From Afric's forest glooms and tawny sands,
> First felt the Northern blast, and his vast frame
> Sunk useless; whence in after ages found,
> The wondering hinds, on those enormous bones
> Gaz'd; and in giants dwelling on the hills
> Believed and marvell'd –

(ln. 392-419)

This passage on the relative ignorance of the peasant, herdsman, and "lone antiquary" alike constructs the land as marked both by history and by local, everyday labor. The peasant "cultivates" the earth, his "daily task" uprooting and turning up its topsoil, while the antiquary attempts to "trace" the "half fill'd trenches" dug by invaders of "times remote." The herdsman, one of those figures whose labor is performed while "idly reclined," rests without awareness of the others that are *at* rest beneath him, almost as if he is subconsciously mimicking, like the fossils that "mimic…fantastic shapes /of bivalves," the bodies buried below. The herdsman's recline puts him in a parallel position to the dead beneath him, as if the difference between death and recline is simply a matter of elevation, of who is above ground and who below. The corresponding footnote unsettles, for the reader if not for the herdsman, the apparent boundary between these various figures at rest.

That same footnote reminds us, too, of the similarities between the footnote and the ground itself:

> These Downs are not only marked with traces of encampments, which from their forms are called Roman or Danish; but there are numerous tumuli among them. Some of which having been opened a few years ago, were supposed by a learned antiquary to contain the remains of the original natives of the country. (177)

The herdsman reclines upon one of these raised "tumuli," or burial mounds, in which a "learned antiquary" believes there are members of an "original" population. I have already discussed just how many such mounds and hills punctuate the area. This particular mound steers the reader's attention to the ways that the footnotes operate as a form of poetic strata, as subterranean pockets of historical and scientific knowledge that might not be fully obvious from "above," in the main text, but are present nonetheless. Indeed, Smith's footnote draws an explicit comparison between itself and the burial mound upon which the herdsman reclines: the mound is a place of pause for

the herdsman and of indistinct but important knowledge for the antiquary, but it is also a place of death and absence. The footnote and mound alike mark a particular kind of phenomenological *and* intellectual absence-in-presence, a parallel topographical and poetic calcification of what is left over – the "remains of men" that signal the "nothingness of all" as well as the vast motions of nature and history.[94]

Smith's footnotes are often cited as evidence for her superior scientific and historical knowledge.[95] And of course Smith does possess that knowledge and does display it in her footnotes, often in order to contradict or correct more official studies of the area, but she also formulates these prosaic mounds as spaces in which she is free to doubt her own knowledge and to uncover certain gaps in the local record. The tumuli in the footnote above is "*supposed* by a learned antiquary" to contain native remains, but that antiquary is, in the poem proper, revealed as an at least somewhat flawed or fanciful figure (if we are meant to read them as the same antiquary). In the footnote that accompanies her rumination on the aquatic fossils embedded in the cliff, Smith reminds us that "it is now many years since I made these observations," and that she "then knew nothing of natural history," nor has she read any of the late theories of the earth" and remains, still, unsatisfied with what explanations she has accessed.[96] Though her knowledge

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[94] Smith, l. 420.

[95] Jacqueline Labbe argues that Smith's footnotes work as a "subterranean challenge to culture" in that they reflect the "cultural marginality of femininity" and allow Smith to critique British culture and scientific knowledge and to explore her own more "masculine" intellectualism (73). In doing so Labbe argues that Smith "underpins the poem with a factual base that substantiates the more flowery, more colourful, even more fanciful – in short, more poeticized – lines in the poem proper" (79). I, frankly, disagree with this characterization of Smith's "flowery" and feminine poetry needing the more "substantial," masculinized weight of prose to establish her seriousness, especially because the poem often repeats the information given in the footnotes. I also, as I explain in this paragraph, disagree with the idea that the footnotes provide consistently more substantial or factual ideas at all. Rather, the footnotes become places for admissions of doubt and non-knowledge as much as for more straightforward facts. Jacqueline M. Labbe, "'Transplanted Into More Congenial Soil': Footnoting the Self in the Poetry of Charlotte Smith," in *Ma(r)King the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page*, ed. Joe Bray, Miriam Handley, and Anne C. Henry (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000).

[96] Smith, "Beachy Head," n. 1, ln. 375, p. 176.

in the moment of writing is more recent, she confesses that her actual observations of these "objects more minute" are from a time when she knew much less, and that even now her knowledge is to her unsatisfactory.

Statements like this one, which reaffirm Smith's own lack of or dissatisfaction with common knowledge, appear across the text's notes. With her opening lines about the "vast concussion" that separated England and the continent, Smith writes in her accompanying footnote: "I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries," as if she still doubts the theory she has just imaginatively reenacted.[97] When describing the "huge unwieldy Elephant" that once crossed England's shores with the Romans she states "I had often heard of elephant's bones at Burton, but never saw them; and I have no books to refer to. *I think I saw*, in what is now called the National Museum of Paris, the very large bones of an elephant."[98] Here Smith cannot even be sure of what she saw in a museum, never mind the actual bones of which she speaks in the poem. Later she will admit to having previously been ignorant of the Night Hawk's migratory patterns: "I was mistaken in supposing it was visible in November...I had often seen and heard it, but I did not then know its name or history."[99] Many more such moments are scattered throughout the text. These are certainly, in part, about pointing out both the achievements and failings of modern science and natural history, as well as the growth and limitations of Smith's own educational and personal history.[100] But they also reaffirm this

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[97] Smith, n. 2, ln. 7, p. 163.

[98] Smith, n. 3, ln. 413, pp. 178, emphasis mine.

[99] Smith, n. 4, ln. 513, p. 183.

[100] The "lone antiquary" is a good example of Smith's rendering of historiography and those who study history. The antiquary's best hope for success is that he "perhaps may trace, or fancy he can trace, the oblong square" where Claudius' legions once "rear'd / the rampire, or excavated fossé delved." All that remains of these great legions and their fortifications are "half obliterated mounds" and half fill'd trenches," partially destroyed and only barely visible in the present moment of the poem. This antiquary must imaginatively retrace those old impressions in the earth, or, with even less certainty, just "fancy he can trace" them. Here the historical evidence is so faint that the antiquary can only imagine that he sees the outline of something that might once have been there. For although Smith's footnote confirms the likelihood that Claudius's men were at some point in the region, there is no certainty that what the

connection between Smith's subtext and Beachy Head's subterrain, as both reveal *and* obscure their own histories of composition. In both the textual and the geographic body, gaps abound.

Smith is thus forming a poetic topography of her own, one that forces the reader, like anyone looking out from the cliff tops of Beachy Head, to transition with agility between what is above and below, before and after.[101] This is yet another kind of formal movement, one in which the poem regularly unsettles its own ground of authority. It encourages the reader to cultivate – to dig up or disturb rather than to extract – the poetic soil to reveal new knowledge, or perhaps only to reveal the outline of what once was but now can never be known completely. That cultivation is, still, central to that more positive pursuit of the "nature of the ground." The footnotes' disruption of knowledge and the corresponding desire to mark and linger with absence, is built into – or, rather, *buried* into – Smith's poetic practice, along with those other "remains of men." Death and doubt lie hand-in-hand here, consistently and unabashedly revealed as irrevocable components of this exercise in reading, living, and knowing in the long term.

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antiquary sees above ground in these "half obliterated mounds" is related to that history at all. All the antiquary can do is to look out upon these obscure marks and visually fill them in. He can only engage in an imaginative re-digging or re-excavation that cannot ever provide real evidence, much like the opening scene in which "Fancy" is sent out to "represent the strange and awful hour / of vast concussion." Much of what the historian does then, is simply to retrace visually and imaginatively the physical impressions that other people have made in the ground. This is, interestingly, exactly what Oldbuck does early in *The Antiquary* (1816) when he brings Lovel to the Kaim of Kimprunes, where he misinterprets the leftover marks from a recent local party for evidence of a Roman encampment. Both scenes are born of a kind of historiography that openly does not or cannot give a comprehensive vision of the past.

[101] Lily Gurton-Wachter similarly argues that Smith "insists on the productivity of an attention divided between the prospect view and more minute observation of the ground and its materials. And Smith demands the same division of attention of her reader, who has to oscillate between verse and the long, detailed notes that both add to and distract from it" (112). Gurton-Wachter and I agree that the poem requires a visually agile reader. But while Gurton-Wachter's emphasis is on the oscillations of attention, I am more interested in this is as a formal movement in its own right (a movement that the reader obviously follows), one that upturns and reveals the perpetual presence of absence, non-knowledge, and death as irrevocably enmeshed in the poem's formal and thematic makeup. The poem is a durational form, a form that works with time, precisely because it moves through and with these elements. Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention*.

**Stretching**

Even if Smith herself is not fully convinced, the poem ascribes Beachy Head's beginnings to the "Omnipotent" who "Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills," creating the cliff in the process. That stretching forth is an embodied expansion that is both a destructive and creative act, a reaching out and tearing apart that is also a multiplication of place and localities. The movement expands the geographical and national scope of the landscape along with its political tensions (France and England are now perpetually, literally, at odds), and provides a blueprint for the poem's own formal expansions. Like the Omnipotent and the reclining speaker, the poem also stretches itself out, pushing its representational and formal limits by expanding its considerations across temporalities, histories, landscapes, bodies, and elevations. If it is possible to say that poetry has an impulse, an inclination, or perhaps an orientation, *Beachy Head*'s is to keep stretching, to extend all bodies beyond their bounds. But that impulse is also the text's method of anticipating its own formal collapse, of including and presaging its own end. This section will conclude this chapter by briefly exploring the embedded limitations of this self-expanding form.

The text's representations of itself and of the cliff are inextricably entangled, but there is one other "vast frame" that we will do well to consider alongside them:

> Where the mail'd legions, under Claudius, rear'd
> The rampire, or excavated fossé delved;
> What time the huge unwieldy Elephant
> Auxiliary reluctant, hither led
> From Afric's forest glooms and tawny sands,
> First felt the Northern blast, and his vast frame
> Sunk useless; whence in after ages found,
> The wondering hinds, on those enormous bones
> Gaz'd; and in giants dwelling on the hills
> Believed and marvell'd –
>
> (410-419)

The passage is unique for Smith's consideration of the elephant as a body, which was so large and "unwieldy" that "his vast frame / sunk useless" into the ground almost immediately after arriving (so Smith imagines). Smith spends much of the corresponding footnote emphasizing the enormity and fractured nature of the elephant's form, which has spread apart over time:

> Or, dying on the high downs, one of which, called Duncton Hill, rises immediately above Burton Park, the bones might have been washed down by the torrents of rain, and buried deep in the soil. They were not found together, but scattered at some distance from each other. The two tusks were twenty feet apart.[102]
>
> (n. 3, ln. 413, p. 178)

Two of the animal's most recognizable bones are spread "twenty feet apart" upon discovery, the animal's remains spread out confusingly along the hillside. The impressive size of the elephant when it was alive is increased by the dispersal – the stretching out – of the bones. The elephant seems even bigger and harder to contain now than it actually was, making it much more difficult, by its discovery in 1740, to discern where it died and where the bones are in relation to one another; more difficult, in short, to determine the nature of its form as a whole. The footnote then moves to those similar but not identical bones Smith saw in Paris, brought to the museum from North America. The actual bones found in Sussex were originally spread across Duncton Hill and Burton Park by floods, then after their discovery some were taken to "Burton House, the seat of John Biddulph, Esp." while "others were in possession of the Rev. Dr. Langrish, minister of Pentworth." The remains of ancient members of the species are spread more distantly across the

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[102] Kevis Goodman uses this footnote to argue that Smith uses the term "conjecture" to mean "thrown together," as in a loose conglomerate of disparate parts. That definition differs from the more common contemporary uses of the word, which would refer to a kind of scientific guessing that often refused to acknowledge itself as a guess, as conjecture. For Goodman, Smith works to emphasize the almost haphazard, disconnected nature of this knowledge and the local ground alike. I of course agree that Smith points out the incomplete nature of contemporary scientific and historical knowledge, but I also want to highlight how Smith includes herself into that assessment. Also, the greater emphasis of this footnote is on the elephant's body, on the kind of stretching – rather than "throwing together" for which Goodman argues – that I'm talking about here. The knowledge Smith explores may not be "extensive" in its thoroughness or even its correctness, but the temporalities, histories, and forms that the bones reference and unearth are indeed "vast." Goodman, "Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological Poetics and the Grounds of the Present."

continents, as "this enormous animal is never seen in its natural state, but in the countries under the torrid zone of the old world." One elephant's body is spread across multiple temporalities and locales, while it also references the other elephant remains that exist not just in Sussex but across the world. That is certainly a "huge unwieldy" form, not to mention the fact that the poem's reference to it leads to an extensive footnote that also expands the text's "vast frame" and its reading time.[103] Compound this with the footnote's multiplicity of temporalities and histories and we find the text to be as spread out and dispersed as the elephant, nearly to the point that, like the elephant, it is difficult and time-consuming to track all of its movements. The poem appears to revel in its own temporal, spatial, and formal extensions.

The text offers a counterpoint to the elephant's expansions a few lines later with its description of the "wide" view from "beneath the shadow of a gnarled thorn" that, unlike the opening clifftop prospect, faces toward the "distant north" of Kent and London.[104] The view opens broadly:

> Till in the distant north it melts away,
> And mingles indiscriminate with clouds:

[103] The accompanying footnote also includes one of Smith's more overt moments of self-doubt, when she can only report that she *thinks* she saw the bones of a similar elephant in the National Museum at Paris. The footnote moves across various temporalities: the animal arrived at Beachy Head and died thousands of years ago, the bones were found in 1740, Smith sees similar bones in Paris at some more recent date, and admits that some time has passed between the initial and final drafts of the footnote itself. Beyond those more straightforward archeological records, Smith makes a point in the poem proper to remind us that similar bones had been found before the discovery of 1740 by local farmhands and were once seen as evidence for the presence of "giants dwelling on the hills." The bones thus reference two disparate histories: that of the common-knowledge military invasions of the ancient Romans *and* the more fantastic local belief that giants once roamed the land, a belief that is itself on the verge of extinction. That line about the giants also contains a footnote on yet another local belief about the hills themselves, as the "hill and vale" were thought to have been carved out by the movements of the devil, in order to explain the sudden variations between "deep hollows, or high and abrupt ridges" (footnote to ln. 418, p. 178).

[104] Lily Gurton-Wachter also reads *Beachy Head* as interested in certain postures, the most important of which is, she argues, watchfulness. For Gurton-Wachter, this poem "proliferates and archives a variety of watchful postures" like those taken up by local shepherds, who watch over their flocks and are also engaged in smuggling ventures with France. Gurton-Wachter considers the ways that Smith's understanding of watchfulness is often "disjointed from the single focused target of invasion" and war, and is also significantly "multidirectional," of which this north-facing prospect view is a good example. Gurton-Wachter argues that watchfulness and attention are not only militaristic acts for Smith, nor are they always involved in reaffirming national identity and security more generally. Instead, they describe and model a mode of attention that attends to the more minute particulars of landscape, which actually serve to link the English and French coastlines as to reject their cultural status as "natural enemies" (118-19).

But if the eye could reach so far, the mart
Of England's capital, its domes and spires
Might be perceived – Yet hence the distant range
Of Kentish hills, appear in purple haze;
And nearer, undulate the wooded heights

(481-487)

The lines of the horizon confuse the viewing eye, mingling the hills of the north with the clouds until they are "indiscriminate." The passage then backtracks to closer entities like the "Kentish hills" and "wooded heights" until, later on in the poem, arriving at the "tiller of the soil" who dwells in one of the area's "ruin'd battlements." Smith makes it doubly clear – both in this passage and the accompanying footnote – that it is only the limitations of the eye, not of the prospect itself, that prohibit one from being able to see the "domes and spires" of London. All that keeps "here," Sussex, from "mingl[ing] indiscriminate" from the more distant "there" of London is a crisis of vision and perspective, a failing made especially clear when the view, like this one, is so wide. From the clifftop, the French coastline looms much larger because it rests within the range of vision and thus within the public imagination, but this passage tests the limits of that view. Just beyond the northern-facing horizon, somewhere mixed indistinguishably with the clouds and rolling hills, lies a city that with all its urban "domes and spires" feels almost as foreign to this region as does France. Sussex is thus sandwiched between multiple powerful and foreign locales, hanging on the verge of becoming somewhere else.[105] All that seems to maintain the distinction between regional spaces are the limitations of the human body. The eye is rarely

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[105] Goodman argues that Smith changes the meaning of a "local" poem in how she "intuits…that *local places were not originally local*. The place and the poem of "Beachy Head" present a nature not rooted or grounded in a single site, but instead a composite that includes traces of other places" (92, emphasis hers). This allows Smith to think of England and France's relationship as other than oppositional. Goodman's analysis makes a lot of sense here, and I agree that Smith has a special awareness of how thin the line between the local and the foreign is at Beachy Head especially.

able to "travel so far" as it could, and so is what ultimately marks the outer bounds of place.[106] The viewer's extended but limited powers of vision keep this place in bounds, keep it from bleeding into other horizons and other locales.

Following the elephant passage, the limitations of the human body and its senses appear less negative than they might otherwise. With the elephant and the corresponding footnote, the overwhelming vastness of the animal's frame and its postmortem geographic dispersal are in some sense without bounds – there is nothing to keep the bones from spreading apart, both when they are buried in the ground and especially once they are in the hands of men. The elephant's extension is "unwieldy"; it engenders a larger discussion about similar animal remains around the world but it also makes it much harder for both Smith and the reader to track this particular elephant's history and movements in space. But with the Sussex passage, the viewing body in question is much more self-contained, as are the perspectives of Smith's speaker and the other locals she describes. The localized, grounded viewer keeps the "here" of Sussex from becoming everywhere. Though extending its vision into everywhere and everything – into the ground, into death, into France, into London, into all of history – is a primary impulse of the poem, Smith's equally pervasive emphasis on embodiment and phenomenological experience keeps that impulse in check. The body's experience in time and space (as exemplified by acts like reclining, marking, and stretching) *is* the boundary that the poem tests and bumps up against but does not break through. If, on the other hand, the eye actually could "reach so far," *Beachy Head* would not be *Beachy Head*, but something and somewhere else entirely.

The poem's and its figures' limited vision becomes more overt at its close. The drastic change in elevation from *Beachy Head*'s beginning to its end (we might say that the poem's

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[106] Smith, "Beachy Head," n. 4, ln. 480, p. 181.

beginning and end are simply stacked on top of one another) is one of its most recognizable features. Stuart Curran describes the poem as a "work that begins atop a massive feature of the landscape and ends immured within it," giving the poem a "remarkable coherence" that he finds lacking in other Romantic long poems.[107] But the transition to Darby's life on the beach is also about perspective, about the particularities of his position and phenomenological experience of the cliffs, which are more radically different from every other figure in the poem than Curran's statement acknowledges. Darby lives directly under the cliff's projecting head, so that, like the "gnarled thorn," it blocks his vision from both behind and above. He is so visually secluded that "nothing mark'd to him the season's change" except the changing patterns of the sea and the migrations of the birds above. Darby has learned to read well what signs of change are available to him, so his isolated position has not prevented him from attaining an intimate knowledge of that place. Still, one cannot help but observe how strange it is that a poem so intensely concerned with the natural, topographical, and prospective details of the local ground ends with a figure who cannot see the vast majority of all that has just been described. Nearly all of the views from above are unavailable to Darby, so that whatever education in the Sussex landscape the poem offers is almost entirely useless to him. Smith offers up an overabundance of natural detail and visual expansion only to block it all out beneath the shadow of the cliff. The poem ends with a figure blind to its own revelations.

By its end, *Beachy Head*'s prospect has been significantly reduced, blotted out by the shadow of the very cliff it describes. Darby's place in the landscape is an isolated and dangerous one – more so than that of any other figure in the poem – but it is also the position from which

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[107] Stuart Curran, "Introduction," in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxvii.

the cliff's fragmentary nature is the most visible.[108] The poem is itself an unfinished fragment,

ending at the most treacherous and uncertain ground in the area, where death's presence is most

oppressive and where the massive, ancient cliff is revealed as involved in a constant and

unavoidable process of fragmentation and change.[109] This ending feels, in short, like a failed

expansion, as if the poem has become fractured and disfigured, wearing away at the edges like

"these mournful lines" and the cliff itself.[110] The concluding passage leaves the reader on a patch

of shifting ground where the cliff and much of what is visible from above are obscured by the

formation's own magnitude. Such is the same for the poem. The text builds up into a poetic mass

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[108] Darby's cave dwelling was "mined" long ago by the "wintry tides," proof of the long-term erosional power of the sea and weather and a larger replica of the scars produced by the birds described in the opening. Darby goes out during storms to rescue drowning sailors or to find the dead and carve out memorials for them in the rock. The sea destroys ships and lives alike, while the wind and "angry flood" shake the cliffs "even to their stony base," "fragments" of that rock falling to the beach below. It is during one such storm that Darby himself is caught up in the waves and drowned. The memorial lines that the local fishermen carve for Darby near his cave dwelling mimic Darby's own carvings as well as the various other acts of marking we have seen throughout the poem. The lines are also fragmentations: they themselves are the result of the chipping away of rock, and they mark the poem's own breaking off, as it is here that the poem comes to an abrupt and uncertain end (ln. 717-19).

[109] Much has been made of the poem's own status as a fragment and of "these mournful lines," which open up the possibility that *this* poem, *Beachy Head* itself, is carved into the cave wall and that Darby is its speaker. That seems unlikely, and may be a result of the poem's own fragmentation, although whether or not Smith herself considered the poem finished is also unclear (Zimmerman, 497). So the possibility remains that Smith is referring to an epitaph she intended to include, to other "lines" that were meant to be added in but are now lost or were never written. (Kelley, 296). The "these" in "these mournful lines" points the reader, then, in two opposite directions: to the text of the poem itself and to another text, to the epitaph carved in the cave wall and, theoretically, meant to be reprinted in the poem (Zimmerman, 497). These lines refer simultaneously to the poetic "here" and "there," to the poem's own textual body and to another textual location entirely, one not fully realized but gestured to and outlined nonetheless. The lines reference and are themselves dispersed across two locales at once. They are present, they are here, even if they are also absent, carved out in some distant elsewhere. The poem ends by gesturing back to itself and, simultaneously, beyond itself, hanging somewhere between the "lines" of page and rock. Sarah M. Zimmerman, "Varieties of Privacy in Charlotte Smith's Poetry," *European Romantic Review* 18, no. 4 (2007): 497.; Kelley, "Romantic Histories."

[110] Smith's footnote at the beginning of the section implies that the carved lines are now gone, or at least are rarely read: "It has been thirty years since I heard this tradition of Parson Darby (for so I think he was called): it may now perhaps be forgotten" (footnote to ln. 673, pg. 188). The poem's end marks the loss of Darby both in death and in local lore – it has been so long since Smith heard his story repeated that she is no longer sure of his name (it never appears in the poem itself), never mind his place in communal legend or the status of his rocky epitaph. The memorial is already eroded by the time Smith attempts (and fails) to retrace it before her own fragmented poem abruptly concludes. All of these chalky "lines" are thus in some sense defaced or dismembered: they are left to register the recession and loss of the human and watery bodies that made them and are themselves lost or being lost in the process.

that, like the "huge unwieldy" body of the elephant, fractures and fragments under its own weight.

  *Beachy Head* is a poem stretched thin, reaching across various temporalities, perspectives, elevations, modes, and postures. The poem engages in a durational balancing act in which it confronts and conveys the pressures of length, time, and death by extending itself between all of these different modes and positions. Durational experience is here made evident by the poem's persistent movement toward length – its impulse to expand its "views" – and its simultaneous awareness of its own limits. *Beachy Head* is extensive but not endless, neither in the atemporal, lyrical sense nor in the ongoingness of length unchecked. My goal in arguing for reclining, marking, and stretching as exemplary postures of Smith's poetics has been to highlight how Smith makes time (and, by extension, space) felt through embodied acts whose movements and limitations mimic those of the poem and reader alike. In this text, the extensions of landscape, poetry, and the body are closely linked: the limits of the body (its vision, labors, and mortality) mark the limits of place and local knowledge. The speaker's initial position of recline and her (and others') habit of marking and stretching – her regular acts of self-extension – put all of this into motion. *Beachy Head* cannot provide its reader with a fully comprehensive view of the landscapes or the histories it describes, but its oscillation between modes and views, its slow amassing of prospects and positions, and its cataloging of absence and the "remains of men" frame that view, they form and reform it, nonetheless.[111]

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[111] *Beachy Head* thus prioritizes the ongoing accessibility of incomplete, localized knowledge over the fantasy of full comprehension. As I mention at the beginning of the chapter, this is one way that *Beachy Head* is aligned with Nersessian, Goodman, Gurton-Wachter, Favret and other scholars of the Romantic era that argue for the Romantics' general refusal to make concrete claims about the world. But this is also, on the other hand, evidence of Smith's equal emphasis on the incredible accessibility of the more localized, incomplete forms of knowledge of which Darby is a great example. Just because Darby, the speaker, or the reader cannot see all things – or even most things! – does not mean there is no knowledge to be communicated or no way of gesturing to, of making space for, lost or uncommunicated experience. *Beachy Head*'s lengthiness is a testament to all there is still left to see and know as much as it is to the vastness of all that cannot be.

These fragmented but expansive poetic movements make *Beachy Head* representative of the long processes of reading and living in the world, but also of *Forms Less Solid* as a whole. In many ways, the transition from *Elegiac Sonnets* to *Beachy Head* operates as the miniature of the relation between Romantic conceptions of atemporal and durational forms generally, a relationship that this project takes as a major point of interest. The transition from *Elegiac Sonnets* to *Beachy Head* is marked by the increasingly harmonic and close interactions between the speaker, the local community, and the landscape and its history, represented in the corresponding convergence of form and content. The other three chapters in this project also explore texts that, like *Beachy Head*, prioritize local or otherwise limited forms of knowledge, rely on analogical relationships, move between perspectives or elevations over time, are guided by the discomforts or labors of the body, and prioritize spatiotemporal experience, all of which are thematic concerns that mirror their formal construction and style. Smith is, at least in terms of publication history, the first of the authors considered here to narrate the shifting nature of all these relationships. In this way, *Beachy Head* is *Forms Less Solid*'s own extended introduction into the "nature of the ground."

**CHAPTER III**

**Scenes Revisited: William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* and "The Forms of Things"**

*The Excursion* begins with a formal and thematic double act. Formally, Book I is a

revised version of a handful of earlier drafts, chiefly *The Ruined Cottage* (1799) and *The Pedlar*

(1802). During the same period in which Wordsworth was drafting the 1805 *Prelude*, *The Ruined*

*Cottage* and *The Pedlar* were drafted together, separated, recombined, and then finally published

as Book I of *The Excursion* in 1814.[112] Though Wordsworth never published it as a separate

poem, *The Ruined Cottage* remains one of his most widely read and appreciated works, often

much more so, in fact, than *The Excursion*.[113] This multifaceted revisionary history complicates

the reading experience of Book I for modern readers especially, so that to read and analyze the

opening of *The Excursion* is, already, to do so with multiple poems at once.

Thematically, *The Excursion* begins with another kind of doubled vision, this time

rendered in the competing perspectives of the Poet speaker and his imagined "dreaming Man":

> 'Twas summer, and the sun had mounted high:
> Southward, the landscape indistinctly glared
> Through the pale steam; but all the northern downs,
> In clearest air ascending, shew'd far off
> A surface dappled o'er with shadows, flung
> From many a brooding cloud; far as the sight
> Could reach, those many shadows lay in spots
> Determined and unmoved, with steady beams

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[112] Nicholas Halmi, *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed., Nicholas Halmi. (New York: Norton & Company, 2014), 441.

[113] Nicholas Halmi's introduction to the poem(s) in the Norton Wordsworth makes this exact claim, one that certainly informs one's reading: "Unlike *The Excursion* itself, however, the earlier form of its first book, *The Ruined Cottage*, has been appreciated as one of Wordsworth's major poems since Jonathan Wordsworth, himself a forceful advocate of its value." Halmi, *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, 443.

Of bright and pleasant sunshine interposed.
Pleasant to him who on the soft cool moss
Extends his careless limbs along the front
Of some huge cave, whose rocky ceiling casts
A twilight of its own, an ample shade,
Where the wren warbles; while the dreaming Man,
Half conscious of the soothing melody,
With side-long eye looks out upon the scene,
By that impending covert made more soft,
More low and distant! Other lot was mine;
Yet with good hope that soon I should obtain
As grateful resting-place, and livelier joy.
Across a bare wide Common I was toiling
With languid feet, which by the slippery ground
Were baffled; nor could my weak arm disperse
The host of insects gathering round my face,
And ever with me as I paced along.

Upon that open level stood a Grove,
The wished-for Port to which my steps were bound.
Thither I came, and there – amid the gloom
Spread by a brotherhood of lofty elms –
Appeared a roofless Hut; four naked walls
That stared upon each other!

(1.1-31)

The Poet, our speaker, is "toiling" with "languid feet" across the "bare wide Common" at noon,

when the sun bears down heavily enough that a "pale steam" rises from the ground. The Poet's

progress is slow and difficult, his feet "baffled" by the "slippery ground" while he is plagued by

a "host of insects" that follows as he walks. The Poet's journey is so taxing that he almost

immediately imagines an alternative, non-real "dreaming Man," who reclines comfortably under

the shade of a "huge cave, whose rocky ceiling casts / A twilight of its own" and makes the

landscape easier to process, "more soft…and distant." The Dreaming Man's repose and relative

ease directly contradicts the Poet's state of physical discomfort ("Other lot was mine") and gives

the opening passage and its corresponding prospect a marked multiplicity – the scene is at once

"soft" and difficult, tripping up the Poet's feet and the reader's eye with its dueling points of view.

The contrasting experiences of the Poet and his imagined Dreaming Man offer two competing readings of the opening scene, but this vision of the reclined Dreaming Man is reminiscent of yet another of Wordsworth's opening scenes:

> Whereat being not unwilling now to give
> A respite to this passion, I paced on,
> Gently, with careless steps, and came erelong
> To a green shady place where down I sate
> Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice
> And settling into gentler happiness.
> 'Twas Autumn, and a calm and placid day,
> With warmth as much as needed, from a sun
> Two hours declined towards the west, a day
> With silver clouds, and sunshine on the grass
> And, in the sheltered grove where I was couched,
> A perfect stillness. On the ground I lay
> Passing through many thoughts, yet mainly such
> As to myself pertained. I made a choice
> Of one sweet Vale whither my step should turn
> And saw, methought, the very house and fields
> Present before my eyes; nor did I fail
> To add, meanwhile, assurance of some work
> Of glory, there forthwith to be begun,
> Perhaps, too, there performed. Thus long I lay
> Cheared by the genial pillow of the earth
> Beneath my head, soothed by a sense of touch
> From the warm ground, that balanced me
> Entirely, seeing nought, nought hearing, save
> When here and there, about the grove of Oaks,
> Where was my bed, an acorn from the trees
> Fell audibly, and with a startling sound.
>
> Thus occupied in mind I lingered here
> Contented, nor rose up until the sun
> Had almost touched the horizon, bidding then
> A farewell to the City left behind,
> Even on the strong temptation of that hour
> And with its chance equipment, I resolved
> To journey towards the Vale which I had chosen.

This scene, from the opening passages of *The Prelude* (1805), also depicts a young poet traveling through the countryside after leaving the city in search of a place to rest. In this version, though, Wordsworth presents himself in a nearly identical position to the Dreaming Man in Book I of *The Excursion*: he too finds a "shady place" (in *The Ruined Cottage* the Dreaming Man reclines under a tree as well), "slackening" his thoughts until he is "seeing nought, nought hearing," just as the Dreaming Man is "half conscious" of what surrounds him.[114] Also as in Book I, the passage marks the season and initial position of the sun: it's a warm autumn day, the "sun / two hours declined towards the west," a milder version of the hot noon sun under which the Poet travels. In both poems, the sun's descent toward the horizon signals when it is time for the men to move on to the next location. *The Prelude* simply expedites this process, so that Wordsworth passes the afternoon in a single passage, rather than over the thousand lines of *The Excursion*'s Book I. It also simplifies its cast of characters, Wordsworth taking on the role of all three of Book I's primary figures. On the whole, though, these scenes follow a nearly identical formula, both ending with their speakers arriving at the restful "Vale" or "Grove" that was the object of the journey to begin with. Wordsworth's journey, however, is a rather easy, comfortable experience, accentuating just how slow, difficult, and physically laborious is the Poet's trek by comparison.

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[114] Note, however, the difference between the overtly doubled dreaming of the Dreaming Man (the speaker dreams a dreamer) and this passage, which delivers a straightforward fantasy. *The Excursion*'s version lays out the potential for an almost infinite regress – a dream becomes another dream becomes another and so on. This plays into my reading of *The Excursion* as a reimagining of *The Prelude* scene – a dream of another dream. This ongoing or self-propagating imaginative power will play into the poem's ongoing tendency to reframe and revision its own scenes, narratives, and structures.

If we consider seriously Wordsworth's proclamation in *The Excursion*'s "Preface" that *The Prelude*, though unpublished in 1814, is meant to stand as the "Anti-chapel" to the church "body" of *The Excursion* and *Recluse*, then it is also worth considering that, under that plan, this early passage from *The Prelude* would be read *before* Book I of *The Excursion*. This means that by the time the reader encounters the Poet and the Dreaming Man, both the scene and the passage in which they appear will register as vaguely familiar. If we think of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* as a semi-unified textual body, then it is a text that turns back on itself, so that one speaker begins his journey by conjuring a fantasized image of the other; namely, Wordsworth as the Dreaming Man. The Poet's opening journey to the Ruined Cottage functions as a restart, the passage reworking and re-envisioning the original scene of Wordsworth's own poetic inspiration but from a different and doubled point of view. That *The Excursion*'s rendering of this scene features the Wordsworth-esque Dreaming Man as having an easier but less intellectually and physically engaged relationship with the landscape than the Poet is, then, a juxtaposition worth noting.

This kind of scenic return should, itself, register as a familiar trope within the Wordsworthian poetic and scholarly cannon. In his seminal essay, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," M.H. Abrams credits Samuel Taylor Coleridge with the development of the greater Romantic lyric and Wordsworth with an essential contribution to that form via "Tintern Abbey." That contribution is a formal and thematic structure in which a "scene is revisited, and the remembered landscape ('the picture of the mind') is superimposed on the picture before the eye; the two landscapes fail to match, and so set a problem…which compels meditation." *The Prelude* takes this aspect of "Tintern Abbey" and develops it "into a persisting

double awareness of things as they are and as they were."[115] Abrams identifies this as

"Wordsworth's favorite device of *déja vu*," a sensation conjured by the "scene revisited."[116] In

Marjorie Levinson's reading of Wordsworth's great period poems (from the so-called "great

period" from 1798-1805), including "Tintern Abbey," she too asserts that Wordsworth's primary

goal in the period poems is to "replace the picture of the place with 'the picture of the mind,'"

and that the "structural device by which this usurpation is achieved is repetition or return."[117]

Levinson also reminds us that Wordsworth's "peculiar style" has long been identified by "its

extreme artlessness, an apparent absence of style" so that "Wordsworth is most distinctively

Wordsworth, most Romantic, and most successful in those poems where the conflicts embedded

in his materials, motives, and methods are most expertly displaced."[118] Or, in other words,

Wordsworth constructs his poems so that they do not appear to be constructed at all, but seem

instead to be spontaneously generated. In both Abrams's assessment of the Romantic lyric and

Levinson's New Historicist rereading of it, the "scene revisited" is the formal tool by which

Wordsworth most characteristically achieves a naturalization of form (or the appearance of it).

The result is a poetry that, structurally and stylistically, functions by bringing an experience out

of time and into aesthetic completeness and, in doing so, obscures and naturalizes the historical

and political particularities of that original experience. The "scene revisited" thus lies at the

center of Wordsworth's contribution to the Romantic lyric tradition and simultaneously enables

the elision of lyric as a product of design that, itself, becomes Wordsworth's stylistic signature.

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[115] Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," 206.
[116] Abrams, 211.
[117] Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4–5.
[118] Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, 4.

Even beyond the opening passage's callback to *The Prelude*, *The Excursion* remains a poem full of "scenes revisited." Book I sets the foundation for the resulting "double awareness" conjured throughout the rest of the poem, as many of the scenes in the later books mimic scenes and narratives from the first book. Book II sees the Poet and the Wanderer make their way to the Solitary's isolated home, where the Solitary tells stories about the place itself, the few other people there, and his own sad history as a military chaplain and his support of the French Revolution after the death of his wife and child. The three men eventually move on to another, nearly identical valley and visit a small churchyard, in which the men hear the Pastor's many tales about the dead who are buried there. They leave to visit the parsonage, and the poem concludes with an evening visit to the lake nearby. The formula laid about by *The Ruined Cottage* and Book I, in which the Poet and Wanderer meet at a significant site to discuss the story of someone who once lived there, is recreated in nearly every major plot shift in the rest of the poem. The poem's narrative is essentially a series of stops and starts, where various travelers meet at sacred or semi-sacred locales and recount their histories, most of which repeat and rework that opening relationship between the Poet, the Wanderer, Margaret, and the ruin. These scenes are not identical to one another, nor do they represent the exact same structures and landscapes, but their references to one another conjure a readerly "double awareness" markedly similar (and perhaps more unsettling) to that which Wordsworth articulates about his own experience in "Tintern Abbey."

The repetitive pattern also describes (or, characterizes) the preface's initial description of the poem as part of the "long and laborious Work," *The Recluse*, of which *The Excursion* was to be the "intermediate part." This grand "philosophical Poem" stands in Wordsworth's formulation

like a "gothic Church," of which *The Prelude* is the "Anti-Chapel."[119] Wordsworth's organizing

principle for *The Excursion* and its broader poetic context depicts it as the very same sort of

sacred locale that is so crucial to its own narrative content (the churchyard is the space in which

the poem spends the most time). The poem's most literal framing chapter, its preface, puts the

reader in the midst of the kind of architectural, framed space conjured repeatedly throughout the

text. The poem rearticulates and re-envisions, in content, the guiding metaphor of its own formal

organization. This makes it quite difficult to read all the way through this emphatically "long and

laborious Work," with all its many scenes revisited, and still remain under the illusion that it is

not a product of Wordsworth's predetermined, distinctly un-spontaneous design, no matter how

natural his style. *The Excursion*'s revisitings do not melt so fluidly into one another as do those

of Wordsworth's earlier, more lyrical employments of the device. This perplexing self-reference

– the result of which is a readerly exhaustion or disorientation – is a purposeful one, as much so

as the deceptive artlessness and neatness of Wordsworth's lyrics.

It may be less surprising, then, that at the end of Book I the Wanderer concludes his tale

with this address to the Poet:

> 'My Friend! enough to sorrow have you given,
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
> Be wise and chearful; and no longer read
> The forms of things with an unworthy eye.'
>
> (1.967-70)

The Wanderer's call to "no longer read / The forms of things with an unworthy eye" is

appropriate in a poem that, as both the preface insists and the broader movements of the plot

reinforce, puts built structures, frames, and other "forms" at the forefront of its interpretive

methodology. Architectural form especially – the "four walls" of the ruin, the various domestic

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[119] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 38.

and religious built structures visited throughout, the church-like organization of the poem itself –

becomes an overt and recurrent point of emphasis throughout the text. Outlines, structures, and

frames guide the traveling characters' movements and the reader's as well. The primary framing

structure is, by the bias of chronology alone, Margaret's ruined cottage, those "four walls / that

stared upon each other" at which the Poet arrives just after the opening passage. *The Excursion*'s

prioritization of architectural metaphor emphasizes "form" defined as that which encloses space

and outlines it as such, but also leaves the door open, so to speak, for all the other kinds of

frames and forms (the human body included) that might encounter and interact in and with that

space. In whatever iteration, learning to recognize and "read" forms is foundational to the

poem's discursive project.

This emphasis on reading the "forms of things" emerges out of that same kind of

awareness of places and "things as they are and as they were" that Abrams identifies in

Romanticism's lyrics. The Wanderer "see[s]...Things which you cannot see" because he has been

to the cottage frequently enough to know Margaret's story and to remember the cottage as

otherwise than in its current state of decay. [120] The recognition of that difference between the

"then" when Margaret was alive and the "now" after her death is the energizing force behind the

Wanderer's story and the rest of Book I (and the poem as a whole), and is information to which

only the Wanderer is privy as lived experience. Repetition and return remain as fundamental to

this project as any other in Wordsworth's oeuvre. But the *déja vu* Abrams references as the result

of this trope is usually one felt by the poem's speaker within the representational world of the

poem. This is the case for the Wanderer and for Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey," who

remembers his previous visit to the scene from five years before but only describes the current

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[120] Wordsworth, l. 1.501-502.

visit in the poem's present. *The Excursion* updates this trope, however, by incorporating and accentuating the "double awareness" of the reader herself, the *only* figure who could recognize the strange familiarity of Book I's opening scene in relation to *The Prelude*. For the Poet, that scene is not a "scene revisited," it is only such for the reader. Later, when the Poet remarks upon the similarities of the churchyard and Margaret's garden, he does so for a reader who can also, as part of her own readerly experience, recognize the likeness of one space to the other. This is a fundamental departure from the Greater Romantic Lyric: the poem no longer resolves the conflict between real-life temporal difference and spatial/situational return, but instead accentuates that conflict by calling attention to "the forms of things" (including to the poem's own organization) and, crucially, to the time *of reading*, to a readerly "then" and "now" that cannot be merged via simultaneous apprehension. And, to be clear, this reading has emerged out of the comparison of, on the one hand, the long narrative poem of *The Excursion* with, on the other hand, Wordsworth's lyrics – two fundamentally different forms whose divergences are themselves evidence of the connection between form (lyric or long poem) and content (the projection of artlessness or performatively self-reflexive narration, respectively) in each.

This chapter, as a result, labels the structural device long identified with Wordsworth's poetry and with his contribution to traditional Romantic formalism – the repetition and return embodied in the "scene revisited" – as the method by which, in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth self-consciously confronts that formal construct *as* a construct, as a formed (rather than spontaneous or natural) structure. The result is a poem that pays special attention to "the forms of things" and instructs its reader to do the same. In addition, this orientation toward form and structural metaphor promotes a distinctly phenomenological rendering of the text's formal machinations and the reader's engagement with it. *The Excursion*, much like *Beachy Head*, makes room for the

embodied "form" of the reader among its many other formal considerations, often by proxy of the Poet-speaker. This does not relieve the poem of interpretive ambiguity or indeterminacy. Quite the opposite: the poem frequently reveals architectural, natural, and poetic forms to be inconveniently difficult to read or recognize. This interpretive struggle often leads to conflicting figures and meanings, but also, as with the Poet's "toiling" journey through the common, to a more physical, intimate kind of engagement. It makes for a poem that encourages, even necessitates, the exhaustion and close contact born of being "baffled" by text and landscape alike.

This chapter is organized around a series of revisitings, and will as a result travel back and forth to the ruin as the Wanderer does in his own tale. The first section ponders the poem's staging of scenic and formal revisiting, which manifests chiefly through the interactions of human and architectural bodies. Those interactions are themselves repeated and referenced throughout the text and, in addition, enable the text to register and embody certain absences, misreadings, or difficulties. The second section focuses on the poem's more shadowy (literally) formal concerns, which the work uses simultaneously to disfigure and to make connections over time and space. These shadows illuminate the text's own body as part of the material world, and construct interpretation itself as a spatial, phenomenological act. The third section, engaging with critical readings of Wordsworthian form as obscure and distant, presents those features as *The Excursion*'s mechanism for pushing the "forms of things" to the foreground and, by way of exposing its own difficulty, for drawing the reader in, for encouraging a mutual "fronting" of forms. In this formulation, the poem's discursive indeterminability is not necessarily equivalent to complete inaccessibility or disengagement. The poem's scenes revisited are often in conflict, but remain relational and interactive in nature. More lyrically-focused conceptions of Romantic

form see repetition as a device of replacement and elision, where difference is resolved when the poetic image of the mind overlays that of nature. *The Excursion* lingers with that tension, exposing it without rushing to resolving it; the text is "long and laborious" indeed. This chapter will explore the motivations and intricacies of that labor.

**Difficult Forms**

Both *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Excursion* introduce the ruin and the surrounding garden as a scene of relief and repose. The Poet arrives only after his struggle through the common, unable to find physical relief anywhere but at the "wished-for Port" of the cottage garden. There he finds the Wanderer, who is already at rest "upon the Cottage bench, / recumbent in the shade."[121] The reader's first view of the Wanderer finds him in a similar position to the Poet's fantasized Dreaming Man, as both men lay "half conscious" and "as if asleep," reclined underneath the shady protection of the branches above. [122] It is as if that fantasy of rest with which the poem begins (as we have seen, a doubled opening in its own right) has been embodied in the Wanderer's own recline, as if the poem has spontaneously manifested the kind of restful setting for which the Poet has been longing. Here, the Poet is finally able to slake his thirst at Margaret's well and sit comfortably with the Wanderer on the shaded bench. The Wanderer begins to tell Margaret's tale immediately after, as if that mutual physical repose is necessary for the book's central narrative to begin. The cottage garden comes onto the scene as both a narrative and physical refuge, and it is so because it can still, even without Margaret

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[121] Wordsworth, l. 1.35-36.
[122] Wordsworth, l. 1.36.

herself, provide some vestige of the "cool refreshment" that Margaret would so often give to "Many a Passenger" on the road.[123]

But the cottage is also, in the present moment of the poem, a ruin, a structure obviously abandoned and in the midst of decay. That is part of what makes the Wanderer's tale possible, too: the fact that the Poet cannot encounter Margaret directly, that the Wanderer alone can "'see around me here / Things which you cannot see: we die,'" that precipitates the need for him to tell the story at all.[124] Margaret's death and the cottage's decay are both the cause for and content of the book's core narrative. The Wanderer's story aims, in part, to explain why the ruin is now so obviously un-homey, so distinctly altered from the haven it once was. The ruin is now only "four naked walls / That stared upon each other." There is, then, a sharp contradiction, a tension, between the two principal roles the ruin plays in this opening sequence. Initially, the ruin and garden arrive as an almost instantaneous realization of the speaker's desire for a place to rest and find shelter. The garden and that "brotherhood of lofty elms," in particular, mark out a space in which the harsher elements of the "bare wide Common" (harsh precisely for that bare wideness, its unlimited openness) might be avoided. But as the poem goes on it becomes increasingly clear how far the ruin is from the stable home it once was. This is no longer the welcoming country cottage Margaret maintained and opened to weary travelers. The juxtaposition is disorienting. The scene appears to accommodate the needs of the men and their weary bodies (it provides water, shade, a place to sit, even the impetus for a good story), but it never quite yields to these domesticating features and gestures. By the poem's present moment, the "roofless Hut" operates as a semi-enclosed space that can only be approached, observed, and experienced from the more

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[123] Wordsworth, l. 1.533-35.
[124] Wordsworth, l. 1.501-02.

intermediate spaces of the garden and grove. Margaret's hut indeed realizes the Poet's fantasy for a scene at once "more soft…and distant": more soft in its shady comfort, but more distant in that to the very end the ruin remains uninhabitable, untouchable, indifferent, just "four naked walls / that stared upon each other."

The ruin's status as an uninhabitable structure limits the temporal expanse of Margaret's story and of Book I more broadly. *The Ruined Cottage* makes this even more obvious, as in that version, the conclusion of the tale marks the end of the entire poem.. The book opens at early afternoon when the "sun had mounted high" and ends by sunset that same evening, when "the sun declining shot / a slant and mellow radiance" across the sky.[125] The result is a correspondingly limited affective range, or at least the fantasy of one. The Wanderer expressly warns against "feeding on disquiet," against indulging too much in grief or sympathy.[126] This anxiety about the power of "restless thoughts" lingers throughout Book I and often seems a valid concern: by the end even the Wanderer must confess how determinedly the "long and tedious" story of Margaret "linger[s] in [his] heart," so much so that his "spirit clings / to that poor Woman."[127] Indeed, the Wanderer's concluding call to "no longer read / the forms of things with an unworthy eye" is delivered as a warning against the Poet's instinct to stay too long "leaning o'er the Garden wall, / Review[ing] that Woman's sufferings."[128] The two men manage to resist the story's clinging influence only when they leave to find an "Evening resting-place" elsewhere.[129] So Book I's operating assumption seems to be that limiting the amount of time one spends in a certain space or with a certain narrative will also limit its emotional cost, that moving

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[125] Wordsworth, l. 1.985-86.
[126] Wordsworth, l. 1.631.
[127] Wordsworth, l. 1.813-15.
[128] Wordsworth, l. 1.956-7; 969–70.
[129] Wordsworth, l. 1.998.

from one place to the next will prevent the visitor from becoming too entangled in the weeds of feeling.

As a result, the Wanderer's emphasis on remaining emotionally aloof functions as an affective mirroring of the ruin's structural inaccessibility; both Wanderer and ruin keep their distance. Book I comes across as a story about avoiding or resisting this dangerous potential of the ruin, a structure (and corresponding narrative) that tempts the visitor to stay too long or indulge too much in grief but cannot, as a ruin, accommodate much less cure any who might actually do so.

The ruin thus embodies the driving tension of *The Excursion* as a whole. The poem operates around a conflict between the desire to stay, to sit in the shade and tell a story, and the uninhabitability (a kind of the resistance to narration itself) of the structures within or through which this narration occurs. And that tension is directly linked to reading practice. Book I's introductory emphasis on the ruin's alluring inaccessibility makes for a way of reading that, like the Wanderer's affective model, is weary of fixation or obsession but, as with the Poet, is also inclined toward return and review. The oscillation between modes of interpretive, emotional, and physical engagement indicates that a healthier relationship to the ruin and to the poem might look something like the Wanderer's early travels to and from the cottage, in which he makes short, irregular, but repeated visits to Margaret over an extended period of time. In the original drafts of *The Ruined Cottage*, the Wanderer's anxiety about attachment makes for a poem that prioritizes expelling the reader-guest before her grief, like the speaker of the unpublished "Incipient Madness," can start "fastening on all things / That promise food."[130] *The Ruined Cottage* achieves closure quickly, but it does so at the expense of further revisitings (at least

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[130] William Wordsworth, "Incipient Madness," in *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James A. Butler, Cornell Wordsworth (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1979), ll. 9–10.

internally to the text – the reader may reread as often as she likes). But once incorporated into *The Excursion*, Book I is only the beginning of a much more "long and laborious" journey and text, much of which reworks scenes, postures, and motifs from Book I. The ruined cottage ideally functions, in short, as a scene revisited, but only as part of a larger poem for which "revisiting" does not necessarily mean resolving difference or alleviating spatiotemporal disorientation.

One of *The Excursion's* most obvious reenactments of its own opening comes when the Poet, Solitary, and Wanderer arrive at the church in Book V, where they will spend the next three books listening to stories from the Pastor. The scene is exemplary of the poem's use of repetition as a method of both connection and disorientation, which is itself reflective of a broader emphasis on form – human, architectural, and poetic – as both highly interactive and, often, frustratingly indeterminate. Book V opens with the three men's journey to and arrival at the church, which is strikingly similar to the Poet's original trek to the ruined cottage:

> This said, oft halting we pursued our way;
> Nor reached the Village Church-yard till the sun,
> Travelling at steadier pace than ours, had risen
> Above the summits of the highest hills
> And round our path darted oppressive beams.
>
> (5.137-41)

Just as before, the travelers arrive at high noon, when the sun has become a kind of aggressor, shooting "oppressive beams" of heat along their path. The summer sun again pushes our speaker and his companions to find shade and shelter, setting up the church and churchyard as, like the ruin and garden, the spatialized manifestation of that relief. The Poet makes a point of emphasizing the fact that the group is still traveling according to the rules established in Book I:

"oft halting we pursued our way." The first book's emphasis on temporary rest in the midst of extended travel still dictates the men's pacing five books later.

The church delivers on that promise of relief just as thoroughly as does the cottage garden:

> As chanced, the portals of the sacred Pile
> Stood open, and we entered. On my frame,
> At such transition from the fervid air,
> A grateful coolness fell, that seemed to strike
> The heart, in concert with that temperate awe
> And natural reverence, which the Place inspired.
> Not framed to nice proportions was the Pile,
> But large and massy; for duration built.
> With pillars crowded, and the roof upheld
> By naked rafters intricately crossed,
> Like leafless underboughs, in some thick grove,
> All withered by the depth of shade above.

<div align="right">(5.142-53)</div>

This "sacred Pile" differs from the ruin in that it is, plainly, not a ruin, and in that its doors stand open for entrance. But its effects on the body are just as immediate. The "transition" from the oppressive heat on the road to the "grateful coolness" inside the church registers instantly for the Poet, directly "On my frame." The church, which Wordsworth designates as a "framed" structure, has an immediate effect on the "frame" of the Poet's body, allowing it to "strike / the heart." The passage reestablishes that earlier connection between demarcated, shaded spaces and physical relief – even the interior of this church looks like that shady space under the elm trees in Book I, "the naked rafters" creating a similar "depth of shade" as would "some thick grove." Both the elm grove in Book I and the cathedral arise when disparate plant, human, and inanimate elements become "intricately crossed."

But the more overt work of this passage is in how it unites multiple kinds and scales of "frames" at once. The Poet's "frame," his bodily, physical form, is directly affected, even struck,

by the much larger, grander frame of the church, "large and massy" by comparison. The structure of the church molds and guides the positions of the Poet's body – he enters, in the first place, in search of temperate relief, and the result is an acute change on his "frame," made possible by the way the church's own constructed (and thus not fully natural) form blocks or filters those "oppressive beams" of sunlight from just a few lines earlier. And *that* frame references both Book I's "brotherhood of lofty elms" as well as, by the simple virtue of it being a church, that earlier metaphor for the whole poem's own organizing principle described in the preface. Much in this particular space is "intricately crossed," brought together by an extended process of self-reference and by various interacting and overlapping "frames."

Before they make the transition to the churchyard that will be the true setting of this and the next two books, the men walk around the sanctuary admiring its construction and attempting to decipher many of the "foot-worn epitaphs."[131] Finally the Wanderer and the Poet notice the Solitary, whose thoughts and posture become another kind of "faded narrative":

> ….from the task
> Of puzzling out that faded Narrative,
> With whisper soft my venerable Friend
> Called me; and looking down the darksome aisle
> I saw the Tenant of the lonely Vale
> Standing apart; with curved arm reclined
> On the baptismal Font; his pallid face
> Upturned as if his mind were rapt, or lost
> In some abstraction; -- gracefully he stood,
> The semblance bearing of a sculptured Form
> That leans upon a monumental Urn
> In peace from morn to night, from year to year.
>
> (5.204-15)

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[131] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, l. 5.167.

The Solitary (who the Poet almost always identifies by the vale, the landscape in which he

originally met him) leans against the font with his "curved arm reclined," a posture that

resembles those "naked rafters intricately crossed." The position also emphasizes how one frame

– the leaning body of the Solitary (notice too how this posture mimics the Poet's own when he is

"leaning o'er the Garden wall, / Review[ing]" Margaret's tale) – might take on a particular

posture by pressing up against another. The Poet reads that interaction in a somewhat surprising

way: the Solitary looks like some "sculptured Form / That leans…in peace from morn to night,

from year to year." What at first presents as an interdependent and thus impermanent stance –

rarely does one lean against another structure forever – becomes a fantasized image of peace, as

if the solution to the Solitary's inner turmoil were just a result of finding the right posture, the

right form of stillness or physical contentment.

This is an odd reading on the Poet's part, one that emerges out of the indecipherability of

the Solitary's facial expression, which makes it look as if "his mind were rapt, or lost / in some

abstraction." Read in full, "rapt" and "lost" present as potentially synonymous, the Solitary may

be "lost" in the sense that he is absorbed in his thoughts. But the line break makes things

complicated. For a moment there, at the end of the line, it is as if the Poet cannot tell if the

Solitary is rapt – fascinated, intensely focused on some fantastic or even religious mental image

– or just totally lost, mentally absent, unfocused, or even confused, a reading supported by his

leaning, even lazy posture. [132] The Solitary might, in short, be thinking big thoughts or none at

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[132] The OED defines "rapt" as the condition of being "transported spiritually, by religious feeling or inspiration," "carried or removed from one place, position, or situation to another," or "deeply absorbed or buried in (a feeling, subject of thought, etc.)." It also has an element of violence – the French *rapt* can refer to abduction or violent robbery. "rapt, n.". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/158218?rskey=5SikfJ&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed February 05, 2023).

all. There is something mildly unsettling, for Poet and reader alike, about this ambiguity between these two states of mind, both of which might register in nearly identical ways upon the face – they physically look the same. Suddenly, the formal, spatial, phenomenological divide between the most engaged viewer and his most disengaged opposite are rather difficult to discern. And that difficulty is realized in the image of a character who is repeatedly admonished for affective despondency, his tendency to care and to grieve too much, and his ongoing desire to withdraw, to be lost to the world and once again be the "tenant of that solitary vale." The Poet's interpretation of the Solitary as like a "sculptured Form" that leans unmoving for years and years reads, then, as a crystallization, as well as an aestheticization, of a posture and expression that itself blurs the line between being "rapt, or lost." Here, the body is both a catalyst of interaction – it is one frame leaning upon another – and a barrier to immediate communication – it is the Solitary's face and posture that mask his thoughts and maintain this ambiguity of expression.

The Solitary's monumental position marks the transition from the inner sanctuary to the churchyard, where the Pastor will relate the stories of those buried there for much of the rest of the poem. While the Poet imagines his transformation into a "sculptured Form," the Solitary is roused into movement by the arrival of the church sexton:

> Him from that posture did the Sexton rouze;
> Who entered, humming carelessly a tune,
> Continuation haply of the notes
> That had beguiled the work from which he came
> With spade and mattock o'er his shoulder hung;
> To be deposited, for future need,
> In their appointed place. The pale Recluse
> Withdrew; and straight we followed, -- to a spot
> Where sun and shade were intermixed; for there
> A broad Oak stretching forth its leafy arms
> From an adjoining pasture, overhung
> Small space of that green church-yard with a light
> And pleasant awning. On the moss-grown wall
> My ancient Friend and I together took

Our seats

Those "naked rafters…like leafless underboughs" inside the church have given way to the actual "leafy arms" of an oak tree overhanging the churchyard. This place's cooling shade comes from that tree's "stretching forth," as if reaching over to greet the men from its place in an "adjoining pasture." By now, intermediate and partially shaded spaces such as this have become familiar. Yet again, one scene of discourse comes to resemble another, but this time with the additional reference to the Solitary's leaning posture just a few lines before. Now, in the churchyard, that same interaction between reaching or leaning bodies and frames has reemerged in space: the tree stretches out is own arm over the wall, becoming part of the churchyard and providing it with a "light and pleasant awning," where light and shade are once again intermixed. These have been the conditions for productive thought, discussion, or narration from the beginning: the enclosed and intermediate space of the churchyard, because it is so "pleasant," enables the men to listen to the Pastor's tales of the dead.

This intermingling, too, allows for the narration of a much more obvious and permanent kind of absence than the Solitary's "lostness," the absence of the dead. The poem's introductory descriptions of the church and churchyard, then, construct the relaxations, leanings, and postures of the body as capable of informing space and of tracing certain absences or unknowns: death, "abstraction," despondency, misreading, rapture. This is a trait that the Solitary's human body shares with and transfers onto other kinds of frames as well, whether that be the "large and massy" church frame, the walled churchyard, the shade-producing body of the tree, or the church-like form of the poem itself. The ruin in Book I operates this way as well. Those "four naked walls / That stared upon each other" outline Margaret's absence, both in space and *as a*

*space*. This may explain why, within the poem's own metaphysics, the Wanderer and Poet cannot enter the ruin: it is a highly particularized structural demarcation of non-presence. All of these forms and frames gesture to and create room for that which cannot be fully articulated or reanimated, and so are themselves often resistant to straightforward interpretation, accommodation, or reproduction (despite their similarities, the churchyard does not amount to a one-to-one recreation of the ruin and Book I). Repetition and return are the poem's tools both for self-reference and for self-estrangement. In either respect, they enable the poem to turn back on itself, and the result is nearly always a heightened awareness of the "frame," poetic and otherwise.

**Dappling Over**

Book VI extends the churchyard scene as the Pastor tells story after story about the local dead. One of his longest tales is of Ellen, a young woman who becomes a nursemaid for another family's child in order to support her own, only to learn that her child has died in her absence. Ellen herself perishes soon after. The men sit by the mother and child's adjoining graves as the Pastor tells their story on a bench "framed in the Church-yard wall" and covered in "Part under shady sycamore, and part / Offering a place of rest in pleasant sunshine."[133] The Poet has a strong reaction to the tale, largely because it reminds him so overtly of another:

> For me, the emotion scarcely was less strong
> Or less benign than that which I had felt
> When, seated near my venerable Friend,
> Beneath those shady elms from him I heard
> The story that retraced the slow decline
> Of Margaret sinking on the lonely Heath,
> With the neglected House in which she dwelt.
>
> (6.1076-82)

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[133] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, l. 6.794-97.

Ellen's history reminds the Poet of Margaret's because they both incite such strong emotional reactions from him, but also because something about Ellen's story alerts the Poet to the fact that the "spot" in which he heard it is also quite similar to Margaret's, to that place "beneath those shady elms." Something about the combination of hearing yet another story about a disadvantaged and despondent mother and hearing it in a place so like the shady spot around the ruin brings the Poet back to that original scene from Book I. [134]

Let us, then, follow the Poet's lead and make our own return to the poem's opening scene and, in particular, those "shady elms," in order to explore the nature of this association. This section will home in on that shadiness as a prominent device, like the other reivisitings discussed above, with which the poem makes connections between scenes, tales, and figures recognizable to the Poet and reader alike. Shade, shadow, and other "dapplings" are alternately disfiguring and connective materials, and are employed to track time or movement, to initiate return or accentuate repetitions, and to make the text's surface, its materiality, visible in its own narrative rendering of the natural world.

In the most notable addition to the original *Ruined Cottage* draft, upon first seeing the Wanderer on the cottage bench the Poet begins to reminisce about having encountered the Wanderer, at first without realizing it, in the "middle of the public way" of the city. The Poet goes on, for another four hundred lines, to relate the Wanderer's childhood, education, and

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[134] Ingrid Horrocks' *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility* argues that many of the male authors of the late eighteenth century, Wordsworth included, use the female wanderer and/or disenfranchised to absorb certain anxieties about wandering and poverty, especially the physical and affective vulnerability involved in moving through landscape and encountering others along the way. Women like Margaret and Ellen tend to act as catalysts for a certain sympathetic mode, one which the male wanderers in this poem and beyond can both engage and disengage with more freely and with more control, remove, and distance.

development into a man whose "whole figure breathed intelligence." The Wanderer's personal

history, a history that manifests in his "figure" and even on his face, makes up the Wanderers

own "frame":

> Active and nervous was his gait; his limbs
> And his whole figure breathed intelligence.
> Time had compressed the freshness of his cheek
> Into a narrower circle of deep red
> But had not tamed his eye; that under brows
> Shaggy and grey had meanings which it brought
> From years of youth; which, like a Being made
> Of many Beings, he had wondrous skill
> To blend with knowledge of the years to come,
> Human, or such as lie beyond the grave.
>
> So He was framed; and such is course of life
> Who now, with no Appendage but a Staff,
> The prized memorial of relinquish'd toils,
> Upon that Cottage bench reposed his limbs,
> Screened from the sun. Supine the Wanderer lay,
> His eyes as if in drowsiness half shut,
> The shadows of the breezy elms above
> Dappling his face. He had not heard my steps
> As I approached; and near him did I stand
> Unnotic'd in the shade, some minutes' space.

<div align="right">(1. 456-75)</div>

To be "framed" here means to have a history, a history of personal and intellectual development

that has led to the Wanderer as he is *and* that registers on the physical body – it is "under brows /

Shaggy and grey" that the still-active eye resides and communicates the lessons "brought / From

years of youth." Here, the Wanderer manifests as an exact physical manifestation of his own

history and mental activity, a man whose "limbs / and his whole figure breathed intelligence," as

if his body acts as a direct expression of his thoughts.[135]  So the Wanderer's conjoining,

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[135] This portion of the poem certainly seems like a reworking of the earlier poem "Old Man Travelling: Animal Tranquility and Decay," drafted as early as 1796 and published in *Lyrical Ballads* 1800 and 1805. For more on the influence this poem has had on this chapter and *Forms Less Solid* as a whole, see the Coda. William Wordsworth, "Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquility and Decay, a Sketch," in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014).

intermixing frames – his history and his physical appearance – set him up, at first, as a figure far removed from that later image of the Solitary, whose facial expression and "Form" obscure rather than reveal his thinking mind. In that scene, the Solitary's is a petrified, "sculptured Form" at odds with the dynamism of the breathing, blending form(s) of the Wanderer, an opposition that quite accurately describes the roles the two characters play throughout the poem. This is one explanation for why the Wanderer can "afford to suffer" and the Solitary cannot.[136]

But the Wanderer's facial features are quickly disfigured once the Poet's narration returns to the present. Here the poem joins back up with the original *Ruined Cottage* draft, so the Poet arrives at the ruin to find his friend lying "supine" on the cottage bench, "His eyes as if in drowsiness half shut, / the shadows of breezy elms above / Dappling his face." The Poet's initial sighting of the Wanderer at the ruin mimics his encounter with him the previous day, when he saw the Wanderer in the "public way" but did not, at first, recognize him. In that meeting, the Wanderer stands "with face / turned toward the sun setting" so that the "countenance of the Man / Was hidden" from the Poet's view and thus the Wanderer at first goes "unrecognized" as the Wanderer. So despite that great concordance between face, figure, and thinking mind, the Wanderer's two most recent appearances present him as, essentially, a "face / turned," a figure at first unrecognized and then unrecognizing: the Poet arrives at the ruin and stands "unnotic'd in the shade, some minutes' space" before the Wanderer awakes. That almost overly active eye

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[136] Celeste Langan's reading of that phrase is part of an argument for how *The Excursion* depicts Liberalism as arising out of the "conjunction of surplus and distress," where "surplus" refers to the Wanderer's economic surplus – his status as a pedlar – as well as his ability to sympathize with others (and so he can "afford to suffer") (230). Langan argues that the interaction between the "missionary salesman," the Wanderer, and the "disconsolate subject," the Solitary, is "part of the cure we now call liberalism" (229). Langan is another critic who, like me, sees *The Excursion* as articulating the failure of its own project. Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom*.

described just a few lines earlier as part of the Wanderer's essential physical and psychological makeup is now "in drowsiness half shut," closed off from viewing.

The Wanderer's drowsiness almost comically opposes his preceding description, but it is not the only disfiguring force in this scene. The shade created by the overhanging elm trees (the shade that makes this a sheltering, narrative-friendly space in the first place) leaves "shadows" of branches and leaves "dappling his face." The Wanderer's previously active eye is, then, made indiscernible both by his own position and state of consciousness – his is a reclined, sleeping form – and by the shade and shadow overlain by the trees above. This unconscious, supine form is the first we see of the Wanderer in the present moment of the poem, and it is an opening posture that combines physical rest with mental remove. As with the Dreaming Man in the opening, the Wanderer's ability to find comfort and to relax in this natural space signals a certain kind of distance. That distance registers both for the Poet, whose initial views of both the Wanderer and the imagined Dreaming Man are rather hazy, and for the poem, for which the Wanderer is the image-bearer for an easier but less emotionally attached relationship to nature and history.

If the Wanderer's more active countenance from just a few lines before acts as a foil for the Solitary's sculptured one, this sleeping and shaded position mimics that of other, earlier figures as well. When the traveling Poet first looks out upon the open landscape, the view of the south "indistinctly glared / Through a pale steam" while the "northern downs," in contrast, "shew'd far off / A surface dappled o'er with shadows, flung / From many a brooding cloud." The distant hills are a undulating surface "dappled o'er with shadows" just as, on a much, much smaller scale, the elms at the ruin create shadows that are "dappling" the Wanderer's own face – a profile also made of undulating lines and, in its sleeping state, distant in another sense. A

crucial part of that opening landscape scene is, again, the Poet's imagined vision of the Dreaming Man, who "extends his careless limbs" under a cave or, in *The Ruined Cottage* drafts, also under a tree. The ceiling or branches that extend above him "cast a twilight of its [their] own," shading his face, too, from the noon sunlight and making for a comfortable enough situation that he is "half conscious" of his surroundings. The pre-ruin stanza of the poem thus creates an overt set of connections between the faces and figures of these two idealized philosophizing men and the landscape itself, the "face" or frame of the poem's own natural surroundings. All three figures are in some way removed: the hills are geographically distant, the Dreaming Man is an unattainable vision of semi-consciousness, the Wanderer does not notice the Poet because he too is asleep. They are also all three at rest – "half conscious," "supine," "determined and unmoved" – and are in some way obscured – the (sur)faces of the landscape and the Wanderer are "dappled o'er," and the Dreaming Man is, after all, imaginary. Rest, remove, and disfiguration are at play in each image and, in turn, unite them to one another. As a result, the opening approach to the ruin reads as if the poem has triangulated the ruin and its surroundings by setting up this connection between the landscape, the Dreaming Man, and the Wanderer. The ideal spot for short poetic respite arrives as the condensation of a series of the Poet's own associations, of the (literally) shadowy, subconscious connections he has made along his journey.

The movements of the sun and the intermixing of shade and light are, as delicate as they may seem, one of the poem's primary tools for making various connections legible. Before the Poet ever arrives at the ruin, he makes connections between various figures real and imaginary based on their similarly shaded or "dappled o'er" countenances. When the men first arrive at the church in Book V, the first sign that the church will be like the ruin is the passage's emphasis on

the time of their arrival. Just as in Book I, the men arrive at their destination around midday and use it as a source of shelter from the oppressive heat. Then the churchyard, where "sun and shade were intermixed" thanks to the large overhanging Oak tree, comes to look strikingly similar to that earlier scene where "Beneath those shady elms" the Wanderer told Margaret's story. This is also the travelers' (and the poem's) way of marking time, both as insurance against dwelling too long in sorrow and, on a more practical level, out of an awareness that these spaces can only provide this cooling, shady relief for limited periods of time. Even the bench the men sit upon while listening to Ellen's story is "part under shady sycamore, and part / Offering a place of rest in pleasant sunshine," a comfortable semi-shade that will surely only last for so long (about as long, theoretically, as it takes to tell Ellen's story). Very little in this poem is more overtly contingent than this interplay of light and shadow, so dependent as it is upon situation, time of day, and the angle at which one sits or is positioned. The poem maintains a consistent awareness of that spatiotemporal particularity, and employs these "dappling" forms as the strange and fragile signs by which it registers that particularity and the resemblances among its own much more unwieldy, expansive set of forms and frames.

Using shadow as a way of tracking time is certainly nothing new (perhaps the least new knowledge there is, i.e., the sundial), but it corresponds compellingly with both the poem's attempts to demarcate periods of rest and labor and with that other focus on shade as something that can mask a once recognizable figure. That disfiguring power emphasizes shade or shadow's role as an overlaying substance, a film, a thing that is itself insubstantial and often meant to be looked *through* rather than looked at. Shade and shadow are, after all, rarely the forms we are accustomed to reading, or to recognizing as legible at all. But in these scenes and in nature, these shadowy substances act as proof of particular interactions – they are both the result and the sign

of the interplay of light and bodies in space. On the broader narrative scale, they are the evidence

of more extensive interactions between scenes, tales, and figures. Shade and shadow are perhaps

the closest naturally occurring manifestations of bare form to which we have access. A shadow is

a formal negative, the absence of light projected in the shape of the obstructing figure. This

shadowy form may be distorted or distorting (or may cover or conceal *other* forms like the

Wanderer's sleeping face), but that distortion brings into the foreground the very formality – the

linear, spatial, shaped-ness – of the poem's many faces and figures *and* of these shadowy

connections themselves. Reading along the lines of shade and shadow may thus be another,

surprisingly legitimate, way of reading the forms of things.

In one sense, this reading of the poem's formal operations is very much in line with the

scholarly history with which I began this chapter. The shade and shadow metaphor still reads as

a naturalization of Wordsworth's style and the poem's structure (and a rather overt one at that).

The semi-translucence of those forms might also mimic the transparency of Wordsworth's style,

as it has also traditionally been read as a thing meant to be looked through but not at. Equally

relevant here is the fact that "dappled" means "marked with roundish spots," or "spotted," a term

that references the kind of spots for which Wordsworth is now better known: *The Prelude*'s

"spots of time."[137] Geoffrey Hartman's thinking on those spots highlights how the phrase "spots

of time" is simultaneously spatial and temporal, where "spots" can refer to fixed places

impressed upon the poet's mind in boyhood and the experiences associated with them, but also

evokes the more abstract "'time-spot'" that may initiate chronological disruption and the

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[137] "dappled, adj.". OED Online. (September 2022. Oxford University Press). https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/47257?rskey=OI68cP&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed November 21, 2022).

preservation of memory.[138] Hartman reads spots of time as the "fusing not only [of] time and place but also stasis and continuity," a moment of "fixation" that is "reintegrated in the stream of life" as part of the development of poetic imagination and self-consciousness.[139] Wordsworth's "spots of time" are each born out of a sudden defamiliarization of place, and so emphasize the separation of mind and nature. *The Excursion*'s dappling spots also register a stop-start motion, have their own defamiliarizing power and, at the same time, act as a kind of narrative webbing, tracing the movements and connections of the poem's characters, forms, and temporality. But the moments, locales, and figures to which these spots adhere are not autobiographical but internal to the poem's narration. They are images recognizable to the reader and Poet alike, in large because they are a literal, visible elements of that environment. If *The Excursion*'s dapplings trace a spatiotemporally oriented history of development, it is more the poem's than the poet's. And this is managed, in part, by the shadowy disfiguring of the Wanderer (literally, of his face, but also in that his bodily attitude no longer immediately articulates his mental activity), the figure who is most overtly aligned with the poet of *The Prelude*.

Tracking the movements of shade and shadow means, then, tracking the movements of the poem itself. It is as if the poem, like that "broad Oak," uses shadowed forms to stretch out its own arm, to cast its own reflection or outline, across its central figures and scenes. This interplay of light and shadow presents the poem's formal operations as legible to the reader, operating as a self-conscious projection of the poem's form onto its narration of the natural world. So it is as if

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[138] In Gurton-Wachter's reading, the "There Was a Boy" passage in the *Prelude* qualifies as a spot of time because it nuances attention and watching, and moves between the strain and relaxation of attention, leading to a new perception that imprints the experience on the mind. The passage's line breaks – especially the line about how "while he hung / listening" – play a big part in that, because they mimic the experience of reading the line break and "put pressure on the experience of anticipation, the reader experiences the past as something *to come*" (105). Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention*.

[139] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 212.

Wordsworth uses these tricks of the light to make the text's verbal surface – the written word's own dark, inkier "spots" – recognizable *in* the material world *as* the residue of other material interactions. Wordsworth thus makes the text visible as a spatial composition. That very spatiality is itself a sign of connection between disparate forms across place and time; that spatiality is, in short, already an act of interpretation.

The Excursion posits that this spatialized kind of interpretation is something that nearly all bodies and forms might perform. We have already seen how figures and structures like the Wanderer, the Solitary, the ruin, and the church reflect and inform one another in their own postures, orientations, and construction. The poem's own structural, stylistic, and thematic elements are such spatial forms as well. Paul Jaussen, in an argument for the formal flexibility of modernist long poetry, describes the long poem as an "emergent" system, in which the poem's length allows for an extended writing process that is reflected back into the poem's form – the poem is responsive to its own environment. Jaussen's example of this phenomenon in nature is a flock of birds, composed of smaller individual birds that come together into a single, coherent flock that then adjusts according to changes in its environment – wind, rain, trees, and so on. The result is that "the flock as a whole, through this continuously unfolding process, is interpreting a landscape in its form."[140] Jaussen uses a spatial metaphor for what he sees as a chiefly temporal form, but it describes well how interpretation can be spatial and embodied. *The Excursion*'s many forms (human, architectural, and shaded alike) interlock with, adjust to, and inform one

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[140] Jaussen, *Writing in Real Time: Emergent Poetics from Whitman to the Digital*, 2, 7. Jaussen's definition of emergence comes from John Holland and is related to the concept in systems theory of "homeostasis" in which closed systems gather information from the environment they regulate (the thermostat is his prime example). This is the kind of provisional closure Jaussen reads into the long poem. Jaussen's work is reminiscent of Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* in that Bachelard, too, is interested in the interplay between the real and unreal in poetry. Bachelard's exploration of the interaction between imagination and language is quite different from Jaussen's argument for long poetry's accommodation of long term composition and real-world change, but both see poetry as in direct, active relation with the author or reader. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964).

another. Reading the forms of things is thus a reflexive, interactive, phenomenological mode; it means becoming formal, occupying space by reclining, leaning, stretching, by taking on a particular shape or posture. This is true for the bodies and structures internal to the poem, but also for the poem itself and for its reader. For Jaussen, the long poem is "a practice caught up at the intersection of form and time." I agree, but if we are to read a long poem like *The Excursion* as occurring somewhere in that intersection, we must do so with an understanding of "form" as an equally spatial entity, so that taking up time – being "long and laborious" – also means taking up and informing space.

Jaussen's analysis of the long poem presents it as an open structure, open to feedback from the real world because of its extended time of composition. *The Excursion*'s own lengthy drafting process, from the early 1797 *Ruined Cottage*, "Incipient Madness," *The Pedlar*, and *Home at Grasmere* drafts, to earlier versions of *The Prelude* composed in between, had certainly influenced its own development by its publication in 1814 (these drafts have, themselves, been the sites of many of *The Excursion*'s revisitings). This kind of external, compositional temporality is the focus of Jaussen's argument, but the poem's use of shade and shadow as tools for keeping track of time also emphasize Wordsworth's commitment to incorporating real-world temporal experience into the poem's narrative and, by extension, into its narrative rendering of its own formal makeup.

So though both are essentially spatiotemporal motifs, this marks one way that *The Excursion*'s dapplings function differently from *The Prelude*'s "spots of time." Wordsworth's use of the "spots of time" as reenergizing "passages" to the past and away from "ordinary intercourse" constructs them as fixed memories that enable the poet to move outside the bounds

of chronology and everyday temporal experience (re., Hartman's "time-spots").[141]  As a result,

they lend themselves to being interpreted as lyrically aligned, as if they are Wordsworth's

representation of poetry's ability to flee from time or history and into the fixed or eternal. This

contributes to readings like that of Mary Jacobus, who argues (with a slightly different focus)

that *The Prelude* is ultimately just an "extended personal lyric" that is "redeemed from time and

death" through its disruption of narrative time (an argument that seems unconcerned with the fact

that *The Prelude* is quite long and laborious itself).[142] I am also arguing that *The Excursion*'s

dapplings and its more general emphasis on repetition and revisiting enact an intentional

complication of chronological narrative – both the reader and the Poet are often inclined to look

back upon previous scenes or stories – but that disruption is not, in this poem, lyrical by nature.

These spots do not do away with temporal difference or lift the speaker or the reader out of felt

time and material embodiment or decay; they are, by contrast, the marks by which the poem

outlines and accentuates those very occurrences.

The Excursion makes for difficult reading, but that's kind of the point. The poem's

shadowy connections track time, make connections, and defamiliarize at the same time, but the

forms themselves are hard to trace – these spots barely register, are barely noticeable. The

poem's figures and frames hold together delicately, tentatively, and with no guarantee of

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[141] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), l. 11.270. Kevis Goodman reads this phrase – "passages of life" – as a phrase that, both in the "spots of time" passage and its later use in *The Excursion*, describes the "reanimating" power of storytelling (a connection she makes in reference to the overturning of the georgic mode). These passages, however, do not open up the past or convey knowledge with as much immediacy as may be desired. Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129–35.

[142] Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference: Essays on the Prelude* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 166, 176–77. Jacobus' analysis does not engage with what I see, as mentioned above, as a fundamental difference between the lyric and long form, one that also manifests in crucial differences in content (in particular, the difference between the resolution, in the lyric, of the dissonance between original and remembered scene and, in the long form, the lingering tension between similar scenes). That these forms enact key differences is also evidenced by how the lessons of "The Ruined Cottage" are altered with its inclusion into *The Excursion*.

permanence. It calls to mind the unpublished draft "Incipient Madness" (which Tilottama Rajan

has coincidentally labeled the "dark reflection" of *The Ruined Cottage*), a fragment that ends

with a similarly fragile, impermanent, but surprisingly persistent, set of relations: [143]

> I alone
> Remained: the winds of heaven remained – with them
> My heart claimed fellowship and with the beams
> Of dawn and of the setting sun that seemed
> To live and linger on the mouldering walls.
>
> (46-49)

*The Excursion*'s drafts, forms, and shadowy associations have a certain staying power, a

tendency to "live and linger" in the mind despite the poem's own length and narrative

wanderings. This is the clinginess to which the Wanderer refers in Book I when he finds that

even his disinterested "spirit clings / to that woman," and is the effect to which the Poet

repeatedly falls victim. These clingy, lingering relations are unifying *in* their fragility – a

flexibility and openness that resembles Jaussen's emergent forms – but they cannot act as an

escape route from time or death, as they are the very images by which the poem references the

dead and marks time's passing. All of this, as a result, makes for slow going, a reading process as

exhausting and difficult as the Poet's opening trek through the "bare wide Common." Like the

air on the hot summer's day with which it begins, *The Excursion*'s reading environment is thick,

sticky, clingy – it exhausts the mind and trips up the feet. But in so doing it realizes a poetic form

that is sensitive to temporal experience, death, despondency, non-knowledge, and to the extended

and repetitive processes of interpretation.

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[143] Rajan, *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft*, 18.

**Fronting the "Face / Turned"**

The Wanderer's "face / turned," like the Solitary's "rapt, or lost" expression, serves as a reminder of how quickly that which is already familiar or recognizable might become the reverse, either as a temporary trick of the light or as a function of the nuance of the body-as-form. These figures also become, in the brief encounters to which they refer, absent or unfocused observers – the Wanderer's eye is either turned away, blocking the Poet's ability to recognize him, or is "half shut," incapable of registering the arrival of his friend. The Solitary's potential "lostness" means that he may look at some distant abstraction or nothing at all. Both of these blank faces prefigure scenes of literal and figurative gravedigging (a georgic overturning), where the much more permanently disfigured and absent countenances of the dead are conjured in the narration of the Wanderer and the Pastor; for Margaret and the like, "the worm is on her cheek."[144]

Staring and looking are some of *The Excursion*'s most ambiguous acts, in part because they are not straightforwardly active or even, necessarily, performed by animate objects. The ruin is described as "a ruined house, four naked walls / that *stared* upon each other" (emphasis mine). The central formal tension that the ruin comes to embody, its status as an unenterable and self-opposing structure, manifests as a function of this internal staring. The "roofless Hut" remains standing, presumably, because of how its "four walls" press against one another, they perform an interdependent leaning or pushing that maintains its status as a still-standing, if ruined, structure. That mutual pressure and resistance registers as a "staring," an act that is itself a physical and material force and that is a direct result of the ruin's uninhabitability, its

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[144] William Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage," in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), l. 104.

rooflessness. So its staring also articulates the ruin's more abstract unapproachability, its un-

homey inwardness, its domestic "face / turned." This section will explore this kind of staring and

facing, acts that are characterized by an affective and/or physical distance. But this

psychophysical remove, and the corresponding interpretive difficulty it often generates, can also

work as a surprisingly effective pathway to engagement, even to a kind of intimacy, between

mutually observing bodies. This thematic tension between distance and proximity mirrors the

even more overt tensions between movement and stasis and between activity and despondency.

As a result, it also realizes the text's commitment to returning the *reader's* stare by way of

articulating its own internal tensions.

Kevis Goodman ends her reading of *The Excursion* as an "aural history" with a

discussion of how the poem registers "muteness," in the sense that what is recognized or

recorded in *The Excursion*'s historiographic project is "a forceful hindrance" to that project, a

silence that is not exactly a "staging of a failure of signification" nor a full communication with

the past and the dead. Goodman's metaphor is primarily auditory, where history is an acoustic

phenomenon, but she does turn, briefly, to Walter Benjamin and to vision. For Benjamin, as

Goodman notes, a story's "aura," its essential character as an inexhaustible resource, comes as a

result of the "'phenomenon of distance,'" in which "'the object is invested with the ability to

look at us in return.'"[145] Goodman credits Wordsworth with anticipating Benjamin's argument in

the first lines of *The Excursion*, which presents a landscape that "indistinctly glared / through a

pale steam." The landscape, like the ruin a few stanzas later, presents as another kind of face,

another surface "dappled o'er," that can "glare" or stare.

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[145] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*, 135. Goodman is quoting from Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

Goodman's reference to Benjamin indicates that this ability to stare comes primarily as a result of distance, of a certain unapproachability that is literal in relation to the distant hills but more figural, even pathological, in relation to the ruin. That glaring becomes stranger, though, when we notice how the faces that really should be able to engage the looking, speaking Poet by returning his gaze – the Dreaming Man, the Wanderer, and later the Solitary – present as, instead, "face[s] / turned," disengaged and distant in a very different way than what Goodman and Benjamin describe. The poem's opening move is essentially to undermine what expectations we might have about which faces and forms may stare and be stared upon, as well as the nature of that act in the first place. That figural turning away is also at the center of the poem's primary narrative tension, which hinges upon the difference in affective, historical, and social engagement between the Wanderer and the Solitary. It is the Wanderer's project throughout (and the reason for his journey) to shake the Solitary free of his fascination with grief and isolation. But as we have seen, both figures intermittently present as unrecognizable, unreadable, or disengaged, so that the two men often register as oppositely motivated but equally unavailable interiorities. Like the distant hills, both men have a tendency to appear "far off."

The Poet, on the other hand, establishes a very different relationship with his companions, with nature, and even with the reader (or, rather, with the meta-operations of the text with which the reader is also engaged). From the very beginning, the Poet's relationship with the landscape and with nature is strikingly physical, so much so that the opening stanza reads as if he is actively battling with his natural surroundings. He is so much at odds with the landscape that his feet are "baffled" by the "slipp'ry ground," as if he is awkwardly stumbling toward his destination. In *The Ruined Cottage* version of the opening, the Poet immediately tries to mimic the Dreaming Man and lie down before even reaching the ruin, but finds that his "limbs

from very heat / Could find no rest" and the "bursting gorse" creates a "tedious noise" that keep him moving toward the garden.[146] Wordsworth uses the Poet's discomfort as a clear foil to the ease of the Dreaming Man and Wanderer and to present the cottage garden as a more gentle, restful locale. But it also ensures that the first view we get of our speaker (whose first person point of view will guide the entire poem) is of a man whose relationship with nature is difficult but undeniably tactile and close – he may look longingly to the distant hills, but it is the "host of insects gathering round [his] face" that dominate his vision and spur him onward.[147] The Poet's is the most immediate and embodied relationship to nature and even to the poem's more narrative elements – when Margaret's story is done he is "moved" so physically that he leans on the garden wall "in weakness."[148] The Poet's struggle through the common gives the opening landscape and subsequent telling of Margaret's tale a pressing, almost painful physical immediacy, a phenomenological orientation that will characterize the Poet's narration of the poem as a whole.

The Poet's physical struggle is not unique to this Wordsworthian speaker or to this Wordsworthian opening passage, so a quick aside to another poem and another scholar. *Michael* (1800) also begins with a traveling speaker, one who instructs the reader directly on how to follow his steps:

> If from the public way you turn your steps
> Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill,
> You will suppose that with an upright path
> Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent

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[146] Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage," ll. 21–25.

[147] Note the irony of the use of "host." Here it references the closeness and overwhelming number of the bugs, their physical pressure, but the more colloquial use is perhaps a "host of angels," a spiritual but nonmaterial presence akin to the shadowy, dappling forms that pepper the rest of the poem. "host, n.1". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/88743?rskey=iD642i&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed February 06, 2023).

[148] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, l. 1.954.

> The pastoral Mountains front you, face to face.
>
> <div align="right">(1-5)</div>

This speaker has also experienced something like the Poet's "languid feet." Both poem's opening pathways are ones through which "feet must struggle," difficult landscapes to traverse and to read. For Anahid Nersessian, that difficulty lies somewhere in how the mountains "front you." Nersessian reads this fronting as a sign of pretense or inscrutability and identifies it as an essential characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry generally. Wordsworth's poems have an "austere articulation of themselves as manifest, or simply there," a simplicity that itself conceals, that becomes an obscurity.[149] Nersessian's reading of *Michael* is in many ways a more recent articulation of that old reading of Wordsworth's style as deceptively natural or plain – it is like the bare rock of the "pastoral Mountains," whose straightforward presence becomes, somewhat counterintuitively, an obstacle or obstruction, a blind spot. This reading is also aligned with Goodman's use of *The Excursion*'s glaring hills, as Nersessian sees *Michael*'s mountains as a sign of the poem's own distance, its refusal to yield up its meaning. Both scholars read Wordsworth as portraying some form of non-knowledge. Nersessian, for example, reads Wordsworth's obscurity not as an elision but as the method by which the poem purposefully forbids itself from "offering a richly diagnostic account of contemporary history."[150] Obscurity articulates the poetry's separation, its distance, from the real world, history, and even from knowledge generally. It's worth noting, too, that Nersessian opens her chapter on Wordsworth with a discussion of her own personal wariness of his poetry, an emotional disengagement that she uses as an entry point into her investigation of why she has long felt that there is "something

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[149] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life*, 60–61.
[150] Nersessian, 73.

insurmountable about Wordsworth."[151] Nersessian mimics the unyielding, stand-offish posture she assigns to Wordsworth's poetry, an element of the text she argues is designed to keep the reader at arm's length.

I am not interested in ignoring or disproving the difficulty of Wordsworthian form – this chapter has already explored *The Excursion*'s complex employment of disfiguration and disorientation. But I am interested in regarding that difficulty as perhaps a more flexible, relational force than it may at first seem. I wonder, for instance, if the chief emphasis of the last line in the *Michael* passage above might actually be on its latter phrase: "The pastoral Mountains front you, *face to face*" (emphasis mine). The line's ending references the French root of "front," which means "forehead" and functions as a metonym for "face."[152] The stance is still, as in Nersessian's reading, oppositional, but that tripled emphasis on faces and foreheads does more to highlight the mutual closeness of the interaction between the readerly "you" and the mountains. The line positions the reader-traveler as engaged in a close psychophysical interaction with the mountains, almost as if their foreheads are intimately pressed against one another. This is a fronting of a slightly different nature. The traveling addressee and the distant mountains are positioned in much the same way as the walls of the ruin: they all "stared upon each other," they perform a mutual looking that creates and emerges from a tension, a pressing together, of forms. And, in both poems, this friction of intermingling fronts is predicated by a phenomenological "struggle" of the feet. That fronting is, then, as much a result of the traveling body's weight, of how it digs into and wrestles with the very scene at which it stares, as it is the landscape's own austerity. If the poem fronts us, it is only because we do the same.

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[151] Nersessian, 58.

[152] "front, v.1". OED Online. September 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/74916?rskey=ZXjiT5&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed November 15, 2022).

The Poet does just that in Book II, when he, the Wanderer, and the Solitary share a meal at the Solitary's table:

> In genial mood
> While at our pastoral banquet thus we sate
> Fronting the window of that little Cell,
> I could never and anon forbear
> To glance an upward look on two huge Peaks,
> That from some other Vale peered into this
>
> (2.715-20)

In this passage, the Poet, rather than the mountains, initiates the "fronting," it is he who positions his body to face those distant peaks. Something about the Poet's fronting, his willingness or ability to face the exterior scene, opens up his view and the house itself to the landscape. His posture activates the landscape in the first place, allowing the distant "huge Peaks" to return the stare and to become part of the private domestic scene, part of the tablescape. The peak's "peering" is strikingly intimate, even hesitant, as if they are the last, late guests to the meal. Unlike Nersessian's reading of the mountains in *Michael*, where to front is a signal of bare unavailability, the Poet's fronting expands the scene, making it familiar and interactive even as it becomes much grander in scale and prospect.

The Poet's fronting is not directed, initially, at the landscape view, but rather at the window: "thus we sate / fronting the window of that little Cell." The window receives the brunt of the force of the Poet's orientation, it is the object against which he positions himself *and* the frame through which he views the peaks and that "other Vale." If "fronting" describes a psychophysical oppositional posture (a posture of balanced mutual resistance that paradoxically sustains rather than weakens a structure's integrity), then it is directed initially at the frame itself, at the outline of the view rather than its content. The Poet's window fronting highlights the mediated, structured nature of the interaction between the Poet and peaks, where the view and its

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mutual viewing are made possible by the window itself, a frame whose exclusionary power – its

ability to limit what can be seen – organizes the view and invites the visitor in (it is thus as much

a threshold as a window). The window frame also highlights and unites the scene's other frames:

the Poet's body, the house in which he sits, the Solitary's vale, and the Peaks's "other Vale." All

this framing and fronting results in a "glance" (a term that may refer to visual *or* physical

encounter) that is almost compulsory for the Poet, who "could never and anon forbear / To

glance an upward look on two huge Peaks." [153] The window frame draws the Poet's eye,

determines the content of the view, and enables the two-way "peering" between Poet and Peaks.

The Solitary's vale is in some ways the first revisioning (and revisiting) of Margaret's

garden, as both locations present a strikingly private scene. The Poet remarks on multiple

occasions that the vale looks totally protected from external influence, open to the "influx of

morning light" but "veiled / From human observation" as if covered in "impenetrable shade."[154]

And this place, too, draws in the visitor with that tempting promise of privacy and sanctuary;

even as the two men depart, the Poet finds that himself "lingering behind" seeking to understand

why it has enticed the Solitary to "steal from active duties, and embrace / Obscurity, and calm

forgetfulness."[155] The vale has a "quietness profound" that by the standards of Book I is what

makes a space like this difficult or even dangerous as well as attractive; it may "steal" productive

activity. [156] But the Solitary's house offers a counterpoint to the disturbing indeterminacy of the

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[153] As a noun, a "glance" is a "brief or hurried look" or "a sudden movement producing a flash or gleam of light." But the word is a verb here, and so might also refer to the word's more physical, even violent connotation, referring to a weapon's ability "to glide off an object struck, without delivering the full effect of the blow." The combination of the two definitions implies that the Poet's looking might also make for a more phenomenological interaction, a physical marking or even near-wounding. Yet again, we see the reader and viewer made both active and vulnerable. "glance, v.1". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/78698?rskey=wxVrUj&result=3&isAdvanced=false (accessed February 06, 2023).

[154] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, l. 5.5-9.

[155] Wordsworth, l. 5.14-26.

[156] Wordsworth, l. 5.12.

larger scene. Markedly unlike the ruin, the Solitary's house is an inhabitable structure and one that is capable of facilitating some level of open interchange between its interior and exterior. It can let in the visitor and the view. The window fronting scene offers up a solution, it seems, to the problem of the ruin, one in which inhabitation may not have to mean obsessive grief or isolation. The house constructs a frame that facilitates the kind of reciprocal exchange in which the "glance" out the window allows for the realization that "some other Vale peered into this," in which looking might also mean being looked at. The two frames – window and ruin – highlight and outline the poem's uncertain fluctuation between those two observational modes.

Book II thus reiterates and, at the same time, struggles against the guiding precedent of Book I and *The Ruined Cottage*. The Poet establishes himself as the most astute observer of that discord, in large part because of how easily distracted he is. For example: immediately after arriving at the Solitary's vale, the Poet is "enticed" down a narrow path and finds a small annex next to the house. He finds that within this "retreat within retreat" is a small space where a local child has "thronged the grassy floor / With work of frame less solid, a proud show of baby-houses,[157] curiously arranged" with "walks between" and "mimic trees inserted in the turf, / And gardens interposed."[158] The ambiguity about whether the "frame less solid" refers to the construction of the houses themselves or the small body of the child who built them re-emphasizes the mutual pressure that the human body and built structures exert upon each other. But the annex's "proud show" should conjure other images too – the entire poem is full of homes, churches and other structures with trees, gardens and pathways "interposed." *The Excursion* is itself a structure that "curiously arranges" a series of "frame[s] less solid."

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[157] Baby-houses are like small doll houses, here built by the children themselves and constructed with natural materials.
[158] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, l. 2.430-51.

The annex is *The Excursion* in miniature, the playhouse version of the poem's entire

formal and thematic project. The scene is a strange side-show, one that the Wanderer seems to

miss completely, sidetracked by a copy of Voltaire that he wrongly interprets as evidence that the

Solitary is dead (he is almost immediately proven wrong). The Wanderer fails as "my Guide"

here, and for a moment looks like the less intuitive of the poem's two main speaking figures,

failing to recognize how much his affective and social project of moving from one site to another

looks like the work of an unknown village child. The Wanderer's determination to "oft halting

pursue the way" reveals itself, in this small "retreat within retreat," as ultimately just a kind of

child's play. The poem bears a strong resemblance to this "cool Recess / and fanciful!"; it comes

into view as a space in which the hope of avoiding despondency, worklessness, or fixation by

moving from one place to another, and the corresponding desire for physical and emotional

distance, is revealed subliminally as a "fanciful" one.[159]

By the time the travelers transition from the Solitary's vale to the church, the Poet comes

to a similar realization of his own:

> Upon the side
> Of that green Slope, the outlet of the Vale,
> Lingering behind my Comrades, thus I breathed
> A parting tribute to a spot that seemed
> Like the fixed centre of a troubled World.
> And now, pursuing leisurely my way,
> How vain, thought I, it is by change of place
> To seek that comfort which the mind denies;
>
> (5.12-16)

The Poet appears, once again, to have an epiphanic insight into the workings of the text itself.

That impulse "by change of place / to seek that comfort which the mind denies" might as well

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[159] Wordsworth, l. 2.434-35.

describe the motivating force of the entire poem – they are, after all, leaving the vale precisely so as to relieve the Solitary of his psychological discomfort. The Poet goes on to associate the *vale* with this futile change of place, reverting to a critical but sympathetic indictment of geographic and social withdrawal. But his observation is a doubled one, apparently criticizing both the urge to stay and to leave. Once again, the Poet's willingness to "linger behind" or, as in Book I, to lean over the garden wall in contemplation, registers a certain intertextual discord, one in which the poem's own speaker periodically undermines the poem's more overt principles and its wandering guide. The Poet's backward glance opens up a pocket of conceptual disorder, a discursive moment akin to the face of the Solitary caught between being "rapt, or lost" in which the central conflicts of the text – to stay or leave, to move forward or backward – exist together without resolve. This is yet another kind of fronting, a tense opposition of meanings and motivations whose irresolution is laid bare by the lingering Poet.

When Wordsworth describes his epic "philosophical Poem" as like a "gothic Church" in *The Excursion*'s preface, he does so with the acknowledgement that *The Excursion* is part of an incomplete poetic body. The reader's vision is limited, but the "connection" between *The Excursion* and the rest of the poem should still be discernible to the "attentive Reader," so much so that Wordsworth feels he has no need "formally to announce a system" for the poem when such a reader should be capable of "extracting the system for himself."[160] Wordsworth's evasive refusal to articulate the poem's "system" beyond his church metaphor puts a lot of pressure on this readerly attentiveness. But what does it even mean to be an "attentive Reader" of

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[160] Wordsworth, 39.

Wordsworth and *The Excursion*?[161] How does a reader remain attentive to a poem so notoriously

"long and laborious," so unwieldy in length and organization?[162] *The Excursion*, even more than

most long poems, presents a radical challenge to the attention span. Its repetitive self-reference

and thematic ambiguities slow narrative progression and make for a "long and laborious" reading

experience that might easily tempt the reader to become a "face / turned" in her own right.

If Wordsworth does ever offer a model for the kind of attentiveness that might open the

poem up to the reader, we find it in the figure of the Poet. As easy as it may be to read the

Wanderer as the most Wordsworthian and thus most authoritative of the poem's figures, it is the

Poet who, as in the scene above, remains most attuned to the complexities and contradictions of

*The Excursion*'s narrative and formal construction. The Poet is almost always more inclined to

engage physically and emotionally with his surroundings, as if he begins the poem having

already accepted that, as we learn in *Michael*, "your feet must struggle." The Poet is our speaker

because he is a close observer, perpetually engaged and engaging even when the Wanderer and

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[161] Wordsworth, 38. The most obvious parallel here is with Lily Gurton-Wachter's own study of the use and
theories of and around "attention" during the Romantic period, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of
Attention*. Gurton-Wachter's study is focused largely on how different disciplines and facets of everyday life –
political, military, scientific, private, public, etc. – began to intertwine during this period, making Romantic poets
especially conscious of how they were vying with other media for the attention of their readers. I am much less
interested in the interdisciplinary nature of attention than is Gurton-Wachter, or in the history and multiplicity of the
word itself. I do, however, share her interest in how Romantic poetry "uses verse form to explore attention's
conditions and its limits" and encourages a doubled or divided attention (11). Gurton-Wachter reads Wordsworth
specifically as being interested in the "intervals *between* acts of attention," but argues that that interest extends
"beyond phenomenology" (86). Instead, I would argue that Wordsworth constructs attention as a directly
phenomenological experience.

[162] Many early reviewers note just how indiscernible that system, by the end of the poem, appears: William Hazlitt
describes the poem as "one of those stupendous but half-finished *structures*" whose "cost and labour" exceeds its
function (emphasis mine). Francis Jeffrey's famously brutal review accuses the poem's "long words, long sentences,
and unwieldy phrases" of making it "extremely difficult for the most skillful and *attentive* student to obtain a
glimpse of the author's meaning" (emphasis mine). These reviews cast the experience of reading *The Excursion* as
one that will "alarm the weakness of most modern readers," preying on the very skill that the preface presents as
synonymous with reading itself – that ability to remain attentive. William Hazlitt, "William Hazlitt: Unsigned
Review, 'Character of Mr. Wordsworth's New Poem," in Three Parts: Examiner 21, August, 1814, 541-2; 28
August 1814, 555-8; 2 October 1814, 636-8 (The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Ed. P.P. Howe, 1930, XIX, 9-
25)," in *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage Series*, ed. Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001).
Francis Jeffrey and Robert Woof, "Unsigned Review, Edinburgh Review, November 1814, XXIV, 1-30," in *William
Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage Series* (London: Routledge, 2001).

the Solitary are not, and even when that engagement is a hindrance to forward progress, leaving him "lingering behind." The Poet fronts the landscape, empathizes with those around him, and makes connections between scenes and forms. It is, all in all, through the Poet's perspective that the poem's intricate crossing and recrossing of frames and scenes becomes an interactive formal movement, even if it also extends and complicates the reading process. Toiling, lingering, fronting: these acts describe the Poet's embodied contact with all around him. The attentiveness for which Wordsworth calls in the preface may, then, be as much a gesture as an attitude, a willingness to lean forward and engage the text by pressing against it, spending time with it, tracing its repetitions and returns.[163] My own extensive close readings have been an effort to take on that attentive posture.

The goal of this attentiveness is to put the reader in a position much like the Poet at the dinner table, where the thing he fronts is the window, the frame, itself. *The Excursion* is an extended and extensive attempt at bringing Wordsworth's own stylistic and structural formulations into the foreground. That project is achieved through and because of the poem's rendering of phenomenological experience, and its depiction of interpretation itself as an embodied act. More often than not, *The Excursion* leaves the reader "toiling / With languid feet" – it draws her in, keeps her and her reading close. Neither the reader nor the Poet is allowed the easy, "half-conscious" relationship with the poem that the Dreaming Man makes so tantalizing. *The Excursion*'s figures struggle instead across "slippery ground," fronting, disfiguring, and crossing each other in the process. But this may not be the worst thing in the world. If *Michael* revisits Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, readers of *The Excursion* might look to Genesis' next

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[163] For a fascinating reading of Wordsworth's conceptualization of reading and writing poetry as gestures of interpersonal connection, see Stacy McDowell, "Wordsworth and Reading's Promise," *Studies in Romanticism* 60, no. 1 (2021).

generation: to Jacob, who receives his blessing only after he wrestles with God until daybreak. Jacob emerges from that encounter with a wound of his own, but also with the inheritance of one who has "seen God face to face."[164] *The Excursion*'s rewards are perhaps less immediate, but it does position itself and its forms so that interpretive and physical struggle might result in a certain closeness, a mutual pressure reminiscent of that of the "four walls / that stared upon each other." That multiplied stare is ongoing and inward-looking, formal and embodied, unyielding but interactive. So too is the act of reading the forms of things.

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[164] Genesis 32:30.

**CHAPTER IV**

**Between the House and Landscape: *Aurora Leigh* as a Many-Faced Form**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) begins its second stanza with a relatively simple proclamation from its protagonist: "I, writing thus, am still what men call young." The line emphasizes, in part, that Aurora's current age – around 26 or 27 – as she composes her autobiography is not the same as it is in the poem's narrative beginning, which opens in her early childhood.[165] But the line is also part of an opening that both connects and distinguishes between Aurora the poetess and her other "many selves," the past, present, and future versions of her and her story that will alternately appear throughout the verse-novel:

> Of writing many books there is no end;
> And I who have written much in prose and verse
> For other's uses, will write now for mine, –
> Will write my story for my better self
> As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
> Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
> Long after he has ceased to love you, just
> To hold together what he was and is.
>
> I, writing thus, am still what men call young…
>
> (1.1-9)

I will expand later on this opening's strange central metaphor, but for now I want to emphasize that before all else *Aurora Leigh* opens with the act of writing; it introduces itself as still in the midst of its own becoming. From the start there is "no end," the text is already capable of

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extending itself indefinitely into other temporalities and versions of the self. Aurora opens the poem in the present-tense act of writing, reminds us that she has "written much" already, then promises that she "will write," finally, for her own uses and for a future, "better self." To write means, already, to engage multiple temporalities at once. Aurora's "I" is, narratively and temporally, both one and many. But it is also formally multiple, composed by and with the act of writing: "I, writing thus, am." Writing is the link between the "I" and its duration (its being through time). It establishes Aurora as a poetess and as a figure of the text, a character or presence brought into being by the poetic narrative. "Writing thus" connects not only Aurora's "many selves," but also Aurora and *Aurora Leigh*. All these selves and temporalities exist somewhere in the space between the "I" and "am," in the movement of "writing thus."

This chapter reads *Aurora Leigh* as the narration of this writerly movement and of the textual space in which it occurs. That narration is mirrored by the verse-novel form, which (as the hyphenated term implies) acts as a relational entity in its own right. This text is formally "double-faced," a frankensteinian hodge-podge of genres that works to bring multiple aesthetic traditions together into one textual space.[166] The two traditions that will feature most prominently in this chapter are both Romantic: one is the early Romantic transition away from the prospect view and into landscape (a tradition well-represented in this project by both Smith and Wordsworth), and the other being the pre-Romantic tradition here represented by William Cowper, in which the interior domestic space acts as a reflective surface upon which larger, exterior forces may be registered and articulated.

Barrett Browning's oscillation between these two traditions and, more importantly, the orientations they represent (one toward the landscape, one toward the house), serves three

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[166] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 5.153.

primary purposes. First, it depicts two gendered and opposed spaces – the house and the landscape – as interrelated, and in so doing narrates Aurora's development into the Poetess as the navigation between those two spaces. Aurora finds a way to move within, and to recognize herself, in both. Second, it legitimizes and makes room for the poem's interest in domestic spaces and decor (such as textiles, mirrors, portraits, drawers, books, and letters). Aurora makes use of these spaces and objects to replicate her own image and externalize it as an object of desire, an aesthetic form in its own right (this is one way that the complicated relationship between Aurora the poetess and *Aurora* the text will emerge). This impulse will be, as we will see, an obscuring, disfiguring force as well as an expansive, self-replicating one. It is the Poetess's relational and reiterative, and at times self-defacing, act of poetic reproduction. This is one way we might think of Aurora as a post- or hyper-Romantic poet.[167] Finally, it establishes *Aurora Leigh*, the long poem and verse-novel, as a spatial entity in its own right, one that attempts to accommodate the different labors, temporalities, views, genres, and figures upon which it builds.

Throughout this chapter, I read *Aurora Leigh*'s prevailing interest in its own form as closely linked to its protagonist's fascination with faces, portraiture, reflection, and the body, especially where those forms depict and reproduce Aurora's and other women's figures. This connection between the text's formal composition and the feminine form is, also, linked to the

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[167] Aurora's reproductive acts are figural and poetic rather than literal and physical (she has no children of her own, though we might say that Marian becomes a kind of conduit for child bearing). As we will see, that act of reflection and replication often defaces or disfigures more than it reproduces. Aurora's attempts at self-recognition or -replication often obscure or dilute her own figuration in the text. I see this as one way that Barrett Browning presents Aurora as a post- or hyper-Romantic poet: her vision of the poetic imagination and of herself is as a force that is self-consciously reiterative, non-original, relational, emptying out the self rather than finding plentitude or synthesis. This turn is in line with the durational turn in Romanticism I have identified so far – both Smith and Wordsworth at times envision the poetic figure or speaker as diluted, disfigured, or anonymous – but stands apart from (or even emerges as a strange metastasizing of) the traditional emphasis on the individual imagination we tend to associate with Romanticism more broadly.

poem's interest in space, which, whether it is natural or architectural, manifests here as a reflective surface in and upon which gendered, textual, domestic, and natural forms are revealed as such – as formal – and brought into relation without being subsumed into one another or even into Aurora's poetic vision. *Aurora Leigh* is a long poem that follows in the Romantic-adjacent tradition exemplified by texts like *Beachy Head* and *The Excursion* because of how it, to use Aurora's own phrase, "hold[s] together" so much, it maintains its own multiplicity. This act of holding together is a trait that the poem itself shares with both natural and domestic space – spatiality and textuality are, also, related entities in the world of *Aurora Leigh*.

Because this chapter interprets *Aurora Leigh*'s extended body as an essentially relational form, this chapter will oscillate between a series of relata (forms, reflections, and spaces) that triangulate the poem's own narrative and formal self-figuration, its vision of itself. The first section will briefly explore key poetic influences that the text attempts to navigate and renew.[168] The second section will track how Aurora establishes herself as her own object of interest, even as this effort often results in a sort of disfiguration, in which Aurora's expansion or replication of her image makes it more nebulous and harder to contain. This replication is done in relation to the home and to household objects, as Aurora often projects herself onto those surfaces in an overt exteriorization and figuration of the writing, reading, viewing self. In the third section of this chapter, I read landscape as defined by Aurora's interaction with her own namesake – the sunrise or sunset – and as defined by the feminine form, a connection that she often uses to make her own desire, sadness, or isolation manifest in space. The poem's play between "aurora" as sun

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[168] Other commonly remarked upon influences for *Aurora Leigh* also include Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Tennyson's *Princess* (1847), Jane Austen, Felicia Hemans, and Mme de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). Cora Kaplan's introduction to *Aurora Leigh* gives a helpful summary of these influences and of the importance of *Corinne* in particular. Cora Kaplan, "Introduction," in *Aurora Leigh, and Other Poems* (London: The Women's Press, 1978).

(as the horizon, landscape), as heroine ( as a woman and poetess), and as text is an important triad, a single word that aligns landscape, the gendered body of the writing poetess, and the form of the poem itself. It holds together space, bodily form, and text, and finds each gazing upon the others. The final section explores the connection between the text's rendering of natural and domestic spaces and of its own textuality, a connection by which house and text, in particular, will come to reflect and resemble one another.

**In and Out of the Big House**

In this section, I give a short and incomplete history of the house/landscape divide in order to layout, as the groundwork of *Aurora Leigh* and this chapter, the complicated relationship between house and landscape as depicted in long-form poetry throughout the eighteenth century and into Romanticism. In this tradition, the domestic space often manifests as a place or structure that is opposed to mobility or a hindrance to imagination and creativity, exemplified here in brief examples from William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is the most obvious exception to this rule, and I include that poem as a point of reference for Barrett Browning's own thinking about the house's reflectivity, its status as both a private space and as capable of gesturing to and opening itself up to the exterior, public world. That flexibility is aligned with how I read *Aurora Leigh* as a whole, and provides a different way of thinking about the domestic sphere and its prevalence in the poem. I read *Aurora Leigh* as recognizing the house as one untapped creative space in a Romantic tradition that is already, as I have discussed throughout this project, deeply interested in the relationship between the artwork, the body, and place (rendered as locality, inhabitation, landscape, architecture). *Aurora Leigh* maintains that interest, but extends its views into the house. This section is a limited attempt at

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explaining, first, why and in what ways the house is relatively unexplored in the Romantic tradition and, second, *Aurora Leigh*'s interest in reclaiming and reworking that space for itself.

Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, the two poets with whom I began this project, are both part of an early Romantic tradition in which the Thomsonian prospect view moves directly into landscape. James Thomson's viewpoint from the "big house" in *The Seasons* (1730) creates, as John Barrell has argued, a "space between landscape and the observer, so that Thomson sees landscape as not something he is *in*, but which is all around him *out there*."[169] The Romantics transform that view, in part, by making that "out there" here, by walking through and in the natural scenes they describe. As a result, Romanticism foregrounds figures who have wandered away from the Thomsonian big house and from the elevated, static view that house traditionally provides. That transition, which exposes the speaker to the elements, allows for a more dynamic and extended method of moving in and with the landscape.

For example, despite its self-declared interest in architectural forms and structures, *The Excursion* begins with a tale of domestic decay, brought about by Margaret's neglect of her home and resulting in the Wanderer's anxiety about staying too long at the ruin. The ruin outlines and provides space for narrative and poetry, but also represents the Wanderer's fear of stasis and the unmaintained home. The poem's perspective is not identical to the Wanderer's, but he remains a prime example of the kind of Romantic figure whose mobility is, itself, a rejection of the domestic sphere. Ingrid Horrocks' study of the pre-Romantic women wanderers of the late eighteenth century argues that not only did women writers like Anne Radcliffe, Francis Burney, and Charlotte Smith popularize that initial literary move from the prospect view into landscape, but also that by the time the Romantics take up this trend they transfer the dangers and anxieties

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[169] 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), 21.

associated with that new mobility (poverty, affective and physical vulnerability) onto their women characters.[170] Margaret is thus an especially good example of a particularly "double-faced" anxiety: she is both the poorer, more mentally unstable and physically vulnerable counterpart to the Wanderer's mobility and, on the other hand, the representative of a certain kind of unkempt and uncontained domesticity, of the house as a space of dangerous fixation, fascination, and "Incipient Madness."[171]

Barrett Browning begins to play with this tradition early in Book I when Aurora is made by her aunt to sit in a chair facing away from the garden, her "back against the window, to exclude / the sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn."[172] In this scene, Aurora laments the fact that her gendered, domestic education has barred her from the garden and from nature generally.[173] Aurora's exclusion from the sight of the "great lime-tree on the lawn" harks back to another Romantic's earlier exclusion. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), an injury forces him to remain behind in the bower, under the lime tree, while the Wordsworths and Charles Lamb venture out on an evening walk. Lamenting the loss of the

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[170] See Ingrid Horrocks' *Women Wanderers* and Jacqueline Labbe's *Romantic Visualities*. Both argue that early or pre-Romantic women writers examine nature and landscape from within rather than above it, and that this is a perspective the male Romantics either take on themselves or adopt as an early stage through which the male poet develops. Horrocks examines how Ann Radcliffe, Francis Burney, Charlotte Smith and others send their heroines out into the landscape and, in doing so, disrupt the fantasy of the "full," unhindered prospect view and expose the unique vulnerability of that move for women wanderers especially. For Horrocks, this feminized wandering is an affective mode, one that the male Romantics, Wordsworth especially, often transfer onto mad, impoverished, or otherwise disenfranchised women characters like Margaret. Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*; Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998).

[171] By this I of course refer to Wordsworth's unpublished fragment, "Incipient Madness," in which the speaker's grief leads him or her to the ruin and to remain within it. The poem figures this strange attachment to the ruin as a kind of "incipient madness."

[172] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1. 484-88.

[173] Barrett Browning makes a point of emphasizing the feminine nature of this education. Aurora's aunt is her educator, and her education includes reading "books on womanhood," drawing "costumes," dancing, cross-stitching, and music (1.384-447). Notice how much Aurora's distinctly indoor education resembles Cowper's activities in the "winter evening scene" of *The Task*: he "devote[s] thy gentle hours / to books, to music, or the poet's toil, / to weaving...or twining" (4.251-269).

"beauties" and "feelings" that the walk would surely have generated, Coleridge simultaneously imagines his friends' entire journey as they complete it, as if "I myself were there!"[174] The lyric acts out the connective power of the imagination, which like the ash tree "flings arching like a bridge" to connect Coleridge to his unseen walking companions. Coleridge overcomes his injury, his separation from friends and nature, and the stasis of the domestic space with the powers of imagination. His lyric triumph is thus also a triumph over the confinement of the domestic.[175]

Of course Aurora, even if she were able to look out at the lime tree, does not yet know the pleasure of having visiting friends, nor of the artistic community those specific friends represent for Coleridge, and thus does not imagine others enjoying a nature she cannot. Even Coleridge acknowledges that he can only conjure this imaginative version of the walk because he has already spent so much time there. He is, in fact, the one who provided the others with this specific route in the first place. His limitation is temporary, and his imaginative re-entry into the landscape predicated upon previous unmediated access and experience. Even without this history of movement and companionship, Coleridge's fashioning of the lime-tree bower as his "prison," rather than, say, the drawing room, reminds the reader that even if unable to move through the landscape, he is still in contact with and sheltered by natural forms, still able to access some level of the "fellowship / of verdure" for which Aurora longs.[176] Aurora finds herself excluded even from this Coleridgean version of exclusion. Even still, the lime-tree scene makes it evident that

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[174] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, A Poem," in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), ll. 3–5, 47.
[175] That Sara Coleridge is at fault for Coleridge's injury – it is she who accidentally poured boiling milk on his foot – has always felt to me like another way that Coleridge is apparently overcoming the "domestic," overcoming Sara's mistake. Labbe argues the same in *Romantic Visualities*, and connects this to a longer cultural association with the garden as a feminized space. Labbe argues that in "Lime Bower" Coleridge can achieve his imaginative reconnection "only *after* he has exchanged the feminized enclosed bower for the masculinized open vista" (97).
[176] Barrett, Browning, 1.260.

neither Aurora nor *Aurora Leigh* are immune to the Romantic desire to move into landscape, even if that movement is initially impeded.

But both Romanticism and the long poem have another great predecessor that offers an alternative relationship to the house: William Cowper's *The Task* (1785). Cowper opens with the declaration that he now "seek[s] repose upon a humbler theme" and so will "sing the sofa," a long rumination on the history of the sofa from its origins as a "rugged rock" to the erect, "restless" chair, into the luxuriously comfortable sofa of the modern age.[177] Much of the poem, including the "winter evening" scene in Book IV, takes place inside or meditates upon the relationship between interior spaces or furnishings and the realities of modern life. When he does describe or walk through landscape, Cowper often does so with interiors in mind, or within the larger context of his song of the sofa and the poem's constant interplay between scenes of action and inaction, rest and movement, and the external, broader world and the domestic space.[178] For Cowper, the interior of the home is a protected but permeable space, open enough to allow the speaker to "welcome peaceful evening in."[179] Even when the sky displays only a "star or two just twinklings," the drawing room "begin[s] to blaze / with lights by clear reflection multiplied / from many a mirror." The room's sumptuous decoration enhances and, literally, reflects the

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[177] William Cowper, "The Task," in *The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. H.S. Milford (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), l. 1.1, 5, 12, 44, 88.

[178] For Anahid Nersessian, the sofa and its related furnishings stand in as "paradigm[s] of exchange," they represent the much larger global capitalist system of trade and labor in which the "striped" back of the slave oceans away reappears in the cane chair from India, its back "severed into stripes." *The Task* maps poetic labors onto a broader scale of capitalist labor and exchange all within the context of the home and its furnishings, its most luxurious and "homey" accompaniments. Anahid Nersessian, "Romantic Difficulty," *New Literary History* 49, no. 4 (2018): 461–63.

[179] Cowper, "The Task," l. 4.41. Mary Favret's understanding of the poem's crucial role in constructing a contemporary wartime aesthetic stems from this sense of exterior interiority. For Favret *The Task* has a barely realized "worldliness," it just manages to register the "tumult" of distant violence (23). What happens out there makes its way, slowly, into the domestic "here." The poem registers the home's way of nearly always allowing the outside in: "Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat to peep at such a world (4.88-89)." Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*.

natural beauties of the night.[180] Cowper's long poem presents an alternative rendering of the interactions between house, poet, and landscape, and in so doing constructs the house as a flexible, open space rather than as a barrier to poetic creativity.[181]

That Cowperian example also finds its way into Aurora's lament for the lime tree. Even as she is turned away from the tree and engaged in her own domestic labors, Aurora, like Coleridge, allows her imagination to activate the exterior scene. In this version, the lime tree itself becomes the traveling friend, as it "seemed to have come on purpose from the woods / To bring the house a message."[182] Despite her frustration at her forced domestic education and orientation, Aurora acknowledges that the house itself may play a role in imaginative and natural interactions. Even if the domestic space is, now, the barrier between poetess and landscape, it may also be capable of drawing what is outside in.

This chapter reads *Aurora Leigh* as working to bring these two traditions and their impulses – on the one hand, to leave the big house and move into landscape and, on the other, to allow that landscape (and the world) to move into the house.[183] In the lime tree scene, Aurora describes an anxiety about staying too long in the house reminiscent of the Wanderer's in *The*

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[180] It draws in the view, even as the speaker's efforts and attentions are focused elsewhere – he "devote[s] thy gentle hours / to books, to music, or the poet's toil, / to weaving...or twining" (4. 251-269). The drawing room welcomes the evening in, largely because it is furnished *like* a drawing room – it is full of mirrors – and thus used as space of domestic labors (reading, writing, weaving) as well as of domestic luxury and repose.

[181] On the novelistic side of eighteenth-century literary developments, Gabrielle Starr argues that one of the novel's major influences on poetry was in fact its redefining of literary intimacy – its ability to move into the individual mind – in respect to the domestic, to "what goes on within the home." Starr argues that intimacy itself is "redefined in part by domesticity and domestic encounters, and literary encounters (between and among readers, poets, and narrators or characters) are shaped anew." This is part of Starr's larger reading of both the poetry and prose of the turn of the century as working out for themselves, and instructing readers on, the relationship between the fictional world and the real. I read Cowper as using the domestic scene in a similar way here. Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 7.

[182] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 1.487-88.

[183] Though it deals with a very different subject matter – working-class childhoods in post-war Britain – I owe much of my thinking about the gendered "process by which we step into the landscape, and see ourselves" to Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1987). Steedman's work provides an additional way of thinking about the role of storytelling and fashion in how women construct narratives about themselves. Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 24.

*Excursion.* In line with that thinking, Aurora will for the rest of the work understand her creative and psychological life as connected to her relationship with whatever landscape surrounds her at the time.[184] But she also, as we will see, quickly develops a sense of the house's ability to frame and even conjure certain views or relationships of and with those landscapes. As we see both in *The Excursion* and *The Task*, the house has a pull and a power of its own, though the nature and strength of that power may be indeterminate or anxiety-inducing. *Aurora Leigh* does not always escape that indeterminacy, but it does work explicitly to explore the possibilities of the domestic space as a social, gendered, and poetic structure.

**House of Mirrors**

When Aurora exclaims in the opening of Book V that she hopes to bring epic poetry into the present age, she argues that there is "more heroic heat, / Betwixt the mirrors of drawing rooms, / Than Roland and his knights at Roncesvalles."[185] The line is most overtly an argument for the introduction of poetry and epic into feminine spaces and literary traditions, as well as into "this live, throbbing age."[186] This section will support that reading by considering that characterization of epic poetry as happening "betwixt the mirrors of drawing rooms" as indicating a more literal interest in the mirrors and reflections that abound in domestic space and life. The drawing room as a space of mental and decorative reflection is already present in Cowper; his drawing room is also ablaze "with lights by clear reflection multiplied / from many

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[184] For Anne D, Wallace the poem's first book is much more interested in landscape, as it is the book in which Aurora often demeans women's education and indoor activity in favor of the creative possibilities of walking, although that prioritization of walking as the labor most intimately linked with the creative act will shift to sewing or weaving as the work progresses (233). As with my reading of the lime tree scene above and with the portrait scene below, I read the verse-novel as interested in interior space from the beginning. Anne D. Wallace, "Nor in Fading Silks Compose': Sewing, Walking, and Poetic Labor in Aurora Leigh," *ELH* 64, no. 1 (1997).

[185] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 5.205-06.

[186] Barrett Browning, l. 5.203.

a mirror" – a baton that Barrett Browning takes up both in her interest in the decor of interior spaces and in her fascination with more figurative forms of reflection or doubling. For Barrett Browning, the reflected feminine form – Aurora's in particular – is central to the poem's broader operations and techniques. The poem depicts a process in which Aurora looks back, through her own autobiographical project, on herself and her image and finds that image to be multiplied in unexpected ways in the faces and figures of diverse women. This is one way in which Aurora becomes her own object, the subject of her own desire and aesthetic pleasure, even as she looks out at others or retells their stories (as she does so overtly with Marian).[187] Barrett Browning constructs that self-fascination as a major, if not the central, energizing force of the poem – it is Aurora's need to "write my story for my better self" that drives the project from the beginning.[188]

Judith Neiswander's study of the Victorian home explains that it was not until the mid-century that anyone but the wealthiest members of society were able to afford to furnish their homes with large, framed mirrors. Because the glass no longer had to be hand blown, the middle class could now afford to purchase large-scale, commercially-made mirrors and use them lavishly. This contributed to an already growing association between the Victorian home and excess clutter, as the Victorian homemaker is increasingly tempted to fill the more public parts of

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[187] Aurora admits that she does not record Marian's story exactly, but will "re-tell [it] with fuller utterance" (3.828). Margaret Reynolds remarks on this line that while we may be tempted to criticize Aurora for not offering Marian's "authentic" voice, Aurora makes it clear here that "the only voice heard throughout *Aurora Leigh* is that of Aurora herself" (96). The poem is thus an echo chamber for Aurora's voice as much as it is a mirrored hall reflecting her image. This idea helps explain, for me, why Aurora so often engages in a kind of self-talk throughout the poem. Aurora of course sets out to write for her "better self" in the opening, but more directly addresses herself at many points later on, as in the opening of Book V, which begins "Aurora Leigh, be humble," or just after the scene in which she reads Vincent's letter (I'll talk about this later in the chapter), when she admonishes her own self-pity: "Tush, Aurora Leigh!...Be still" (5.1, 7.719-21). She also engages in an odd habit of repetition, as in the opening of Book VIII: "One eve it happened, when I sate alone, /Alone" (8.1-2). There are more moments like this one, when Aurora seems to repeat certain words to herself, than I have been able to count. Both kinds of self-talk do something similar to the repetition and refiguration of faces seen throughout the poem. They mark another way that Aurora is consistently turning inward, talking to herself, even as she engages in a dialogue with other people and the outside world. My point here, and in general, is that *Aurora Leigh* purposefully blurs and confuses the bounds between what is outside and in, as well as what actions or forces move the subject in either direction.
[188] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 1.4.

the private home, like the drawing room, with as many objects as possible. For Neiswander, this increase in clutter (and mirrors, whose reflections multiply the clutter) is linked to a growing understanding of interior decoration as a method of self-expression and, in a more general sense, the growing liberalism of the middle class.[189] Because of the drawing room's particular status as a simultaneously public and private space and its role in representing the self, the room sets the stage for, as Anne Anderson argues, "complicated relationships between consumption, display, and exchange."[190] The drawing room's interplay of consumption and display is especially true in relation to the women who decorated those spaces, often with handmade needlework or stenciling. Anderson emphasizes the role of the art of the Pre-Raphealites, Dante Gabriel Rossetti especially, not only in aestheticizing interior spaces but also in including women in that aestheticization as, themselves, decorative objects, as further furnishing for the house.

As contrary to both Aurora's and Barrett Browning's feminist aims as this objectification of the woman in the house may be, *Aurora Leigh* does, in some sense, take up that project. *Aurora Leigh*, from the very beginning, understands the female body as that which can be and is often made into an object of the house, an act that the poem itself reenacts. That transformation is often something that Aurora imagines as happening to herself – it is a self-objectification.[191]

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[189] Judith A. Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home 1870-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008).

[190] Anne Anderson, "A Backward Glance - Fashioning Individual Drawing Room," in *Domestic Interiors: Representing the Homes of Victorians to the Moderns*, ed. Georgia Downey (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 39.

[191] Gubar details a long literary history from Shakespeare to modernism in which women characters and the female body are figured as the art object but not the artist. Gubar argues that this history brings about a particular anxiety in the women writer, whose "image of herself as text and artifact has affected her attitudes toward her physicality and how these attitude in turn shape the metaphors through which she imagines her creativity" (247). This often means that women writers figure themselves and their bodies as their own artistic medium, so that "the distance between the woman artist and her art is often radically diminished" (248). Gubar also links interior decorating to other domestic and feminine arts like fashion and cosmetics (both of which directly figure the body as canvas or art object) (252). For Gubar, women artists' turn to those mediums is further evidence of the proximity of a woman artist's life to her art. This history rings true both for Barrett Browning's relationship with Aurora and for Aurora's repetitive refiguring of her own image. Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry* 8, No. 2 (1981).

The poem confirms and expands upon this growing sense that the domestic space is one of self-expression *and* of the objectification of the woman's body. In this sense all the decorative elements of the drawing room, and the house in general, act as tools of reflection. This is a visual and psychological experience that the poem mimics for Aurora – the poem becomes its own kind of hall of mirrors. Aurora's experience of both the domestic and the poetic is thus much like Henry Teffry Dunn's first reaction upon entering Rossetti's lavishly furnished parlor in the 1880s, in which "mirrors of all shapes, sizes and designs, lined the walls, so that whichever way I gazed I saw myself looking at myself."[192]

In this sense, *Aurora Leigh* is always seeing Aurora looking at herself. Consider, again, the poem's opening stanza:

> Of writing many books there is no end;
> And I who have written much in prose and verse
> For other's uses, will write now for mine, --
> Will write my story for my better self
> As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
> Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
> Long after he has ceased to love you, just
> To hold together what he was and is.
>
> (1.1-8)

There are already many selves in this first stanza. The "I who have written" is not her own "better self," nor is she the "you" or the "he" of the characteristically strange opening extended simile in which a self-portrait becomes a gift and token for a male lover. The Aurora of the future, her "better self," appears here as drastically othered – a male ex-lover – and what holds

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Christina Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio," also from 1856, is another example of the woman as art object trope Gubar describes, and is also interested in reflection: "One face looks out from all his canvases…The mirror gave back all her loveliness" Christina Rossetti, "In an Artist's Studio," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 9th ed., vol. E (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012), 1493.

[192] Henry Teffry Dunn, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and His Circle (Cheyne Walk Life). Edited and Annotated by the Late Gale Pedrick. With Prefatory Note by William Michael Rossetti. London, E. Matthews, 1904* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 17–18. (Also cited in Anderson, "A Backward Glance").

the two selves together is an aesthetic object – the portrait – that exists outside of both. The portrait combines the external and internal across various temporalities. In part, the metaphor prefigures the difficulty Aurora will have reconciling her position as both woman and (masculine) poet. But it also introduces Aurora's own "story" as one in which she transforms herself into an aesthetic object, something to be looked at. *Aurora Leigh* will depict Aurora looking at herself. The metaphor also constructs the connection between Aurora's various selves as dependent upon external objects, upon the material aesthetic renderings of her own image that may be tucked away "in a drawer," in yet another household object.

Barrett Browning presents all of this in the poem's first sentence, only to mirror it again a few stanzas later with Aurora's description of her mother's portrait, which hangs in the Italian house where she lives before the death of her father and her subsequent move to England. The portrait would startle all members of the house when a "sudden flame" from the fireplace below "made alive" the Mother's image.[193] That of course is only a partial life, because the portrait was painted posthumously and compositionally disjointed, so that the face and throat are separated from the hands by the later addition of the "red stiff silk" of her brocade.[194] The brocade, an oddly vibrant garment contrasted to the English shroud, visually breaks up the Mother's body into disparate parts. So although her image is at the center of the painting and the home, the Mother is oddly disembodied and disfigured, "cut up" by the brocade and by death itself. The effect, as Aurora notes, is "therefore very strange," so that the image of the Mother is to Aurora

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[193] Here Barrett Browning seems to be working from a double reference to Coleridge and Cowper (given that Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" is itself inspired by Cowper). The "sooty films" that warn of "some stranger's near approach" in Cowper's drawing room scene are mimicked here by the "sudden flame" (Cowper, 4.292-95). But here the "stranger" beckoned and brought to life by the flames is, in fact, the image of the mother, an image that is both familiar and strange and, at the same time, able to conjure the many faces of Aurora's reading and imaginative life.

[194] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 1.128, 140.

both "my own mother" and "my dead mother," a dead body reanimated by paint and flame that

can only partially conjure the "last smile" of a living mother.[195]

The indeterminacy of this dead face does not, however, detract from its power as an

object in the house:

> Therefore very strange
> The effect was. I, a little child, would crouch
> For hours upon the floor with knees drawn up,
> And gaze across them, half in terror, half
> In adoration, at the picture there, --
> That swan-like supernatural white life
> Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk
> Which seemed to have no part in it nor power
> To keep it from quite breaking out of bounds.
> For hours I sate and stared. Assunta's awe
> And my poor father's melancholy eyes
> Still pointed that way. That way went my thoughts
> When wandering beyond sight.
>
> (1.134-146)

The portrait draws all the eyes of the house: "for hours" Aurora sits and stares at it, while the

servant Assunta's "awe" and the father's "Melancholy eyes" both "still pointed that way." Even

Aurora's thoughts move toward the painting when it is "beyond sight." The passage seems to

draw the reader's eyes and thoughts, too, to "the picture there, –," the dash leaving the line itself

gesturing toward the portrait like a punctuational pointing of the finger. All eyes and thoughts,

and the passage itself, linger on the face of the absent mother. The portrait thus seems to wield a

psychophysical pull, a force or power that directs the attention of all those around it toward itself.

That magnetism also mandates a particular posture from Aurora, who "would crouch / for hours

upon the floor with knees drawn up" gazing at the painting. Everything in the house has an

orientation, a direction, or a position, all of which are dictated by the painting's power; the face

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[195] Barrett Browning, l. 1.134, 164-67.

of the mother organizes and orients the domestic space.[196] Aurora's "mother-want" has already become a physical, spatialized force in the home. Here absence and desire organize domestic space.

The painted figure at the center of this passage is strange not only because of the absence of the living mother or the power it holds as an object, but also because it has so many faces. Aurora confesses that as she grew she "mixed, confused" the content of her own reading and dreams, whether "abhorrent, admirable, beautiful...grotesque," with "that face." Her mother is "ghost" and "fiend," but also "angel, fairy, witch, sprite," a mystical figure of indeterminate threat and power. She also takes on the image of more specific literary figures: Aurora sees her as a "dauntless Muse," "loving Psyche," "still Medusa," and as a Keatsian Lamia. For each new face there is a new source text or tradition, so that the image of the mother takes on the inter-generic and inter-traditional nature of the poem itself. *Aurora Leigh*, too, has many faces, and that multiplicity, along with Aurora's own fantasies, is recreated in the image of the Mother.

Aurora's associations are of women figures whose own forms shift or are difficult to determine: Medusa's is a fearful face of "slime" and "milky brows / all curdled," that is literally deadly to gaze upon; Lamia shrinks, blinks, and shudders as she changes form; Psyche "loses sight of Love." These women either cannot be seen in their true form or are blind themselves. The mother-portrait, then, represents a mother figure whose own form is a disembodied and strange recreation of the absent original and, at the same time, becomes for Aurora a

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[196] Barbara Barrow's elucidating study of the politics of disembodiment in *Aurora Leigh* reminds us that this scene is, in fact, a literal example of how Aurora thinks about and describes bodies in general. In Barrow's reading, the poem's many passages of bodily description "approach the style of ekphrasis, reading the body at once as intensely visual objects and as the means of collective expression and self-definition." The mother-portrait passage is an extreme example, as it is an actual instance of ekphrasis that describes an artistic rendering of an absent and variable body, a body that is for Aurora crucial for her own "self-definition," or lack thereof. Barbara Barrow, "Gender, Language, and the Politics of Disembodiment in Aurora Leigh," *Victorian Poetry* 53, no. 3 (2015): 252.

conglomerate image of *other* female figures whose forms are equally powerful and indeterminate. The portrait's capacity to fluctuate between the living and the dead, the strange and familiar, and the figured and disfigured, allows "that face" to keep "the mystic level of all forms," to be understood as a form that contains and conjures more than it ought and is thus actively and consistently "breaking out of bounds." The portrait and passage both yield to the impulse to gesture beyond themselves. They point, like Aurora, to whatever is just "there, –," to those figures that are somehow out of bounds but, also, perpetually self-referencing and -replicating. All of this is initiated by Aurora, who transfers all she had "read or heard or dreamed" onto the painted face of her mother.[197]

The poem's emphasis on self-reflection is complicated even more by how it recreates aspects or images of Aurora in other female figures only to replicate *those* figures and faces again in *other* women.[198] The repressed familiarity of those replicated figures often leads, as in the portrait passage above, to a feeling of uncanniness. For example, the Mother's "dead" face finds its mirror image later on, when Aurora sees the destitute Marian on a crowded Paris street:

> What face is that?
> What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine
> The sudden blow of it came down, till all
> My blood swam, my eyes dazzled. Then I sprang…
>
> It was as if a meditative man
> Were dreaming out a summer afternoon
> And watching gnats a-prick upon a pond,
> When something floats up suddenly, out there,
> Turns over...a dead face, known once alive…
> So old, so new! It would be dreadful now

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[197] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 1.148.

[198] Margaret Reynolds notes how closely Aurora's description of her mother's neck as "that swan-like supernatural white life / Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk" resembles her later description of Lady Waldemar in her party dress, in which her "alabaster shoulders and bare breasts, / On which the pearls, drowned out of sight in milk, / Were lost, excepting the ruby-clasp!" The mother-portrait and Lady Waldemar both represent a womanly elegance, sexuality, and physicality that are at once intriguing and intimidating to Aurora. In many ways Lady Waldemar is the living extension of the version of Aurora's mother that is simultaneously "abhorrent" and "beautiful," a source of anxiety as much as fascination. Margaret Reynolds, *Aurora Leigh*, n. 2, p.9.

> To lose the sight and keep the doubt of this:
> He plunges - ha! He has lost it in the splash.

<div align="right">(6.232-242)</div>

Here, again, Aurora is "dazzled" by a simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar face.[199] Indeed, her startled question – "what face is that?" – could apply easily to the mother-portrait passage as much as to this one. Barrett Browning follows Aurora's shocked recognition of Marian with another, equally startling, simile about a man whose easy daydream is disturbed by the sight of a dead body, "a dead face." Like the mother-portrait, which is painted posthumously and "made alive" suddenly by the light of the fire, Marian's is yet another "dead face, known once alive" that "floats up suddenly, out there," of which, despite its "ghastly, or grotesque" appearance, "it would be dreadful now / to lose the sight."[200] The feminine face, whether it belongs to Aurora, her mother, Lady Waldemar, or Marian, is a self-replicating figure, even when it is a "dead face," no longer so clearly united with its original referent.[201]

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[199] Margaret Reynolds notes that Marian is described as looking quite similar to Barrett Browning, who is the most obvious real-life mirror image of Aurora herself (note to ln. 3.823). Still, I'm not sure I'm totally convinced by Reynolds's connection between Marian and Barrett Browning's appearances, if only because Aurora's description of Marian seems purposefully vague – Marian's  is a face that is, like the portrait, hard to tie down into a single coherent description.

Barbara Barrow thinks about Marian in much the same way as I do, arguing that this scene highlights Marian's "disengagement from the epic's formal systems of representation" and so calls "into question the equation of gender, language, and bodies elsewhere in the poem" (255). Barrow reads Marian as the character who most openly questions, as with her comments about Lady Waldemar, both the female form and language as "unstable network[s] of signs" (256). Marian's appearance and her story both reveal the body and language as fallible signifiers.

[200] Note this passage's similarity to "The Drowned Man" passage in Book V of *The Prelude*:

> At length, the dead Man, 'mid that beauteous scene
> Of trees, and hills, and water, bolt upright
> Rose with his ghastly face: a spectre-shape
> Of terror even!

<div align="right">(5.470-73)</div>

[201] One supplemental example: after escaping her own mother's attempts to sell her off as a mistress, Marian finds work as a seamstress in London, an arduous line of work that provides her some degree of protection along with a particular insight into the vanity of the upper class women from whom she labors. The wealthy woman Marian describes is "charmed" by her own "glorious brows and breasts," seemingly entranced by the power of the looking-glass to reflect her own figure back to her (4.255-60). As Elizabeth Erbeznik explains, Marian's characterization of rich women as cruelly ignoring or undervaluing the labor of the seamstresses who made their clothes was a popular criticism of the day. This specific comparison between wealthy women and the overworked seamstresses they ignore also "played out the familiar dramas of self-absorption and self-abnegation" and overtly juxtaposed them (628). Marian's description reveals how quickly that act of looking at oneself can be transformed into something

This multiplication of the of the painted, mirrored, or imagined image is itself a reworking of the function of autobiography in the tradition of the Poetess, in which personal revelation becomes oddly abstract and "the more we try to make the Poetess visible the more she seems to dissolve before our eyes."[202] *Aurora Leigh* and Aurora herself both take on a Narcissus-like obsession with the self's image that is potentially self-annihilating or, in these scenes, disfiguring, precisely because it accommodates so many versions of that self or self-image. Here Percy Bysshe Shelley's influence on Barrett Browning shines through, as the poem looks to be playing with something like Rousseau's facial disfiguration in "Triumph of Life."[203] In Paul De Man's reading of that poem, Rousseau's disfiguration stands in for the text's narration of its own poetic forgetting and disfiguration (where "figure" refers both to the face and to the figural, to signification).[204] In Barrett Browning's rendering, the text imagines Aurora's transition into Poetess as a process of self-effacement and replication, a revelation and re-imaging of the woman poet whose dark reflection (or, to use Marian's mordant word, "remainder") is that "dead face" that without warning "floats up suddenly, out there."[205]

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more variable. As with the woman whose self-admiration also inadvertently reflects the pale face of the laborer she has shoved aside, the mirror does not produce an easy one-to-one replication of figures. Instead, it adds another face, adjacent to but not the same as the one presented, and so, like the mother-portrait, keeps the "mystic level of all forms…Ghost, fiend, and angel," even as it obscures the face of the original. Elizabeth Erbeznik, "City-Craft as Poetic Process in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Aurora Leigh,'" *Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 4 (2014).

[202] Yopie Prins, "Poetess," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

[203] Tilottama Rajan also reads Shelley's *Alastor* (1816) in relation to the Narcissus myth and to the broader categories of reflection and disfiguration. Rajan also sees Shelley as presenting reflection as a process that does not offer back an image or clear meaning. Rajan reads reflection as a poetic movement that denotes a "shifting surface" that "absorbs rather than returns what is reflected in it" (26). I do not read *Aurora Leigh*'s surfaces as absorptive in quite this way, but Rajan's reading drives home the idea that Barrett Browning is taking up a particularly Shelleyian understanding of the unwieldiness and uncanniness of reflection and self-fascination in passages such as those above. Rajan, *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft*.

[204] Paul De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[205] Barrett Browning, 4.260. Note also the final lines of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1816), which features an equally uncanny reference to the face of Kubla Khan in the pleasure dome:

> That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
> And all who heard should see them there,
> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

**Moving into Landscape; or, The Other Aurora**

Aurora's fascination with her own image persists into the latter half of the verse-novel, when Aurora returns to Italy and turns her eye toward its "grand nature" in an attempt to see herself in the landscape that was once her home.[206] That more expansive natural space is just as unpredictable a reflective surface as is the domestic space and its decor, perhaps even more so. This section will track Aurora's engagement with landscape as a tool for realizing and thus spatializing her own desire, loss, and isolation. That engagement is also the method by which the poem recognizes the futility of Aurora's own integrative impulses, her Romantic inclination for drawing all things natural together under the picture of the individual mind. This section will read this as one way that Aurora and *Aurora Leigh* are set against one another.

Upon selling her completed book to a publisher at the end of Book V, Aurora decides to return to Italy:

> And now I come, my Italy,
> My own hills! Are you 'ware of me, my hills,
> How I burn toward you? Do you feel to-night
> The urgency and yearning of my soul,
> As sleeping mothers feel the sucking babe
> And smile? - Nay, not so much as when in heat
> Vain lightnings catch at your inviolate tops
> And tremble while ye are stedfast. Still ye go
> Your own determined, calm, indifferent way
> Toward sunrise, shade by shade, and light by light,
> Of all the grand progression naught left out,
> As if God verily made you for yourselves
> And would not interrupt your life with ours.
>
> (5.1266-1278)

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread:
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drank the milk of Paradise.

(47-54)

[206] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 1.615.

Aurora conceives of the Italian mountains as still her "own," her birthright, and yet, in their

magnificent indifference, unable to register her being as it "burn[s] toward" them. Aurora's

simile (the mountains are like "sleeping mothers") gives a local habitation and a name to her

more generalized "mother-want about the world."[207] However, even as the landscape re-figures

the mother's body and loss, it also doubles Aurora's own image. Note how the scene sets Aurora

in opposition to her namesake, the dawn, so that the Italian mother-hills remain ignorant of the

longing and "burning" of the returning daughter while turning to face instead that *other* aurora:

"still ye go / Your own determined, calm, indifferent way / Toward sunrise."

This is just one of many scenes wherein Aurora plays with the relation between herself

and the dawn, many of which, like the above, mark a longing for some literally and existentially

lost object or person. Scenes like this suggest a reading of landscape that is aligned with Doreen

Massey's study of the gendered legacy of space, as we can see how Aurora's figuration of the

mother-hills of Italy arises as a determinate (and feminized) absence – an absence unto death – in

relation to a masculinized model of the temporal and as an impossible object of desire.[208] But

Aurora often answers or fulfills her desire for the absent Mother (and, later, for Romney) with

the image of the other Aurora: later she describes how the "sunrise fills as full as crystal cups"

the bowl-like valleys surrounding her new home in Florence.[209] Aurora sees her namesake in

landscape and in doing so at least partially satisfies or "fills up" her own sense of lack or desire;

Aurora positions herself, or at least some expanded, naturalized version of herself, as both the

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[207] Barrett Browning, l. 1.40.

[208] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 4. Notice, though, that the natural entity to which Aurora compares herself is the very thing by which time has longest been determined – the sun. Aurora's spatialization of her own image is thus also a temporalization of it.

[209] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 7.522.

object and the fulfillment of her own desire. Every landscape has its Aurora, and our protagonist looks constantly for a view. It should be no surprise, then, that the home she finds in Florence provides a "post of double-vision" over the valley, the view so wide that "No sun could die nor yet be born unseen / by dwellers at my villa."[210]

In his discussion of the body's role in defining *place* (as distinct from the empty, infinite, abstract *space* we associate with Enlightenment thought), Edward S. Casey argues that the "body is on the 'near side' of place," while "place is in turn the 'far side' of the body" and landscape, or really the horizon of landscape, is "in turn on the far side of particular places."[211] Casey understands the body as the inner limit of place (there is nowhere more intimately "here" than the body) and the horizon as that same place's most extreme, outer limit. Whatever lies beyond the visible landscape is somewhere else, another place. Casey's phenomenological account (at odds with cultural, cartographic, and political descriptions) is useful for grasping Aurora's spatial projections. When she and Marian finally arrive in Italy, they do so at sunrise: "Thus my Italy / was stealing on us. Genoa broke with day."[212] Italy comes into vision, into the landscape and into place, in direct concordance with the break of dawn. Aurora marks her return to the land of her childhood by attempting to set herself at *both* the outer and inner limits of place; she is both the viewing body and the visible horizon. This is, to be clear, an attempt at containment. It is an effort to take full possession of "my Italy" that is reflective of Aurora's grander impulse to

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[210] Barrett Browning, l. 7.517, 524–25. The description of the valley landscape that immediately follows mimics the green chamber passage discussed in the next section quite closely. The "mystic floating grey" of the olive trees "drop" behind the "outer wall / of the garden," which is then "caught and torn" by the "black line of cypresses." The river goes "trailing like a silver cord / Through all, and curling loosely, both before / and after, over the whole stretch of land" (7.529-540). This passage connects sewing to landscape description even more overtly than the view from the green chamber passage (featured below) and acts as a repetition and reaffirmation of that original relationship to landscape, in which Aurora's labors are at once feminine and poetic.

[211] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 46.

[212] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 7.485-89.

absorb place into the self, body, and image as part of a unified, though expansive, interior experience. Aurora openly lusts after herself and, too, after the places and people that have formed that self, and she performs that possessive desire as a function of the prospect view.

Aurora's fantasy is that by laying claim to her namesake – Aurora as both dawn and the goddess thereof – she will lay claim to landscape, reintegrating her scenes of childhood back into her adult perspective. But this project appears less and less successful as the latter half of the verse-novel progresses. For most of Book VII, Aurora's desire for home, the past, her parents, Romney, and even for productivity remains unrealized, leaving her in a spatial and affective limbo. At this point in the narrative, Aurora's listlessness starts to manifest in her relationship with her natural surroundings. She tries to "[take] up the old days" and yet finds them "spoiled":

> The days went by. I took up the old days,
> With all their Tuscan pleasures worn and spoiled,
> Like some lost book, we dropt in the long grass
> On such a happy summer-afternoon
> When last we read it with a loving friend,
> And find in autumn when the friend is gone,
> The grass cut short, the weather changed, too late,
> And stare at, as at something wonderful
> For sorrow, thinking how two hands before
> Had held up what is left to only one
>
> (7. 1040-49)

The passage reproduces the portrait simile in the poem's opening stanza. As before, Aurora marks internal change by reference to an inanimate object, this time a book found in the natural scene itself. She associates the book, like the portrait, with "a loving friend" now absent. Here and throughout the poem, Aurora presents herself as a multiplied subject, not just in figuring childhood as a relational moment (friendship), but in her unmarked transition from "I" to "we" (copying and reversing from the "two hands" that held the book "to only one"). The description of the local plant and animal life that follows overtly links one species or natural

element to another. This almost always happens with a colon.[213] The passage puts each in direct physical and syntactical relation to the other, so the fireflies whose light flickers across the "tingling Dark" and are in turn mimicked by "the constant inviolable stars."[214] Once again, Italy's nature is "tingling" and palpably alive, but Aurora frames the passage with her repeated assertion that something here has been lost, that even with all these transformations the place and its inhabitants have "dwindled from / My childish imagery."[215] This landscape, like those before it, presents itself as a series of harmonious relationships and juxtapositions, but Aurora cannot seem to find her own place within it. Aurora registers that displacement in terms of spatial distance: "But now the creatures seemed farther off, / No longer mine, not like me, only *there*, / A gulph between us."[216] Aurora's relationship with the landscape has reverted back to something like the old Thomsonian prospect view, where landscape is out "*there*," separate and "farther off" despite her attempts to repossess it. Aurora's crisis lies in the realization of difference and distance. She shares a name with a feature of the physical world but it is not actually "like" her.

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[213] See the following transition from birds and insects, to flowers, to moths, to butterflies, to fireflies, to stars:
    "I knew the birds
    And insects -- which look fathered by the flowers
    And emulous of their hues: I recognised
    The moths with great overpoise of wings
    Which makes a mystery of them how at all
    They can stop flying: butterflies, that bear
    Upon their blue wings such red embers round,
    They seem to scorch the blue air into holes
    Each flight they take: and fire-flies, that suspire
    In short soft lapses of transported flame
    Across the tingling Dark, while overhead
    The constant inviolable stars"

                                                          (7.1053-5864)
The passage, which goes on to make further connections, conveys likeness via juxtaposition – those things which are next to one another in the space of the text are like one another, in some way, in the real world.
[214] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 7.1061-64.
[215] Barrett Browning, l. 7.1085-86.
[216] Barrett Browning, l. 7.1099-1101, emphasis original.

And though the various reflections offered by the landscape might bring out her own internal multiplicity, the "gulph" between that self or selves remains.

Both the poem and its heroine struggle to decide whether or not nature and landscape can ever be fully possessed or can ever produce another object or image that is "like me." I am suggesting that Aurora's failed attempt to lay claim to the Italian landscape functions, then, in two primary ways. First, it constructs broad, expansive landscape views that are just as reflective and feminized as the drawing room scenes. Second, it sets up an ironic distance between the poem and its protagonist. These scenes in which Aurora fails to remake the landscape in her own image reveal the indifference (in figural terms, the flatness and unintegrated multiplicity) of the natural world. Aurora's acts of self-reflection reveal to us, though not always to her, that nature is a surface as inscrutable or unresponsive as any of the reflected faces above – nature, too, is a "dead face." The form of the poem, we might say, knows more than its protagonist. And the poem's "knowing" occurs as it turns its gaze upon its primary figure simultaneously with her own self-projecting gaze upon the world.

These formally represented failures of figuration also translate into more domestic and object-oriented settings. I give one instance where Aurora's ruminations turn back to the domestic and to household objects. In Book V, Aurora is struck by an odd sense of isolation following her book's publication, presumably composed of the first four books of *Aurora Leigh* (yet another way the text is always moving between temporalities and selves).[217] She

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[217] Aurora also registers her isolation and sense of displacement once back in Italy, declaring it the "land of all men's past! For me alone, / It would not mix tenses. I was past, / It seemed, like others, only not in heaven." (7.1157-59). She describes herself as both out of place – not in heaven with those with whom she belongs – *and* out of time – "I was past" – in a landscape that is itself outdated, it is the "land of all men's past." Tuscany has become a kind of in-between place, an almost-home that can neither facilitate genuine dwelling nor incorporate Aurora's memories of the past into the present, it cannot "mix tenses." She is caught somewhere between that here and there *and* between past and present.

contextualizes her loneliness by reference to the broader fate of women writers to "sit still / On winter nights by solitary fires / And hear the nations praising them far off."[218] The moment clearly summons the world of *The Task*. Aurora imagines herself not only as part of a women's collective enacting the creative impulse from inside the home, but she also imagines that domestic space as one capable of registering the sounds of "nations," even if only to emphasize the distance between the vast nation and the "solitary fire." She then moves into a domesticated prospect vision of other people in *their* homes, reading her book:

> To sit alone
> And think for comfort how, that very night,
> Affianced lovers, leaning face to face
> With sweet half-listenings for each other's breath,
> Are reading haply from a page of ours,
> To pause with a thrill (as if their cheeks had touched)
> When such a stanza, level to their mood,
> Seems floating their own thought out – 'So I feel
> For thee,' – 'And I, for thee: this poet knows
> What everlasting love is' – how, that night,
> Some father, issuing from the misty roads
> Upon the luminous round of lamp and hearth
> And happy children, having caught up first
> The youngest there until it shrink and shriek
> To feel the cold chin prick its dimples through
> With winter from the hills, may throw i' the lap
> Of the eldest, (who has learnt to drop her lids
> To hide some sweetness newer than last year's)
> Our book and cry,...'Ah you, you care for rhymes;
> So here be rhymes to pore on under trees,
> When April comes to let you! I've been told
> They are not idle as so many are,
> But set hearts beating pure as well as fast.
> 'Tis yours, the book; I'll write your name in it,
> So that you may not lose, however lost
> In poet's lore and charming reverie,
> The thought of how your father thought of *you*
> In riding from the town.'
>
>                                        (5.447-474)

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[218] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 5.439-41.

Aurora's book (the physical object) is more thoroughly in and of the world than she is. The lovers have the makings of fantasy for Aurora not only because they have each other, but also because her book acts as a conduit for their relationship. The lovers lean "face to face" over its pages while its lines seem to bring "their own thought out," an externalized materialization of their unspoken feelings for one another.[219] The book is a vehicle for romance and for physical desire. Similarly, the father in the second half of the stanza marks his daughter's new ownership of Aurora's book by writing *her* name inside it, so that the daughter may remember its status as a possession and a gift – her book and her name, but written in the father's hand. In a weirdly self-replicative logic, the virtue of the mark is to keep the girl from losing the thought of her father remembering her. The inscription turns her thoughts to one who thought of her, all in the midst of becoming "lost / in poet's lore and charming reverie." The memory of the father who is absent at the time of reading is marked by his writing in the physically present book, which itself encourages a kind of mental absence insofar as the book brings forth a fictional world in which the girl might lose herself. We see in this pattern of near-infinite regress a relation between the physical book's capacity to delineate absence and presence simultaneously. Moreover, the stanza's emphasis on the book as a token or gift summons up the opening portrait simile, in which the male lover looks upon the portrait of another to conjure a time and selfhood that has been lost.

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[219] This may be a reference to the Paolo and Francesca episode in the fifth canto of Dante's *Inferno*, and/or to Keats' sonnet on the subject, "A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode of Paulo and Francesca" (1819). In that sonnet, Keats describes (as he later related in a letter to George Keats) a "delightful" dream in which he descended into Hell and "floated about the whirling atmosphere…with a beautiful figure to whose lips mine were joined at it seem'd for an age." The poem ends with that prolonged kiss that resembles the "face to face" lovers above. Interestingly, Keats confesses that the poem has "nothing of what I felt in it" and longs to return to the dream instead (footnote 1, 336). The poem is thus, like this passage is for Aurora, an instance of the poet's disappointment in poetry's inability to conjure for him the things he describes. John Keats, "A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca," in *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 327, 336.

The central figure of this little drama of reflection is a physical object that is of Aurora's making but not, of course, Aurora herself. For Aurora (as distinct from the father and daughter and potential readers), the book signifies stasis and isolation. This is something Aurora does over and over again.[220] Objects (typically, domestic objects such as portraits, books, clothes, and the writing desk) "hold together" the remnants of what Aurora "was and is," but they do so with partial success. The poem makes it hard to determine whether any of these objects, as well as the broader contexts in which they appear, conjure their referents or simply outline those referents' absences. The stanza articulates the fantasy that a former self or relationship might be revived in the vision of another, but rather than realizing that fantasy, the stanza performs various modes of "hold[ing] together": juxtaposition, reflection, or standing "face to face." None of these leads to the kind of coherence or fusion that fuels the fantasy. And the same holds true for Aurora's relationship with other women, with her own replicated image, and with the text itself. Aurora sees her likeness in everyone and everything, but there are still "many selves" with which to contend.

**Holding Together**

Aurora envisions her book, in both in its semantic and material dimensions, as a relational entity: a point of connection both between the lovers who lean over it and between daughter and her absent father. On the whole, *Aurora Leigh* maintains this vision of the text as a conduit for relation, especially where that relation is an oppositional or juxtapositional posture –

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[220] We see it in the portrait simile in the opening stanza, in the portrait of the mother, in the ivy crown Aurora claims to have preserved "in the drawer there!" to remember her initial poetic self-crowning and rejection of Romney, in the figurative book read together "with a loving friend" now gone, in Kate Ward's recreation of her cloak, and in Aurora's attempts to connect with that other aurora on the horizon (2.812-13; 7.706).

a "leaning face to face."[221] Consider the house/landscape relationship, structures that recur

throughout *Aurora Leigh*. Both these designed aesthetic forms are presented as expansive

surfaces, both despite and because of the fact that they represent opposing poetic and gendered

traditions. Both are at once three dimensional spatial figures and "mere" surface. In this section, I

propose reading *Aurora Leigh* as a work that understands spatiality as a function of textuality.

The poem renders space as a textual entity because it constructs both domestic and natural spaces

as visual and figural echo chambers, as the surfaces in which figures are mirrored or replicated,

often in unpredictable or incongruous ways. This is a relation into which the reader, who "faces"

the text as she reads, is also pulled.

Aurora's early retreat into her "little chamber" is a good example. Shortly after her

lament about missing the lime tree that "seemed to have come…to bring the house a message,"

she moves to a space from which she does finally "have enough" of the lime tree and the view

beyond:

> I had a little chamber in the house,
> As green as any privet-hedge a bird
> Might choose to build in, though the nest itself
> Could show but dead-brown sticks and straws; the walls
> Were green the carpet was pure green, the straight
> Small bed was curtained greenly, and the folds
> Hung green about the window which let in
> The out-door world with all its greenery.
> You could not push your head out and escape
> A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,
> But so you were baptized into the grace
> And privilege of seeing…
>
> (1.567-578)

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[221] This is also an interesting echo of Wordsworth's own articulation of formal interaction in *The Excursion* I detail in Chapter Three.

Aurora's "little chamber" (her bedroom) allows her access to the view beyond in part because it is a more private space but also because of how its interior gestures toward its exterior. The entire room is covered in some form of green textile: "the walls were green, the carpet was pure green," the bed is "curtained greenly," and the window curtains "hung green." The uniform and all encompassing "greenery" of textiles is artificial, of course, but its garden mimicry somehow "let[s] in / The out-door world and all its greenery." The decorative and stylized recreation of natural greenery guides the eye through the window to the plant life that is, on some level, the inspiration or referent for the decor in the first place.[222]

The landscape viewed from the green chamber is doubled from the beginning. It presents exteriority via interiority and the natural accessed only through the artificial, decorative, and domestic. Note that the viewer too is multiple. Narrating the view with the window opened, Aurora switches to the second person (the same happens in the poem's opening stanza), leading the reader out into the dew as companion – more like Siamese twin – with her own younger self. Both the "you" and the "I," into the "privilege of seeing…" That final ellipses signals a moment when the reader's and Aurora's eyes will at least partially align, mirroring one another in the direction and subject of their gazes – for Aurora, the garden; for the reader, the text's narration of that garden.[223] The stanza endows Aurora with the poet's visionary power and, at the same time, it draws the reader into the space of the text, and into the garden *as* text. Open and multiple, the

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[222] Compounding this is the fact that Aurora's initial reference to a bird's nest also exchanges inside for outside, as she admits that, realistically, the inside of a nest would look "dead-brown," not green. The green of her room is, then, a mimicking of a nest's surrounding hedge, even as the room's quiet privacy makes it nest-like. The green chamber is, on many levels, an interior made exterior, but it maintains its status as a protective enclosure nonetheless. The room, like the passage, enables the decorated domestic interior and the natural "out-door world" to take part in a dynamic weaving of plants and textiles.

[223] That final ellipses acts much like the gesturing "there, –" of the mother-portrait passage in that it directs the reader's eye not only to the poem's next line, which does in fact describe in great detail what natural entities Aurora has "the privilege of seeing," but also to an imagined space beyond the line break, another "out there."

green room stanza "let[s] in" a view that links the indoors to the outdoors, the reader to the

speaker, and reading space to narrative space.

The green room then gives way to a landscape view defined by its own strange

connections:

> First, the lime,
> (I had enough there, of the lime, be sure, -
> My morning-dream was often hummed away
> By the bees in it;) past the lime, the lawn,
> Which, after sweeping broadly round the house,
> Went trickling through the shrubberies in a stream
> Of tender turf, and wore and lost itself
> Among the acacias, over which you saw
> The irregular line of elms by the deep lane
> Which stopped the grounds and dammed the overflow
> Of arbutus and laurel. Out of sight
> The lane was; sunk so deep, no foreign tramp
> Nor drover of wild ponies out of Wales
> Could guess if lady's hall or tenant's lodge
> Dispensed such odours, - though his stick well-crooked
> Might reach the lowest trail of blossoming briar
> Which dipped upon the wall. Behind the elms,
> And through their tops, you saw the folded hills
> Striped up and down with hedges, (burly oaks
> Projecting from the line to show themselves)
> Through which my cousin Romney's chimneys smoked
> And still as when a silent mouth in frost
> Breathes, showing where the woodlands hid Leigh Hall;
> While, far above, a jut of table-land,
> A promontory without water, stretched, -
> You could not catch it if the days were thick,
> Or took it for a cloud; but, otherwise,
> The vigorous sun would catch it up at eve
> And use it for an anvil till he had filled
> The shelves of heaven with burning thunderbolts,
> Protesting against night and darkness: - then,
> When all his setting trouble was resolved
> To a trance of passive glory, you might see
> In apparition on the golden sky
> (Alas, my Giotto's background) the sheep run
> Along the fine clear outline, small as mice
> That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

(1.567-614)

The lime tree of which Aurora now "has enough" once again stands central in the scene, but it gives way to "the lawn" ("lime" and "lawn" appearing together in an alliterative pair, replicated again with "line" and "lane" a few lines later). The lawn becomes a "trickling" stream of "tender turf," leading the eye to the "line of elms" and the "deep" though unseen lane that "dammed the overflow" of the garden's plant life. The wall and the lane behind limit the garden's overgrowth or "flow" and, also, Aurora's powers of vision. Like Coleridge in "Lime Tree," she uses memory and imagination to fill in what she cannot see. She imagines a figure (a local traveler or Welsh shepherd) who must himself imagine that the house hidden behind the wall, making that figure an alter ego of the imagining narrator. Imaginative power spills over like the "trail of blossoming briar."[224]

There is, indeed, a certain magic about this passage – a study in metamorphosis. As Aurora's eye sweeps over the view, the greenly curtained window gives way to natural greenery, the lime gives way to lawn, the lawn trickles like a stream, elms become hills, smoke becomes breath, sheep become the "mice / that run along a witch's scarlet thread." All shapes are shifting, each image a gesture toward the next. The final transition from sheep to mice is a reference to German folklore, in which witches shape mice out of cloth and bring them to life by telling them to "run along and come back."[225] This landscape description, already so full of metaphoric transformations, closes with the image of a woman who sets natural entities in motion with the supernatural movements of her thread. By this point in Book I, Aurora has already described her

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[224] Anne D. Wallace reads the inclusion of the Welsh shepherd in this scene as a reference to an older, Wordsworthian tradition of walking. For Wallace, Aurora's imaginative conjuring of other walkers in landscape acts as a sign of the future walking Aurora herself will do, especially right after when she explores the garden on her birthday. I do not see Aurora as a poetic figure who is especially interested in walking, although I do read her as in conversation with Wordsworth. The Welsh shepherd looks more similar, in my view, to the Dreaming Man in the opening of *The Excursion*, as he is both an imagined and imagining figure whose relationship with nature is equal and opposite to that of the Poet.

[225] Reynolds, *Aurora Leigh*, n. 2, ln. 1.614, p. 23

mother as a "fairy, witch, and sprite" and will herself be labeled as a witch, partly in jest, by

Romney only a few stanzas after this one.[226] Despite the condescension in Romney's joke and

the childishness of Aurora's mystification of her mother, it seems clear from this rendering of

landscape that Barrett Browning does enchant Aurora, modeling her as a figure who can bring

disparate natural, inanimate, real, and imaginary entities into active relation with one another

through the movements of her own thread: her lines of blank verse. This is just one of many

instances throughout the poem when Barrett Browning references textiles to connect the prospect

view and the act of writing with sewing and weaving, allowing her to redefine writing as another

form of "women's work."[227] Such is especially true here, in the poetic rendering of a view born

and described from the perspective of the house. Still, Aurora's work remains an uncertain and

imperfect witchcraft, its transformations are not absolute. The sheep are only like mice, the lawn

is not a stream, the wandering shepherd is not really visible or accessible from the house (or even

real at all). The view the window offers is as full of shifting shapes as any looking-glass, largely

because it, too, works to "hold together" an abundance of disparate figures, forms, visions, and

temporalities.[228]

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[226] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 2.78-80.

[227] There are quite a few scholars who have made this connection in *Aurora Leigh*. Anne D. Wallace argues that Barrett Browning reconstructs sewing as a georgic labor in the same way that Wordsworth does with walking (this is why, she argues, Aurora is at first more interested in walking than she is sewing – she follows a Wordsworthian tradition and then transforms it). In uniting sewing and writing, Wallace argues that the poem is "redrawing women's work as true cultivation" (242). Elizabeth Erbeznik reads *Aurora Leigh* as a poem that unites sewing and writing as, again, forms of women's work and in their ability to make room for women in the cityscape, as space that would otherwise be too dangerous or generally inaccessible for women.

[228] Here the poem approaches something like Jacques Derrida's classic definition of textuality, in which the text is itself a textile, a web with a "woven texture." Its textuality is constituted in its movement between or among differences, from *pharmakon* as a remedy to *pharmakon* as a poison (or, as in this poem, from *woman* as mother/nurturer to *woman* as witch/poetess). The *pharmakon* is a "charm" with a "spellbinding virtue" and a "power of fascination" that may be "beneficent or maleficent. (1609). The Derridean text is a surface that twists until it comes into contact with its own opposite, its "nonidentity-with-itself [is] always allowing it to be turned against itself" (1630). It stands in opposition, face to face, with itself – or, rather, with what is not-itself, like Aurora staring out at the sunrise. *Aurora Leigh* exemplifies this in its refusal of subordination and integration in favor of juxtaposition, relationality, and exteriority. The scene is exemplary of how the text points to itself as a text (as a surface, an exterior). Aurora's ongoing fascination with and reproductions of her own image are a narration of this

We have seen how the poem's play on "aurora" as protagonist, sun, and text (Aurora's gaze at the aurora-sunrise is also coincides with *Aurora Leigh*'s ironic stare at its protagonist) is also the means by which it establishes landscape (or its sense of place) as that which lies between the embodied Aurora and the aurora on the horizon. The text's play on its own multiplicity depends on its highly spatialized rendering of that relationship. Likewise, the green chamber passage brings the protagonist and reader (its "you" and "I") together into the "privilege of seeing" by making domestic and natural spaces resemble each other *and* by self-consciously revealing that resemblance as yet another movement, the movement of blank verse. The text's own narrative and formal rendering of spatiality is, in short, constitutive for its rendering of its own textuality.

I will conclude with one final reading in which the space/text correlation manifests rather literally. In a late scene at Aurora's villa in Italy, Aurora's reading body, the letter she reads from Vincent Carrington, and the house in which she sits are overtly connected to one another. The moment is a highly emotional one for Aurora, and that emotion registers as spatial awareness, so that Aurora becomes increasingly cognizant of the room in which she has been reading:

> The noon was hot; the air scorched like the sun
> And was shut out. The closed persiani threw
> Their long-scored shadows on my villa-floor,
> And interlined the golden atmosphere
> Straight, still, – across the pictures on the wall,
> The statuette on the console, (of young Love
> And Psyche made one marble by a kiss)
> The low couch where I leaned, the table near,
> The vase of lilies Marian pulled last night
> (Each green leaf and each white leaf ruled in black
> As if for writing some new text of fate)
> And the open letter, rested on my knee,
> But there the lines swerved, trembled, though I sate
> Untroubled, plainly, reading it again

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process. Jacques Derrida, "Dissemination," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018).

And three times. Well, he's married; that is clear.

<div align="right">(7.661-675)</div>

All the room's furnishings are written over and strung together by the "long-scored shadows" that emanate from the window blinds, initiating Aurora's cataloging of the decor. Interestingly, most of what Aurora describes are objects we have, by this point in the poem, seen in some form before.[229] This is yet another space in which much is held together, this time under the "long-scored shadows" that reflect house and text alike.

Vincent's letter is, in some sense, just another object in the room in that it, too, is overlain by the lines of shadow as it rests open on Aurora's knee, except that "there the lines swerved, trembled." The letter reflects, literally, Aurora's physical and emotional agitation – she is shaking enough to disturb the lines, the letter's shadowed surface contradicting her own assertion that she "sate / untroubled."[230] That involuntary movement from Aurora turns the letter into a kind of odd and temporary palimpsest: the pages are covered by the lines written by Vincent, but also by the lines of shadow that fill the rest of the room and tremble in mimicry of Aurora's shaking body. In this sense, both Vincent and *the house* have written lines upon the letter, forming a new text that reflects both what is happening *there*, in England, and in the past, and

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[229] The "statuette" depicts Love and Psyche, whom Aurora compares to the portrait of her mother in Book I. That portrait is also mimicked in the "pictures on the wall." In earlier manuscripts, Barrett Browning describes the cushions of the "low couch" as "heaped up," and the "table near" as also "heaped" with "open books," describing a somewhat stereotypically cluttered Victorian room filled with books, each of which color Aurora's domestic life in much the same way as she described her own book doing in other's homes. Aurora is surrounded by the results of other people's labors: Marian who has collected and brought in the flowers, the numerous other authors who have also "laboured on alone" to produce the open books, the seamstresses or other housewives who have made and decorated the "heaped up" cushions, Vincent who has written the letter, and so on (5.421). Other influences, other books, other people's labor, even other moments from *Aurora Leigh*, collect and pile up throughout the room.

[230] The affective element of this shadowy trembling is reminiscent of scenes Adela Pinch points out in Anne Radcliffe's novels, in which characters cry on other characters' hands. Pinch argues that these scenes, and hands in general, become tropes for the easy transmission of emotions from one person to another and a signal the corresponding figurative transmission of feeling (129). This passage does not depict feeling as so transpersonal, but the trembling lines of shadow replicate or formalize Aurora's feelings in a similar way. Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

*here*, in the very present heat of the villa in Italy. Both the letter and the room as a whole now resemble something like Marian's lilies, which are "ruled in black / As if for writing some new text of fate." The house and the page are suddenly prepped and lined "for writing," even though they are already filled to the brim with other referents, other labors, other temporalities. Here house and page are both reflective surfaces, each turned toward the other. Aurora looks up from her reading only to see the house as an inscriber and *as a text*.

Even more directly than any we see in Wordsworth, these "long-scored shadows" make the text's surface visible in narrative content at the same time that they make the room's interior register as one such textual surface. This self-reflection of poetic form is one criteria by which Herbert Tucker denotes "poetic spacetime," a mode by which he argues Romantic and Victorian poetry attempts to "construct a venue" for the reader through auto-narrations of the text as the kind of built structure it describes in content.[231] Indeed, this moment in which the reading Aurora finds her text crossed over by the shadowy form of the house is one any reader of *Aurora Leigh* may likely experience as well. This scene (and the green chamber scene as well) brings the reader into the text; or, rather, it models a poetic movement in which the text is like a shadow that "trembles" in its dynamism and activity, tentatively stretching out to draw a line from reading body to page to house and landscape, and to other temporalities.[232] This movement is

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[231] Herbert F. Tucker, "Of Monuments and Moments: Spacetime in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *MLQ* 58, no. 3 (September 1997): 278–79. Tucker argues that the industrial developments of the nineteenth century meant that space and time became increasingly interrelated and interchangeable. The railroad, for example, made the British citizen increasingly adept at "translating minutes into miles," while, on the other hand, scientific discourse often interpreted space temporally (270-71). This chapter takes that space-time relationship seriously as well. "Poetic spacetime" is Tucker's term for how the space-time interchangeability emerges in poetry, notably as a function of form. In this I am of course aligned with Tucker's analysis. Tucker, however, reads form as chiefly lyrical, interpreting poetic spatiality, in particular, as rendered through overt, strict formal construction (as in, for example, the sonnet form).

[232] For a helpful model of the novel as a space of play that is analogous but not identical to the real world, see Franta, *Systems Failure: The Uses of Disorder in English Literature*. Julia Carlson's reading of the importance of lines (lines of blank verse, hachure lines in mapping) in Wordsworth argues that the line is associated with motion and phenomenological experiences of landscape, linking (as in the skating scene in *The Prelude*) the individual imagination, nature, and the "spatiotemporal turnings of verse" (98). Carlson's is a helpful model for how the

something like what we see in the verse-novel's opening declaration that "I, writing thus, am": "writing thus" is the ongoing action that happens in the midst of the "I…am," that brings the text's "many selves" into relation and into the durational, spatiotemporal experience of being.

All of this is to say that *Aurora Leigh* figures poetic space as that which exists between, a connective tissue flexible enough to accommodate disparate temporalities, genres, places, figures, readers, and traditions without collapsing them into one another. That flexible in-betweenness is what makes *Aurora Leigh* a durational and spatial form – it is expansive in how much it holds together. This chapter is perhaps the most spatially-oriented analysis of the project, an orientation guided by the intricacies of the poem itself and that stands as evidence of duration and length's status as spatial as well as temporal entities.

Aurora's coming into being as a poetess, her "writing thus," is also depicted as a navigation of that spatiality (i.e., a navigation of the poem's deeply intertwined depictions of landscape and domestic spaces and of their corresponding poetic traditions). That the navigation of space is so central to Aurora's poetic development serves three major purposes. First, it legitimizes the house as a creative space and inhabitation as a creative mode (an alternative to, say, the model of perpetual mobility and progression embodied by Wordsworth's Wanderer).[233] Second, it brings Aurora's Narcissus-like self-fascination into a broader context, in which her many replications of her own image are one way the text makes visible its expansive capacity, its ability to hold together so many selves. Finally, those self-reflections work as both a method of

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shadowy lines in the "interlined golden atmosphere" of the villa scene might also be bringing together the body, house, and text. Julia Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in the Fields of Print* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[233] This is of course not to say that Aurora never moves – the transition from England to Italy is a central plot point of the poem – only that the active interplay between house and landscape, mobility and stasis, and even authorial production and writer's block, is distinct from the anxious and ongoing mobilities we often see in pre- and early-Romanticism (Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* is another example) and that is, at least ostensibly, romanticized in the figure of the Wanderer.

poetic reproduction and as a dilution of the self, a dilution that is a central characteristic of the Poetess. Aurora's coming into being as a Poetess is, then, defined in part by her capacity for replication, relation, and reiteration, reproductive acts that may overlay and obscure the image of the individual but that also build up those many selves over time, so that their accumulation (Aurora and the text's double-facedness) is made evident as the direct result of the spatiotemporal processes of writing and poetic development.

All of this may help to explain why the poem concludes with an apocalyptic vision, a final landscape scene that once again positions Aurora opposite her namesake, the rising sun of the "new, near Day" through which she narrates the emergence of a New Jerusalem.[234] The scene is Aurora's final act of self-reflection, a reproduction that, like all the others, may also be a self-annihilation. Even still, this new rising aurora marks a spatial expansion. Here the text offers up a new future but also a new locale, a new positional poetics manifested only in the interaction between the silhouettes of the body and landscape. The long poem registers here as a formal space of extension that consistently gestures beyond itself. The consequence is a form that, like the mother-portrait, is nearly always breaking out of bounds, overwhelmed by its own powers of vision.

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[234] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, l. 9.956.

# CHAPTER V

## Everyday Accidents: Plots of Place in Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary*

Sir Walter Scott's third novel, *The Antiquary* (1816), begins on "a fine summer's day" in which Lovel, the youth of "genteel appearance" who is the novel's most traditionally heroic figure, waits for the noon coach, now late, to carry him from Edinburgh to the Queensferry.[235] Of *The Antiquary*'s two main protagonists, Lovel is certainly the most even-tempered, but by the novel's opening even he has begun "to grow somewhat impatient" by the coach's lateness. While waiting, Lovel is soon joined by Jonathan Oldbuck, the titular antiquary, who arrives at the coach-office just after the scheduled time of departure. Oldbuck initially fears that he has missed the coach all together:

> He arrived with a hurried pace, and, casting an alarmed glance towards the dial-plate of the church, then looking at the place where the coach should have been, exclaimed, 'Deil's in it – I am too late after all!
>
> (14-15)

Oldbuck misidentifies a delayed event as one that has already happened or, rather, that *should* have already happened according to the "dial-plate of the church." Oldbuck's is a unique kind of temporal disorientation in which a future event – the arrival of the coach – appears to be already over, brought on by the fact that he, unlike Lovel, is late as well. Confusion of this sort, where those who wait or are delayed are struck suddenly by the possibility that they may have already missed their object or that events have been mis-ordered, is central to *The Antiquary*'s rendering

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[235] Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. Nicola J. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

of temporal experience. This chapter will take this anxious, discombobulating mode of waiting as one of its primary subjects.[236] In keeping with that spirit of delay, I will use these first few introductory pages as an opportunity to linger with the novel's first chapter, which I read as modeling the novel's fascination by and with spatiotemporal disorientation and disjuncture.[237]

*The Antiquary* begins with a state of delay and interruption that is partly a result of individual action and partly of larger, more systematic temporal disordinance. Consider, for instance, just how many measurements of time are represented in the novel's second paragraph alone. The scene opens somewhat vaguely upon a "fine summer's day, near the end of the eighteenth century," until Scott's narration zooms in upon the bill announcing the coach, which provides much greater specificity:

> The written hand-bill, which, pasted on a projecting board, announced that the Queensferry Diligence, or Hawes Fly, departed precisely at twelve o'clock on Tuesday, the fifteenth July, 17--, in order to secure for travellers the opportunity of passing the Frith with the flood-tide, lied on the present occasion like a bulletin; for although that hour was pealed from Saint Giles' steeple, and repeated by the Tron, no coach appeared upon the appointed stand.
>
> (13)

Already we have moved from the broad scale of the entire eighteenth century to a particular day at a particular time: Tuesday, July 15th, at noon.[238] We have moved, too, from a broad joke about the conventions of authorial realism ("a fine summer's day, near the end of the eighteenth century") to another about the notional specificity of time-tables. The hand-bill presents itself as

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[236] Miranda Burgess identifies a particularly place-based anxiety as arising in the Romantic era as a result of the emerging global economy. What I identify in *The Antiquary* is not identical, but the novel, though highly localized (as we will see), still registers larger global forces, mostly through the threat of invasion. That awareness manifests as an anxious time-sense, a prolonged kind of waiting. Burgess, "Transport: Mobility, Anxiety, and the Romantic Poetics of Feeling."

[237] I refer to fascination in both senses – the novel is both thematically interested in disorientation and disjuncture and finds its own plot fixed or slowed by it.

[238] For more on the growing importance of specific dating to the historiography of the period, especially in relation to Scott's development of the historical novel and the wider project of "making legible the historical particularity of…place and time," see James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 67–78.

a premonitory text, generated from a time-table precise enough to make such a designation possible, but is already outdated, already mis-timed, when Scott presents it to his readers. There are other time-tables at work here too: the carriage must depart at noon in order to arrive at Queensferry in time for its passengers to make the ferry, which is itself dictated by the natural rhythms of the tides. The trouble with the coach schedule, then, is not its exactitude, per se, but its indifference to the many other time-tables at work in the system that the schedule claims to represent. With so many contingencies at play, it quickly becomes obvious that it would take very little to disrupt this travel schedule.[239]

Overall, the chapter registers time on many scales and with many tools: first the century, then the day and the hour listed on the hand-bill, then the church bells that mark time for a larger community, the clock in the coach-office meant to assist the traveler, Oldbuck's personal watch, and the distant but localized pattern of the tides and the ferry. The above passage brings many of these scales together and then almost immediately puts them into conflict, as we now know that, at minimum, the hand-bill and the church clock offer contradictory information. Even later, after the coach has finally departed with, according to the ticket lady, enough time to make the ferry at Fairport, the coach is delayed further when it breaks down and, again, when the horse throws a shoe. Oldbuck insists they stop the carriage to treat the horse's lameness, a kindness the narrator attributes to Oldbuck's desire to show Lovel a cite of antiquarian interest that "happened to exist about a hundred yards from the place where this interruption took place."[240] Oldbuck's antiquarianism – his interest in the much broader time-scale of national history – delays them

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[239] And, of course, things are off schedule, or are beginning to be so. The bells from Saint Giles' steeple signal the emerging lateness of the coach, according to abstract, communal clock time (we do not yet know if it is late enough to miss the tides). Later, when Oldbuck arrives at the office and, despite his own lateness, begins to grow impatient, he compares the "progress of the minute-hand" of the smaller coach-office clock with his own personal watch, "a huge and antique gold repeater" (15).

[240] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 19.

even further, so that they reach Fairport only to find they have missed the boat completely. *The Antiquary* opens with a system of coach travel that registers and attempts to operate within various temporal scales and mechanisms but cannot fully marry them.

The novel's first chapter mocks the inefficiencies of the public carriage system and its own protagonist's exacerbation of those inefficiencies, but it also toys with a broader, already well-established association between coach travel and the novel form itself. The stagecoach was an apt analogy for narrative and for the British novel in particular – employed by Fielding in both *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) – because it was a public system serving a broad community.[241] It was thus, as Ruth Livesey describes, the "perfect analogy…for an emergent type of fiction that carries such a [readerly] community through an imagined nation dotted by landmarks of the real."[242] Scott uses the stagecoach both as a reference to that long tradition and to his own oeuvre, as *The Antiquary* is not in fact his first reference to the stagecoach-narrative analogy. In the opening chapters of *Waverley, or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), Scott's narrator likens his story to the public coach by way of apology. Aware of how long he has spent "plaguing" his readers with the "old fashioned politics" of mid-eighteenth century Scotland, the narrator apologizes for the decidedly mundane nature of his introductory chapters' political discourse.[243] *Waverley* is not, though his readers may wish it, "a flying chariot drawn by hippogriffs, or moved by enchantment," but rather more like the "humble English post-chaise" with its wheels set solidly on the ground and driven by the narrator and his, at best,

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[241] Percy G. Adams notes that by the time Fielding, along with Smollett, Sterne, Burney, and other early British novelists, were beginning to make use of the coach motif, the tradition was already well-established in European fiction. Scott is, essentially, making use of a motif integral to the novel form itself. Percy G. Adams, "The Coach Motif in Eighteenth-Century Fiction," *Modern Language Studies* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 23.

[242] Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stagecoach Nation: Locality on the Move Inn Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.

[243] Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Ian Duncan (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 26.

"tolerable horses."[244] *Waverley*'s is a vehicle of the everyday, one that must still travel "his

Majesty's highway" and thus remains subject to the intricacies of politics and to the undulations

of the road itself: any reader traveling by this method will be "exposed to the dulness inseparable

from heavy roads, steep hills, sloughs, and other terrestrial retardations." The beginning of

*Waverley* also makes for rough going (although in a markedly different way than *The Antiquary*),

but it establishes a precedent in the *Waverley* canon for a connection between narrative and a

method of travel grounded in the occasionally dull realities of everyday life and geography but

also promising to deliver the reader, eventually, "into a more picturesque and romantic country,"

i.e., to Scotland and to romance.[245] By *Waverley*'s end the narrator declares himself a successful

driver "who has received his full hire" by delivering his hero safely back to England and his

narrative to closure. Scott references the stagecoach as a guarantee that the journey will

overcome its own difficult beginnings and reach destinations so thoroughly predetermined that a

preface can serve as a postscript.[246]

Despite its admission that narrative may at times be a process of endurance or discomfort,

Scott's first novel promotes confidence in its coach-like model. *The Antiquary*, Scott's third

novel and the final installation in the initial *Waverley* trilogy, maintains *Waverley*'s insistence

that reading may be like traveling in a public carriage, but it does so with much less confidence

as to its success.[247] *The Antiquary* begins, as a result, not with a simile about a coach moving too

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[244] Scott, 26.

[245] Fielding also uses the metaphor in *Tom Jones* as a reference to boredom and "plain and serious" discussions. Fielding introduces the last book of the novel by bidding his readers farewell, as reader and narrator are like "Fellow-Travellers in a Stage-Coach" now boarding the vehicle for the last stage of the journey, a period during which "Conversation is usually plain and serious" and, correspondingly, Fielding's narrator swears he will not indulge the reader with the "ludicrous Observations" he supposes may "have prevented thee [the reader] from taking a Nap when it was beginning to steal upon thee." Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 812.

[246] Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, 362.

[247] Scott opens his advertisement to *The Antiquary* with the declaration that *The Antiquary* "completes a series of fictitious narratives, intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland at three different periods. WAVERLEY embraced

slowly, but rather with a real coach that has not arrived at all. *The Antiquary*'s opening presents

its reader with a system that is essentially mis-timed, unable to fully deliver upon its promises,

and caught awkwardly between abstract, local, and historical conceptualizations of time. If, in

reference to *Waverley*, we are meant to read this system as our first and primary example of how

narrative itself will operate throughout *The Antiquary*, then it follows that the novel might also,

like the public carriage system, invoke varied temporalities while lacking the power to integrate

them.

The governing analogy of the novel-as-stagecoach metaphor is thus something like this:

the coach schedule and/or driver is to coach travel as authorial design is to the events of plot and

the experience of reading. Those relationships, so integral both to the British novel's rendering of

its own public function and to *Waverley*, are still relevant in *The Antiquary*, but the systems

themselves – coach travel and narrative progression or telos – have apparently begun to atrophy.

The novel registers its own mechanisms as breaking down or, at least, slowing down, and its

interest lies in the resulting discord. But (to follow one analogy with another) just as the public

carriage's failures of efficiency produce certain payoffs – Oldbuck establishes a relationship with

Lovel that is the throughline of the rest of the narrative – so too do the novel's failures – one of

which is its inability or refusal to integrate into a single system the many temporalities that are

active within it – produce payoffs as well. The first is a playful, counterintuitive kind of suspense

in which the reader is left wondering not only what will happen but whether or not anything will

happen at all (and what, if anything, will be communicated as a result). This suspense – which is

also a temporal suspen*sion*, a delay, as well as a kind of boredom – is itself an undermining of

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the age of our fathers, GUY MANNERING that of our own youth, and the ANTIQUARY refers to the last ten years
of the eighteenth century" (3). The trilogy progresses through the second half of the eighteenth century, ending with
*The Antiquary* in 1794.

plot as a designed series of interrelated events.[248] Another payoff is a certain verisimilitude, the

recognition that real life is also plagued by the imperfect and misleading schedules of public

transportation and the like.[249] In tandem with that verisimilitude comes the readerly pleasure of

being both inside and outside the frame of the story, a pleasure that acts as a counterbalance to

the boring-suspense of the plot's non-happenings (we are in on the joke, but still subject to the

novel's temporal and experiential strangeness).

Having laid out a temporally-oriented thesis for the potential returns of the novel's

disjuncture, I want to attend to the novel's equal and opposite spatial problem, also introduced in

the novel's first chapter. The opening paragraph, for example, expounds upon the possibility of

physical discomfort and awkwardness before it reveals the incorrectness of the hand-bill:

> The coach was calculated to carry six regular passengers, besides such interlopers
> as the coachman could pick up by the way, and intrude upon those who were legally
> in possession. The tickets, which conferred right to a seat in this vehicle of little
> ease, were dispensed by a sharp-looking old dame...who inhabited a 'laigh shop,'
> *anglicè*, a cellar, opening to the High-street by a strait and steep stair, at the bottom
> of which she sold tape, thread, needle, skeans of worsted, coarse linen cloth, and

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[248] Peter Brooks argues that plot is about tracing the intentions of characters in a narrative, because events remain "unavailable to interpretation so long as they are not plotted" (35). I argue that *The Antiquary*'s highly spatialized "plot" (a play on the word's own reference to land or local ground) is partly about undoing those intentions, or, rather, tracing how intention transforms into accident. Brooks' definition of plot helps to explain why this might also make the novel itself a hindrance to interpretation. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984).

 Robert Caserio's catalogue of our attitude toward plot also associates plot with the sequential and, and as a result, with "intelligibility" and a cogent sense of history. Caserio comments casually that "only accidents seem to be stories without plots" (4). It is that relationship – between accident and plot (both as narrative and as the literal ground) – that Scott plays with in *The Antiquary*. Robert L. Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel: From Dickens and Poe to the Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[249] Adams similarly points out that the coach motif is useful largely because of how it presents opportunities for accident, introducing new characters, scenarios, settings, etc., that would have been familiar to readers who had likely also experienced similar events while on the road. Adams, "The Coach Motif in Eighteenth-Century Fiction," 25.

 Jane Millgate argues for a similar effect in *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, where the figure of the Minstrel is specifically designed to act as a conduit between the real and fictional worlds. Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of a Novelist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

 Elaine Auyoung's formal analysis of nineteenth-century novel argues that the novel uses embodied experience to make connections between real and fictional worlds. Auyoung explicitly connects this embodiment to everyday labors and, by extension, to the labor that is novel reading. Auyoung and I are very much aligned in this respect. Auyoung, *When Fiction Feels Real: Representation and the Reading Mind*.

such feminine gear, to those who had the courage and skill to descend to the profundity of her dwelling, without falling headlong themselves, or throwing down any of the numerous articles which, piled on each side of the descent, indicated the profession of the trader below.

(13)

The image of coach travel conjured here is of a crowded, overpacked space that, rather than invoking the freedom of movement and liberal mobility one might associate with a journey to the countryside, feels like a prison cell – a space of "little ease."[250] The coach offers limited space along with its limited schedule. Lovel and Oldbuck are never subjected to the kind of imposition described here, but the possibility for such discomfort remains as one of the essential characteristics of this kind of travel (it is anticipated even if not realized). The "old dame" Mrs. Macleuchar's cellar is similarly cluttered and confined but presents a different potential for harm – entering her space means risking the possibility of "falling headlong" into the subterranean shop below or, at the very least, of disrupting its merchandise.[251] Here the reader must imagine cramming into small spaces and falling headfirst into a dark cellar – legitimate instances of discomfort and disorientation – before either of the main characters or any kind of action has been introduced. The text flirts with the idea that one might fall, trip, or find oneself in a physically uncomfortable or limiting space but does not act it out; it is one possibility among others.

For *The Antiquary*'s reader, narrative itself becomes another kind of stumbling block over which she might find herself "falling headlong." The contemporary critical dissatisfaction with the novel has much to do with its discontinuous plot structure, in which even the most

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[250] Nicola J. Watson defines the space of "little ease" as a specific kind of prison cell meant to prevent the prisoner from being able to stretch out or stand upright (Scott, *The Antiquary*, 439.).

[251] Notice how equally crowded is the second sentence of this passage, whose listing of the Mrs. Macleuchar's many wares and of the potential for injury makes for a syntax as difficult to navigate as the cellar itself.

striking individual characters and plotlines do not necessarily affect or intersect with one another.[252] Lovel is the most traditional heroic figure in the novel, and yet he is entirely absent from the middle section of the story, disappearing after his duel with Hector and reappearing to claim his true namesake and inheritance only at the very end. Oldbuck, Edie Ochiltree, and the Mucklebackits take on central roles but are not always active in or impacted by the events they witness. On the other hand, the plot almost overflows with unique episodes – Hector and Lovel's duel, the near-drowning of the Wardours, the Dousterswivel plot, the gothic sins of the Glenallans – that appear at best only tangentially related and are difficult to hold together in the absence of a central, unifying plot structure. *The Antiquary*, as Nicola J. Watson succinctly phrases it, "has at once too little and too much plot."[253]

What it has significantly *less* of, however, is places. In direct opposition to the precedent established by the *Waverley* structure, Oldbuck and Lovel's initial ill-begotten journey from Edinburgh to Fairport is the only major transition in setting the novel undergoes.[254] Lovel departs from Fairport midway through, but the narrative does not follow him, as it does Waverley,

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[252] *The Quarterly Review* credits the novel with the characterizations of Edie and the Mucklebackits and with its skillful scenic descriptions, but criticizes the fact that Oldbuck has no real effect on the events of the plot (128). "Art. V. The Antiquary. By the Author of Waverley and Guy Mannering. 3 vols. 12 mo. 1816." *The Quarterly Review*, [London], vol. 15, no.29, April 1, 1816. *American Historical Periodicals from the American Antiquarian Society* (accessed January 22, 2023). https://link-gale-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/apps/doc/LTZVRX967219268/AAHP?u=umuser&sid=bookmark-AAHP&xid=30cfa5d0.

The *Monthly Review* reads the novel as evidence that Scott's art is not in the "involution of plot" but rather in the "minute, happy, and frequently humorous delineation of manners" (39). "ART. V. the Antiquary, by the Author of "Waverley," and "Guy Mannering."." *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal, 1752-1825* 82, (01, 1817): 38-52, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/art-v-antiquary-author-waverley-guy-mannering/docview/4820049/se-2 (accessed January 22, 2023). Cited also in Nicola J. Watson, "Introduction," in *The Antiquary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[253] Watson, xi.

[254] Essential to the *Waverley* structure, as it has come to be known in modern literary scholarship, is Waverley's journey from England, to Scotland, and back again, representative of the novel's move from the modern British nation, into the past and to romance, and back to the safety of modern private life and historical coherence. Ian Duncan thoroughly explains this process and its scholarly history. Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also, Ian Duncan, "Primitive Inventions: Rob Roy, Nation, and World System," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no. 1 (2002).

Bertram, and Mannering in Scott's two preceding novels. *The Antiquary*'s concerns are extremely localized even if they are structurally or temporally disjointed. It is a novel of Fairport and Fairport alone; the novel itself lingers in place. So, though it abounds in individual events and people and histories, *The Antiquary*'s spatial footprint remains, like the "vehicle of little ease," markedly and often bewilderingly constricted – there is much less room to move around, so to speak, in this novel than in its predecessors.

The primary thesis I draw from *The Antiquary*'s spatial and local limitations is that what actually unites the many plots, characters, and timelines of the novel is the simple fact that they all take place in the same place. The narrative derives its structure more from geography and topography than it does from cause and effect.[255] This narrative locality, in which the details and undulations of landscape structure the novel itself, has a few interesting consequences of its own. The first is a spatially-realized contingency like that which we see in Mrs. Macleuchar's cellar, a

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[255] Kyle McAuley similarly argues for a "geographic reading of narrative space" as evidence of the "unevenness" of realism in the Romantic novel. McAuley focuses on long descriptive paragraphs in both Scott and Austen, arguing that (much like we saw with McCarthy, Morgan, and Cohn in this project's introduction) those paragraphs are moments in which the narrative's temporal progression nearly comes to a stop (434). McAuley is, like Yoon Sun Lee (and this chapter), interested in how descriptions of natural space depict the unevenness of historical development and a multiplicity of temporalities. McAuley, however, argues for the "chronotope of uneven time," in which "geographical description's impedance of plot movement signals the vertiginous forward movement of the narrator's ecological thinking, where the overlaying of realist denotation and romantic sensibility on the face of landscape indicates the development of systems of social control" (448). Note the similarity between McAuley's reading of this "overlaying" to M.H. Abrams' definition of the Greater Romantic Lyric. For McAuley, geographic description is thus a tool of narrative and social control, of intentional design. That may very well be the case in *Waverley* – the only Scott novel McAuley discusses – but I argue that in *The Antiquary* landscape becomes, instead, a tool of accident, of a contingency and temporal multiplicity that disregards and even actively thwarts individual, social, and narrative intention. Kyle McAuley, "Imaginative Geographies in Scott and Austen," *The Wordsworth Circle* 52, no. 3 (Summer 2021).

Katie Trumpener's study of the traditions that led up to Scott's *Waverley* novels highlights how the "national tale" is distinct from (and preexisted) the historical novel in part for its focus on place and space over time/history. Trumpener reads Scott's work mostly as synonymous with *Waverley*, but *The Antiquary*'s renewed focus on locality suggests that Scott is staging a return, within the *Waverley* cannon itself, to something like the national tale. See either iteration of this argument, Katie Trumpener, "National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806-1830," *ELH* 60, no. 3 (Autumn 1993). And Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

space so tight and physically constraining that it opens up the possibility for falling, tripping, or physical discomfort without necessarily realizing that potential. Not all of *The Antiquary*'s real or possible events involve falling or physical harm (although many of them do), but the novel as a whole repeatedly conjures small spaces or limited landscape views as a way of bringing phenomenological experience to the forefront and of gesturing to a multiplicity of temporalities, histories, and relationships contained or potentially accessible within that space. This is what I refer to as the novel's propensity for "accident," a term Scott himself employs and that captures well the ongoing potential that things or people or temporalities, when corralled into a single place or narrative, might collide. Second, this close attention to local terrain and particular communal relationships operates in contrast to the eighteenth century prospect poem in that it does not offer the long view, and thus makes few claims for providing a broad perspective or comprehensive knowledge.[256] We are back, in short, to a spatialized version of that suspense I denote above, in which the reader is led to ask if anything can or will happen, if the novel can represent or make anything known. This is not to say that this novel refuses to articulate any form of knowledge at all, only that it is highly localized and incomplete.[257] In *The Antiquary*, history and knowledge are both fragmented things, only partially available in the present and only accessible in the midst of movement in place, exemplified in Scott's staging of characters' approaches to various locales (more on this later).

Finally, the novel's enactment of spatial compression, perceptual limitation, and the resulting disorientations of the body (and the reading mind) give special weight to certain

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[256] This is not to say that the prospect poem of the eighteenth century is not locally oriented, only that it offers a privilege and breadth of perception that Scott regularly refuses throughout this novel.

[257] This is also one way that *The Antiquary* is both like and unlike Smith's *Beachy Head*: Smith presents her work as a lesson in locality, in the "nature of the ground" and makes a point of highlighting just how much knowledge is not available to her or the modern subject in general. Scott does both of those things, and also uses the elevations of seaside cliffs as a primary metaphor. However, Smith's poem, as I argue in Chapter Two, still attempts to offer as wide a view as possible, across both space and time. (Smith, "Beachy Head," l. 126.)

durational experiences: i.e., waiting for the coach, preparing for war or invasion, regular labor, communal engagement, relaying generational secrets, antiquarian collection.[258] These durational experiences operate at the intersection of space and time and are fragmented histories in their own right: they are localized, individual experiences of everyday life that do not speak to its entirety or fuse into a causally coherent sequence of events. The rest of this chapter will explore in more detail a few of these durational modes as evidence of the novel's interweaving of space and time and the equally important interplay of "accident [and] intention," a binary I read as central to *The Antiquary*'s unique rendering, in form and content, of narrative progression and of temporal and historical experience. These intersections come to bear not only on the antiquarian pursuits named by its title, but also on scholarship more broadly and on the experience of reading, each of which the novel presents as a durational mode like all the rest. Scott's novel is certainly the outlier in this study: *The Antiquary* is neither a long poem nor a particularly long novel, relatively speaking. I close with it, however, because its diegetic manipulations of the temporality of reading and interpretation, along with its commitment to representing the strange happenings of localized spatiotemporal experience, help us to integrate certain patterns that I have tracked in the earlier chapters.

**Intention and Accident**

Throughout *The Antiquary*, Scott depicts his characters' approaches to key natural and built spaces in order to introduce time and history into the spatial domain. The temporalities and histories that emerge are incomplete but multiple, a temporal variation and fragmentation that is materialized in the equally irregular spatial organization of local landscapes and architecture. I

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[258] To make use of the example again, the coach ride will always feel longer, even if there are no delays (which in this text there always are), the tighter and more uncomfortable the coach's interior space becomes.

will read some of those approaches here, each of which presents spatial forms as narrating, in form, their own histories of development, histories that emerge out of *and* recreate a process in which "intention" gives way to "accident."

A little while after they arrive in Fairport, Lovel visits Oldbuck at Monkbarns, once a monastery and now the Antiquary's cluttered home. As Lovel makes his approach to the house, the structure of the house gives voice – it narrates – its own monastic history.[259] The oldest part of the house belonged once to the bailiff of the monastery, who collected and stored grain from vassals as rent, thus earning the house the title of "Monkbarns." Later inhabitants "made various additions in proportion to the accommodation required by their families," so the house's dismantled, irregular appearance remains as evidence of preceding owners' apparent "contempt of convenience within and architectural regularity without."[260] The history of Monkbarns first reveals itself in its own construction, its odd layout is the evidence and narration of its history of ownership.[261]

Once the gentlemen are inside, that narration is then taken up by Oldbuck himself, who must verbally guide Lovel through the house – "'take care of these three steps…now take care of the corner – ascend twelve steps, and ye are safe!'" – and through his very cluttered library so

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[259] The house of course does not literally speak. This is information we are given via the novel's narrator, but the information is put forth primarily as an explanation for the house's structural irregularity, which stands as a testament, a physical manifestation, of the house's history. Combined with the fact that the narration occurs *as* Lovel is moving toward the house, the narration reads as an embodied movement in place, narration made mobile and spatial.

[260] *The Antiquary*, 29-30.

[261] Penny Fielding argues for *The Antiquary* as depicting the outdatedness of landed wealth (Sir Arthur is the primary example), which does not allow for the circulation of wealth demanded by modern commerce. Fielding connects this economic history to the naming of homes (like Monkbarns) and local places and to the profitability of the novel itself. Fielding undervalues, in my opinion, the importance of topography in this novel, but helpfully explains how *The Antiquary* is caught between new and old economic modes and conceptions of land ownership as well as time-senses. See Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Shawn Malley thinks similarly about the connection between antiquarianism and the private ownership of historical objects. Shawn Malley, "Walter Scott's Romantic Archeology: New/Old Abbotsford and 'The Antiquary,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 40, no. 2 (2001).

that Lovel might finally find an empty chair "without stumbling over a prostrate folio."[262] The house's interior "labyrinth of inconvenient dark passages" has been exacerbated by Oldbuck's antiquarian pursuits, so that the artifacts of the history by which he is so fascinated now manifest primarily as tripping hazards.[263] The house's architecture – a readable historical "document" in its own right – and the folios strewn about Oldbuck's office both attest to and contain certain coincidences or accidents of history and the present: the house is itself the evidence of structural alterations made with unknown purpose by unknown previous owners, while Oldbuck's antiquarian artifacts gesture to *both* the incomplete evidence of history they contain and their own potential, as material objects, to accidentally trip up a visitor. The house is full of objects, people, and structures that increase the likelihood of encountering some hazard within, of falling or becoming lost, but that also narrate its past and present.[264] And it's Lovel's navigation first to the house and then through it, his movements in place, that enable that narration. History

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[262] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 31–32. Noah Heringman and Crystal B. Lake point out antiquarianism's essential literariness, as the collection of disparate objects required or invited narrations of and about those objects – antiquarianism was in part about giving objects a story. Noah Heringman and Crystal B. Lake, "Antiquarian Media Ecologies in the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Philology* 120, no. 1 (2022).

[263] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 31.

[264] Lovel manages to make his way through Monkbarns without stumbling, but the next chapter does feature an interpretive mishap at the Kaim of Kimprunes, a local site that Oldbuck is determined to read, incorrectly, as evidence of an ancient Roman encampment. Before Edie Ochiltree appears to correct him, Oldbuck narrates a long description of the site in which he conjures imaginatively the ancient encampment and its layout (42-44). This is one instance in which the vision of history that both the land and Oldbuck's antiquarian pursuits reveal is a false one, an inaccurate past that the novel allows to be imagined nonetheless. Oldbuck narrates his imagined design of the camp only to have Ochiltree, by some happenstance, appear to debunk him – scholarly intention devolves into accident via the interpretation of local space. I note in Chapter Two how similar this episode is to Smith's depiction of another Antiquary, in which the Antiquary can only imaginatively trace the lines of Roman encampments. Smith, "Beachy Head," l. 281.

Celine Sabiron argues that the Kaim of Kimprunes scene is Scott's warning against a historical reading of space, part of Sabiron's larger argument that Scott prioritizes geography over history. See Celine Sabiron, "Walter Scott and the Geographical Novel," in *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space Throughout History*, ed. Emmanuelle Peraldo (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

happens upon approach, so that moving through a space means moving through, almost

reenacting, its past.[265]

The Antiquary is consistently interested in history (especially on the personal and local

levels) as congealed within, as made manifest by, this translation of time in and into space.[266]

Yoon Sun Lee's reading of Waverley also argues for how Scott uses space to bring multiple

temporalities together, but with slightly different effects.[267] For Lee, Scott enacts this temporal

intermingling most notably in battle, during which the asynchronous movements of the

highlanders elucidate the ways that different characters or groups might be in the same place but

not in sync, not coordinated in their attack. Lee argues that Scott uses the peasant fighters'

lateness to battle to invoke Enlightenment stadial theory, so that "the condition of lateness can be

measured in units ranging from minutes to dynasties to stages of civilization…every moment is

thus a period."[268] Each moment, corresponding to the battle-timing of a different group, works as

a fractal of the scales of societal development, so that the whole history of human civilization

appears to be represented in a single space and a single event.[269] I make no claims for Scott's

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[265] This also rings true for the Glenallan home, where Lady Glenallan has purposefully prevented the house from being renovated or updated. As Edie Ochiltree moves through this outdated interior space toward Lord Glenallan's rooms, the house itself acts as a testament to the Glenallans' own obsession with the past, to how the possible incest surrounding the Neville-Glenallan marriage has left the family in a kind of stasis. The Glenallans, like their home, are unchanged and outdated.

[266] By "translation" I refer both to how time and history are *interpreted*, narrated, and recognized in material form by material bodies and to how the novel often seems to *transform* its temporal dimensions into spatial ones.

[267] Herbert Tucker similarly argues that Scott shows "every succeeding novelist" how to "educe from human constructions, up to and including inhabited rock-strewn landscape, the overlapping differentials of historical change." Tucker reads Scott as reading time as the "meaning" of space (271). Tucker, "Of Monuments and Moments: Spacetime in Nineteenth-Century Poetry."

[268] Yoon Sun Lee, "Austen's Scale Making," *Studies in Romanticism* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 181.

[269] Lee's reading of the battle space is also noticeably similar to how Joseph Frank describes the country fair scene in *Madame Bovary* (1856), which depicts different levels of society at different levels of the fair and moves between them in order to get as close as possible to the experience of simultaneity. Frank credits Flaubert with one of the earliest examples of "spatialization of form in the novel" (231). Frank's "spatial" form is decidedly atemporal, depicting all events as happening at once, in one two-dimensional space, rather than in sequence. Lee's reading is much more interested in, at least in terms of content, the movements of bodies through landscape and a-synchronicity of those movements than is Frank. Still, Lee's final conclusion that Scott merges multiple temporal scales in one space in order to represent all of the stages of societal development at once, along with her argument

rendering of space in *Waverley*, only that by the time we get to *The Antiquary* the novel's

commitment to representing multiple temporalities remains, but its interest in uniting them or in

zooming out to broader, global scales is much diminished. By the time we arrive at *The*

*Antiquary*, space is functioning in a very different way, so that its compressions – the spatial

limitations the novel's characters repeatedly butt up against – enunciate the experience of

duration, of felt time, rather than of historical totality. Monkbarn's "labyrinth of inconvenient

dark passages," through which one must wander without a sense of architectural organization, is

much closer to this novel's standard for spatiotemporal representation.[270]

Perhaps the best example of the novel's depiction of space and place and its

corresponding structuring principles is the Ruin of St. Ruth. Most of the more memorable events

of the novel take place around the ruin, and it is the one place that every major character of the

novel visits at some point.[271] The ruin is also highly localized, if only because it is hard to find,

hidden back in a "sequestered dell" so far that the narrator notes that one might travel around it

"in every direction" without seeing it unless "intention or accident carry you to the very spot."[272]

So although almost every character in the novel has some sort of interaction in and with the ruin,

they do so only because they have access to a relatively exclusive kind of communal knowledge.

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that Scott constructs space as chiefly aesthetic, certainly echoes Frank's spatial form. I am not necessarily unwilling to accept that *Waverley* precedes *Madame Bovary* and modernist spatial form in this scene, only that Scott is interested in a very different kind of spatiotemporal experience by the time he composes *The Antiquary*. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts," *The Sewanee Review* 53, no. 2 (Spring 1945): 221–40.

[270] Christopher Donaldson argues that *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is further evidence of Scott's antiquarianism and his commitment to a localized conceptualization of space. See Christopher Donaldson, "Deep Mapping and Romanticism: 'Practical' Geography in the Poetry of Sir Walter Scott," in *Romantic Cartographies: Mapping, Literature, Culture, 1789-1832*, ed. Sally Bushell, Julia Carlson, and Davies Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[271] Lovel and Hector duel around the ruin; Edie hides Lovel after the duel in the ruin's secret underground passages, where they also witness Dousterswivel's first manipulation of Sir Arthur; Edie and Sweenie Mucklebackit then return to the same site to trick Dousterswivel; Lady Glenallan is buried there at the same time, and her death sets off the Glenallan-Neville incest and inheritance plot that will eventually bring Lovel back to Fairport.

[272] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 159.

The group excursion to the ruin might thus be read as Lovel's initiation into Fairport society and geography, earned only after he helps save the Wardours from drowning.

The group excursion is also the reader's introduction to the ruin and to the complex variability of its surrounding topography, which itself differs significantly from the "general face" of the open and bare regional countryside. Much like Lovel's first visit to Monkbarns, the scene is describable only as a process of change and movement, only as part of the group's approach:

> This was eminently the case with the approach to the ruins of Saint Ruth, which was for some time merely a sheep-track, along the side of a steep and bare hill. By degrees, however, as this path descended, and winded round the hill-side, trees began to appear, at first singly, stunted, and blighted, with locks of wool upon their trunks, and their roots hollowed out into recesses, in which the sheep love to repose themselves...By and by the trees formed groups, fringed on the edges and filled up in the middle, by thorns and hazel bushes; and at length these groups closed so much together, that, although a broad glade opened here and there under their boughs, or a small patch of bog or heath occurred which had refused nourishment to the seed which they sprinkled round, and consequently remained open and waste, the scene might in the whole be termed decidedly woodland.
>
> (159)

The passage narrates the development of bare landscape into secluded woodland, following the group's own movements toward the ruin. The most obvious temporal scale of the passage is, then, the time it takes them to walk along the sheep track, down the hillside, and into the increasingly wooded environment that closes off the ruin from view. But the strange sense persists that the passage is also describing the plants as they grow, as if the woodland is developing in time as well as in space: "trees began to appear, at first singly…by and by the trees formed groups, fringed…by thorns and hazel bushes." It is as if the trees and thorns are moving and clustering together along with the people traveling through them, as if the movement through the woodland is also a sequential review of its maturation in time. And as with Monkbarns, part

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of what allows that temporal movement is the irregularity of the space – though it is, overall, "decidedly woodland,"  the sheep track is interspersed with patches of bogs and heaths and occasional openings to open glades, variations that allow for the passage to conjure, for the reader, a sense of spatiotemporal change.

But the ruin itself provides the most varied and visually interesting scene of all. The narrator characterizes both the ruin and the surrounding natural space as highly visually, aesthetically, and geographically irregular. The path to the ruin, as we have seen, is an discontinuous conglomeration of thick woods and bare bog or open glade. This strangely patchy space is mirrored in the structure of the ruin itself. The roof and entire western end of the church are "completely ruinous" and dismantled, but the eastern side and its ornate window remain almost entirely intact, "with all its ornaments and tracery work, and the sides upheld by flying butresses,[sic] whose airy support, detached from the wall against which they were placed…gave a variety of lightness to the building."[273] Immediately around the structure more contrast abounds: the lake's calm, "deep basin" of water is "finely contrasted with the haste and tumult" of the brook that feeds into it, and "a similar contrast" is visible "between the level green meadow, in which the ruins were situated" and the tall wooded area of "large timber-trees" a short distance away."[274] The varying degrees of movement and of structural and visual continuity create a scene of "repose" that manages to be "still and affecting without being monotonous."[275]

The ruin's natural scene is a place full of surprises, even in a chapter where none of those big plot points I mention above take place. When Oldbuck and the rest of the group finally reach the shaded glen after traveling through the woodland, they must climb through a break in an

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[273] Scott, 162.
[274] Scott, 161.
[275] Scott, 161.

"ancient and ruinous wall" blocking view of the ruin, so they arrive "suddenly upon a scene equally unexpected and interesting."[276] This is a landscape whose pleasure and sense of "repose" are derived directly from its irregularity and unpredictability, from the fact that it refuses the long view, thus preventing viewers from anticipating what is coming or where they are going until they arrive at it. So while there are many temporalities at play here – the growth patterns of plants, the movements of animals and people, the movement of narrative itself, along with the vague but clearly present human history of the ruin – they do not perform a full introduction to the scene itself.[277] This is not a prospect that can be viewed or understood from a distance, temporal or spatial, but can instead only be discovered via some combination of "intention or accident." We might even say that this space, like Monkbarns and the coach and Mrs. Macleuchar's shop, *converts* intention into accident, that it translates organized design (the original structure of the ruin, the path, a passerby's travel plans) into irregularity, movement, and surprise.

This conversion of intent into accident has a few important contexts and implications I want to expound upon before moving on. First, this is one way *The Antiquary*'s spatial organization and overarching attitude toward knowledge and representation imitate the profession from which it takes its title. Oldbuck's antiquarian vocation is intimately involved with practices of collecting and interpreting (or narrating) historical texts and artifacts, but often in such a way as to highlight the fragmentation and disconnection of the historical record more

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[276] Scott, 160.

[277] At the end of the very long introductory description of the ruin and its surroundings, Isabella shrewdly questions how it is that so little of the specific history of the ruin is known, only that it may once have been used for military purposes. The "meanest tower of a freebooting Baron" inspires community legends regularly, she observes, but nothing is known of these ruins "reared at such a cost" other than that, as any local countryman might say, "'they were made by the monks long syne'" (163). There are gaps in the ruin's historical record just as there are literal gaps in its structure, though Oldbuck does his best to guess at the original layout of the monastery and the occupation of the monks who lived there.

than its coherence.[278] Antiquarianism was often criticized for the emphasis that it placed on collecting and interpreting the details of history, in the form of disparate artifacts, over organizing those details into a broad historical vision.[279] Those details are "accidents" in the Aristotelian sense: they are non-essential, secondary material remnants of the broader machinations of history, but antiquarianism puts them at the center of its pursuits.[280] In the Ruin of St. Ruth scene, the novel refuses a complete and unhindered view of both the landscape and its history so as to highlight the antiquarian tendencies of the work as a whole, a narrative methodology that is itself a conversion of broad historical considerations into the limited vision of everyday life.[281] There is, as a result, no guessing at exactly what has happened at the ruin or what will happen, and thus the novel's most central characters will return to the ruin over and over again, exploring and making use of its secret passages, gravesites, and relative seclusion.

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[278] See Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of a Novelist*. See also, Yoon Sun Lee, "A Divided Inheritance: Scott's Antiquarian Novel and the British Nation," *ELH* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 39.

[279] Heringman and Lake detail William Gilpin's dislike of antiquarianism, which he criticizes for its emphasis on detail over a coherent image of the whole (7). Interestingly, Gilpin contrasts this attention to individual details to the picturesque style, even though, as John Barrell argues, the picturesque is itself characterized by the individual or unique features of the landscape. The landscape surrounding St. Ruth, with its surprises and unique, unintegrated features is, in this way, a good representative of the picturesque as an artistic and literary style. See, Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*, 54. Gilpin himself emphasizes the "roughness" of objects in the picturesque and connects this to animal and natural entities as well as to human facial features, William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travel, on Sketching Landscape: To Which Is Added a Poem, on Landscape Painting*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Blamire, 1794). For a history of the role of Gilpin's picturesque in Austen's work and the realist novel, see William Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[280] "accident, n.". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/1051?rskey=6aruNW&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed January 24, 2023).

[281] Although this novel is in conflict with Lukács' claim that Scott offers a broad vision of the world and history – that "'totality of objects'" so central to his prescription of the novel form – Lukács does much to emphasize how that totality requires the novel to "penetrate into the small details of everyday life…it must bring out what is specific to this time through the complex interaction of all these details." Lukács reads this attention to detail as part of the novel's comprehensive historical project. I read *The Antiquary* as, like antiquarianism itself, skewing its focus disproportionately toward detail, locality, and thus away from totality. Georg Lukács, "The Historical Novel," in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 247.

The novel's narrative is, in its own right, a disjointed structure reflective of the similarly fragmented view of history to which antiquarianism subscribes.[282]

Second, that narrative structure is made most visible in those scenes that depend upon and describe the intersections between time and space. The transitions between intention and accident are spatiotemporally realized. *The Antiquary*'s disjointed nature is thus a reflection of Fairport's nature, of its landscapes and topography, and vice versa. This novel is also full of strange variations, maintaining an irregular mixture of bareness and "luxuriant profusion" that refuses the assurance of total clarity or narrative unity. This narrative mode luxuriates in material details, phenomenological experience, and in temporal abundance; it is extensive in how it follows the undulations of the earth but not in its views or locales. Like any visitor to Fairport, the reader of *The Antiquary* might easily travel through it "without being aware of what is well worth seeing," unless guided by some combination of "intention or accident."[283] And it is, indeed, the interplay between intention (narration, closure, authorial design, scholarly study) and accident (contingency, falling or tripping, false alarms, "prostrate folios," natural variation) that fuels the movements of this particular narrative.[284]

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[282] Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of a Novelist*, 89.

[283] W. Tatarkiewicz also mentions this dichotomy in his 5-part definition form in aesthetics, where the fourth definition, "Form D," is Aristotle's "*conceptual essence* of an object," defined in opposition to "the accidental features of objects." That "Form B" is "applied to what is *directly given to the senses*" – the material of form, and what Catherine Gallagher uses to define form-as-style – encapsulates well Tatarkiewicz's claim that form contains many opposites. The conflicting uses of the word come from the "double heritage" of two Greek words (*morphē* and *eidos*) applied to (respectively) both visible forms and to conceptual forms (216). In short, the intention/accident dichotomy that I expound upon here is deeply enmeshed in the longer history of form in aesthetics. Tatarkiewicz, "Form in the History of Aesthetics."

[284] Keith G. Thomas considers a similar interplay between intention and contingency in the larger context of the narrative/lyric divide. Thomas reads Austen and Coleridge as converging in their mutual interest in the relation between internal and external experience, arguing that one major issue for both is the "interplay between inner intention and outer contingency" (901). For Thomas, this is evidence of Austen's lyric-esque rendering of public contingency through private consciousness. I, on other hand, read *The Antiquary's* conversions of intention into accident as evidence of Scott's localized, public, limited time-sense, a project that is (like all those in this study) quite different from, if not a rejection of, any lyric or narrative attempt to subsume public history into private experience. See Keith G. Thomas, "Jane Austen and the Romantic Lyric: Persuasion and Coleridge's Conversation Poems," *ELH* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1987).

Finally, it's worth noting how closely this reading chimes with Georg Lukács' description of the modern novel's plot structure. Whereas drama prioritizes the "personal initiative" of the hero and uses that to guide the events of plot, the modern novel must reflect a "new relationship between individual and society" in which it is very rare that "individual action has a direct social aim." As a result, the novel's "characters act according to their individual inclinations and passions, but the result of their actions is something quite different from what they *intended*."[285] In short, Lukács describes the modern novel's plot structure, on the whole, as organized by the transformation of intention into accident. In *The Antiquary,* Scott (whose novels are already central to Lukács' conceptualization of the modern novel) takes up that structure and molds it into a phenomenology – a material movement in space and time, a tripping up of the feet – that, in a special twist, turns any claim for historiographic or narrative comprehensiveness on its head.

**Suspensions**

One of *The Antiquary*'s most fully-realized narrative details is its portrayal of the Mucklebackits, a local fishing family, whose labors and economic status set them apart from much of the rest of Fairport and provide, in particular, an important foil to Oldbuck's wealthy antiquarianism. The Mucklebackits are a prime example of the variations in life rhythms across Fairport society – another kind of temporal abundance – and of those rhythms' relationship to physical labor and the particularities of place and landscape. That the portions of the novel dedicated to the Mucklebackits' are often stylistically and narratively unique is further proof of the novel's attempts to register not only the period's changing conceptions of time but, also, the

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[285] Lukács, "The Historical Novel," 244–45.

unevenness of that change. Within the Mucklebackit family unit, the arduous and ongoing labors

of most of its members are further contrasted with the psychophysical suspension of their

matriarch, Elspeth. Elspeth's own laborious recounting of the past is, on the one hand, the

novel's primary example of the phenomenological nature of memory and the act of narration

and, on the other, the reenactment of the novel's own time-sense.

The Mucklebackits and the larger fishing community they represent operate within a

notation of time that E.P. Thompson denotes as "task-orientation," where natural rhythms, like

the changing tides, guide labor and structure time rather than abstract, non-local clock time.[286]

For Thompson, attending to the tides rather than to the clock makes for a work rhythm that

mimics natural patterns and relies upon the laborer's access to the landscape and its resources.

Task-orientation engenders a decidedly localized and embodied experience of time that sets it

apart from post-industrialist abstract temporality and work rhythms, which create a much more

distinct separation between work and life than task-orientation.[287] For example, we are first

introduced to the Mucklebackits at home, where the entire family is at work "long past midnight"

preparing the fish caught that day for the "unremitting operation of broiling and frying that part

of the produce reserved for home consumption."[288] Later, when haggling with Oldbuck, Maggie

Mucklebackit states that her husband and son were "'awa this morning by four o'clock, when the

sea was working like barm wi' yestreen's wind,'" despite their having been out in the storm most

of the previous night and day.[289] Even when Steenie Mucklebackit dies at sea, his father returns

quickly to work, reminding Oldbuck coldly that "gentles" may be able to sit at home and mourn,

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[286] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 60–61.
[287] Thompson, 60.
[288] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 256–57.
[289] Scott, 113.

"'but the like o' us maun to our wark again, if our hearts were beating as hard as my hammer.'"[290]

The lives of the Mucklebackits and the rest of the fishing community are driven unceasingly, like the sea itself, by the rhythms of the tides, making for a radically different kind of labor and life-rhythm than that which Oldbuck or any in the higher echelons of Fairport society enjoy. The work-rhythms brought about by the variations of local weather patterns and the tides do not combine easily with the slower and more leisurely pace of the local gentry, nor with the urban-industrial workday, nor with, as evidenced in the opening coach scene, abstract systems of national and international trade and travel. Once again, the novel attempts to bring together multiple temporal scales and measurements only as an act of juxtaposition, as a cohabitation of temporalities in place. As with the scene at St. Ruth's, there is much to be "finely contrasted."[291]

Certainly one figure of contrast and contradiction is the oldest figure in the Mucklebackit household, Elspeth, who sits by the fire in a "passive and half stupefied" state while the rest of the family works through the night. Elspeth sits working "lazily and mechanically the old-fashioned Scottish thrift," a tool already "universally superseded" by the more modern spinning wheel. Elspeth, like her spindle, is far past her prime and has been superseded by other more productive workers in the family. She is, as Scott's accompanying reference to fairytale indicates, a figure of suspension, of non-action, repetition, or a failure to progress.[292] Elspeth is a figure of living memory, a human relic of the past who remains in a semi-conscious state until she tells her tale to Lord Glenallan. As is typical for *The Antiquary*, it is Edie Ochiltree who

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[290] Scott, 322.
[291] Scott, 161.
[292] Scott, 257. Scott writes that the distaff and spindle was so outdated by this point that even Sleeping Beauty could "roam through all Scotland without risk of piercing her hand with a spindle, and dying of the wound" (257).

offers the best interpretation of her mental state, as some parts of her mind seem "'laid waste and decayed, but then there's parts that look the steever, and the stronger, and the grander, because they are rising just like the fragments amang the ruins o' the rest.'"[293] This description of Elspeth's mind looks much like the description of St. Ruth's Priory chapters earlier, where aesthetic pleasure is derived from the distinct contrasts between the ruined sections of the structure and the nearly untouched eastern window.[294] Elspeth and St. Ruth's both make for strange and incomplete remnants of the past, both unable to speak to the entirety of their histories but still central to the novel's narrative machinations. Elspeth thus appears as the embodied realization, in content, of that more pervasive formal suspension I mention above, in which the novel leaves the reader unsure of the work's ability to relay its own story.

When Elspeth does finally give voice to her past, she makes clear the fact that, for her, the act of narration itself is a kind of labor. It takes a great physical effort for her to relate that history – in which she admits to plotting with Lady Glenallan to keep the Earl from marrying Eveline – to Glenallan, so that she eventually becomes "exhausted by the continuous narration of such unusual length," the latter half of her story thus being "more broken, and...had no longer the lucid conciseness" with which she begins the tale."[295] Elspeth's physical exertion in storytelling mimics the physical activity she describes in her tale, in which Elspeth is pulled into Lady Glenallan scheme precisely because she, a true Mucklebackit, was so active in the late hours of

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[293] Scott, 278.

[294] Judith Wilt argues in *Secret Leaves* that St. Ruth's subterranean tunnels and gravesites form the subconscious of the novel (in distinctly gothic fashion), because it is at the ruin that many secrets are discovered – Dousterswivel is revealed as a fraud, Lady Glenallan's burial allows Elspeth to finally tell her story. Those discoveries read to me less as evidence of the Freudian underpinnings of the novel than of the novel's broader interest in accentuating roles the variations of topographical elevation and landscape play in the plot. Still, this connection between the ruin and Elspeth's mind provides an interesting connection between the patchiness of personal memory and, on a larger scale, of historical structures and artifacts. Judith Wilt, *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[295] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 318.

the night. Elspeth depicts her past self as always walking, searching, and waiting, usually at odd

times of night, a pattern she takes up in her storytelling: "'Where am I wandering?" she asks

mid-sentence, as her own wandering narration becomes increasingly disjointed in structure. Even

in her current old age and immobility, Elspeth is a restless and wandering figure, at first because

her husband is a fisherman and then, later, because of her fraught relationship with her own

past.[296] She exemplifies a restless tendency to linger and labor at the same time, manifested both

in her past activity and her present narration of it. In a novel that itself does not move, that does

not change its setting, Elspeth acts as the embodiment of a kind of movement-in-place

characteristic of the text's own mimetic and diegetic motions.

This is not to say that what content Elspeth is able to relay does not have an impact. It is

only through Elspeth that Lord Glenallan learns that Eveline gave birth before she died, paving

the way for Lovel to return and claim his inheritance. Eveline's fall from the cliff is the

centerpiece of Elspeth's story and, though part of its prehistory, a key event in the novel (as

much as this narrative allows). Before she actually falls, Lady Glenallan suggests it as a more

direct way to prevent the marriage: "She walks often to that cliff that overhangs your dwelling to

look for her lover's boat,'" the Lady says of Eveline, "'let him find her forty fathom lower than

he expects!'"[297] Eveline's fall is then acted out in reality, not strictly as murder, but as a

manifestation of Lady Glenallan's original wishes nonetheless. Lukács' remark that if *The*

*Antiquary* were a drama Lady Glenallan would be its tragic hero rings true: if, for Lukács, drama

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[296] Notice how much Elspeth resembles Margaret from *The Excursion*, who also wanders to and from her home and for whom that wandering eventually becomes a sign of her obsession with the past, both in relation to her lost husband and her inability to modernize her labor. We can also see connections between both of these figures and the despondent women wanderers of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*. That these women wanderers also come to represent a certain mental absence or madness is further evidence of Ingrid Horrocks's claim that the Romantics often project certain anxieties about mobility, affective vulnerability, and poverty onto the figure of the woman wanderer. Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814*.

[297] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 316.

is driven by the force of individual will, Lady Glenallan is the only figure whose intentions are made manifest in so direct a fashion.[298] At the same time, Lady Glenallan's intentions are, quite literally, transformed into accident, into Eveline's fall – that threat of "falling headlong" presented to us in the novel's opening is realized in Elspeth's tale.[299]

Beyond Lady Glenallan, Eveline's death is, ultimately, a matter of elevation – she is indeed found "forty fathom lower" than she should be – and so is another example of this novel's fascination with the gradations of the local landscape, with how variations in topography and terrain might impact a community and narrative. Elspeth's story and her telling of it make visible in content the novel's formal rendering of something like task-orientation, in which narration becomes a sort of labor (both for the reader and the narrator) that is, like the Mucklebackits, guided by local temporalities and the variations of landscape. Much like fishing with the tides, navigating *The Antiquary* is a labor ongoing.

### En Attendant

With *The Antiquary*, Scott closes the original *Waverley* trilogy by reinforcing and lingering within a certain kind of narrative space, one that both abounds in temporalities and puts

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[298] Lukács, "The Historical Novel," 232.

[299] It appears from Elspeth's tale that Eveline does not die immediately from her fall because the tide is so high, so that Elspeth is able to fish her out of the water and bring her to the cottage to give birth. As with Eveline's fall, the ground in *The Antiquary* is often shifting, quite literally. We witness the exact opposite event early in the novel when Edie and the Wardours get stuck *below* the cliffs at high tide. They are trapped not because of a fall, but because the tide comes in so quickly that they literally lose the ground they walk on. Lovel then rescues them by pulling them up those same "forty fathoms" from which his mother fell, but this time in the opposite direction. The same elevation presents a different threat to the Wardours, but is dangerous and disorienting nonetheless. Something similar occurs in many of the scenes at the ruin, where the variations between the hills surrounding the "amphitheater"-like scene and subterranean vaults and passages under the ruin make for equally distinct changes in elevation and perspective. It is also an active gravesite, a fact that Edie and Steenie Mucklebackit use to their advantage when they lure Dousterswivel to the ruin, help him dig for "treasure," and then leave him passed out in the freshly-dug hole. The ground surrounding the ruin is shifting too, though in less natural or cyclical ways than at the cliffs. Both sites provide a link to the past, and some sense of continuity for the narrative as a whole, but they are also sites of the greatest phenomenological disruption and destabilization. For such a highly localized place and community, the possibility for spatial disorientation is high, the ground is constantly shifting.

their relationships in question. If Oldbuck figures as the novel's core personality, it is no small

thing that he is first introduced as temporally confused, as both early and too late for the noon

coach. Oldbuck moves out of that initial confusion rather quickly: the coach does eventually

come, and its further delays are a result of his conscious action and control rather than persistent

disorientation. But the novel does not move on so quickly. *The Antiquary* consistently joins the

feeling that we might have missed the boat, so to speak, with the persistent urge to continue

waiting for it. The novel initiates a mode of staying-in-place by presenting events as always, in

some way, out of sequence or as only supplementary, as mere accidents. This last section will

explore the last and most extreme example of that mode, which connects the reading experience

to other labors featured throughout the text. This includes Oldbuck's own antiquarian pursuits,

which the novel alternately mocks and, as we have seen, presents as a legitimate historiographic

and narrative project. *The Antiquary* presents both novel reading and antiquarian scholarship as

concentrated versions of already localized, everyday experiences of life and of broader global

and national changes.[300]

The temporal disconnect with which the novel begins works itself out much more

literally and on a larger scale at the end of the novel, when all of Fairport responds to the beacon

indicating invasion (this may be its primary narrative progression – individual disorientation

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[300] One of these experiences is, of course, wartime, which Mary Favret has so influentially argued is chiefly about being unsure of both the order of events and of their larger historical and personal significance. Wartime, as Favret argues, "is an affective zone, a *sense* of time that, caught in the most unsettled sort of present, without knowledge of its outcome, cannot know its own borders" (18). It is thus apt that Scott compares the "written hand-bill" that announces the Hawes Fly to a military bulletin, which Nicola J. Watson's accompanying note labels as "a military dispatch for domestic publication, and therefore economical with the truth" (439). But the key there is that the hand-bill "*lied* on the present occasion like a bulletin," because, despite its authority and specificity, it does not actually represent reality – the church steeple rings noon but no coach is in sight (13, emphasis mine). Both military dispatches and coach schedules describe a state and chronology of events that are not fully registered or acted out in everyday, localized experience. The bulletin-esque hand-bill is a small marker of the period's prevailing sense that there might be a disconnect, or at least a delay, between what is happening here and the knowledge of what is happening *out there*, and thus, despite the posted schedule, major events may come unexpectedly and without warning, or may have been missed altogether. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*.

becomes communal). The whole town gathers with surprising efficiency and enthusiasm, so that the "good sense and firmness of the people supplied almost all the deficiencies of inexperience."[301] Lovel also returns in this scene to tell those gathered that the beacon was in fact a false alarm, the watchman having been misled by a bonfire which some idle people had made" (425). The false invasion scene does spur on the conclusion of the novel's other plots – Lovel is restored to his rightful place as Glenallan heir (although it turns out that he had already discovered the truth himself) and later marries Isabella with Sir Arthur's blessing, who has also been relieved of his debts and the schemes of Dousterswivel. So the false alarm is also a false climax, as it does not really affect any narrative resolution nor does it initiate real military action, proving only that the town *would have* been ready for action if the French had actually invaded. This conclusion offers no resolution that goes beyond the communal or personal, no assurance that invasion has actually been avoided or that it has not happened somewhere else. The novel closes, much like it opens, with a sense of non-happening, delay, and misidentification. There is little for this narrative to close because so little conflict has actually occurred – the ending is itself a non-event. Scott leaves us instead with a town in an ongoing state of anxious attention, waiting around like a coach traveler for something, possibly, to arrive.[302]

The concluding false alarm plays out rather differently, however, for *The Antiquary*'s reader, who already knows that the alarm is false before Lovel arrives to tell the rest of the town (and not just because any reader, by 1816, would know that no invasion had occurred). Scott's

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[301] Scott, *The Antiquary*, 423.

[302] This sort of "attention" coincides with Lily Gurton-Wachter's study of militarization of attention in the Romantic period, which she reads as evidence of war's impact on everyday life and thought. Gurton-Wachter argues for this emphasis on attention as connected to Romantic texts' equal emphasis on the attention required for reading (and on the reading experience in general). The false invasion scene in *The Antiquary* plays with both forms of attention, but uses the footnotes rather than blank verse (Gurton-Wachter's focus) to play with the limits and temporality of readerly attention. Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention*.

editorial notes actively undermine any sense of anticipation for the reader, further disrupting narrative chronology. The first instance of this is Scott's somewhat disorganized note on the "gynecocracy" of the fishing villages of Friths of Forth and Tay, footnoted midway through the novel in the chapter on the Mucklebackits' late-night domestic work. In order to prove his point about the primacy of women in the hierarchies of fishing communities, Scott includes an anecdote about a fleet of Russian ships that entered the harbor and were mistaken for French invaders. "A general alarm was excited," and all the fishermen immediately boarded the gun-boats and set out to defend the coast before realizing that the Russians were not a threat. The "county gentleman of Mid-Lothian" still found the region's quick action worthy of praise, however, and awarded the local men with a "silver punch-bowl." The "fisher-women" then put in a complaint to receive some separate reward of their own, as "it was they who would have been sufferers if their husbands had been killed, and it was by their permission and injunctions that they embarked on board the gun-boats for public service."[303] Just like the false alarm at Fairport, this real fishing village is fooled by a false alarm but still honored for their quick and effective response to it.

Scott then includes another, but nearly identical, anecdote in a note to the opening of the final chapter, just as the alarm has gone off in Fairport but before anyone knows it is for naught. This time Scott notes the "real incident" of February 2nd, 1804 that inspired the novel's version of the event. The long note describes, in greater detail than in the narrative itself, the assembly of men from various counties, many of whom had to travel dozens of miles to reach the alarm-post. Once again, the quick assembly and display of preparedness is what makes this non-invasion remarkable, this time with the added benefit of representing the "times and feelings," so

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[303] Scott, *The Antiquary*, n. 17, p. 433.

prevalent immediately after the battle of Trafalgar, "which we can hardly hope to make the rising generation comprehend."[304] So while the people of Fairport stand at the ready, impressively prepared for something that has not happened, Scott's reader should experience, at the same time, the odd sensation that this has *already* happened. Again we encounter a doubled sense of time, where the novel's characters anticipate an event they have not experienced while the reader rereads a story they have already heard twice, *and* where the work's supplementary text outpaces its own core narrative.

These two notes are remarkable for the ways that, even as they foreclose the possibility that the narrative will depict an actual invasion or military action, they continue to contemplate that possibility to a degree that the central text does not. The fisher-women in the gynecocracy note display their communal power by speaking in conditional would-haves, reminding the government of how they *would have* suffered had their husbands died, and *would have* been the ones to give their husbands permission to do so in the first place. The false alarm of 1804 remains important for Scott, although it "may be now held of too little importance even for a note upon a work of fiction" by his younger readers, because it stood at the time as a "propitious omen" that the forces of Scotland "had the spirit to look in the face the danger which they had taken arms to repel."[305] That show of force and its consequential good omen present the possibility that any invader would "meet with the most determined opposition" and possibly would be defeated. Here preparedness gestures directly toward success, it opens up the novel and Scottish history to what might have been and revels in the very potential for victory. It also celebrates a particular sort of action-in-non-action: a physical, communal, and narrative posture

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[304] Scott, n. 25, p. 435.
[305] Scott, n. 25, p. 437.

that stands ready to face the contingencies and possibilities of history and of the future

(especially when it is most difficult to tell those two temporalities apart) even if nothing actually

happens.[306] Either way, the tension of this in-between state is still enough to generate new

possibilities; it is a staying-in-place that still warrants telling, a different kind of suspense.

This is a scholarly posture as well. Oldbuck is of course the primary figure for a

scholarship that prioritizes detail and fragmentation over comprehensive knowledge. That

antiquarian orientation is one that the novel, and Scott himself, both employs as an ironic tool of

self-mockery and repeatedly legitimizes as attuned to and integrated within the time-sense of

local, everyday life and of the novel itself. The novel's final passage reaffirms the simultaneous

ignorance and insight of this scholarly posture. To the very end, Lovel continues to assure

Oldbuck that he plans to complete a great project of epic poetry, named by Oldbuck as *The

Caledoniad*, and that Oldbuck will write the editorial notes for it. The narrator makes clear that

Lovel will never actually write it – it was only ever a ploy to distract Oldbuck from Lovel's

designs toward wooing Isabella. Oldbuck's enthusiasm for the mere prospect of this project and

his failure to recognize Lovel's lack of interest makes him the butt of the joke – one last

opportunity for reader and narrator to laugh together – but the narrative ends, nonetheless, with

the declaration that he has found a way to complete his notes even without the primary text:

> He [Oldbuck] often enquires whether Lord Geraldin has commenced the
> Caledoniad, and shakes his head at the answers he receives. *En attendant*, however,
> he has completed his notes, which, we believe, will be at the service of any one who
> chooses to make them public, without risk or expense to the Antiquary.
>
> (430)

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[306] Frank Kermode's analysis of the End, of apocalypse, rings true here: "Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain 'in the middest.'" Past and future are not the same, but they are both products of the present. *The Antiquary* simulates well the disorientating feeling of being "in the middest." Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: With a New Epilogue* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8. For more on the role of contingency in the eighteenth-century novel, especially in connection to contemporary conceptions and experiences of reading, see Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century*.

The notes form a supplemental text written "*en attendant*," while waiting. They mark a kind of scholarship born out of an attentive anticipation, out of a prolonged period of action in non-action. This scholarly posture of endurance and composition *en attendant* mimics Oldbuck's own antiquarian impulses – it is work done independently and without full context – as well as those of the narrative – it is presented out of order and gestures toward something that may never come. This is a work written in anticipation of something else and thus without any assurance that it will ever be truly productive or public, that it will ever make claims upon the world or demand its attention.[307] For *The Caledoniad*, *The Antiquary*, and *Forms Less Solid* alike: an apt ending indeed.

And of course for the initial *Waverley* trilogy, *The Antiquary* marks a rather anticlimactic end as well. That *The Antiquary* is the closest to Scott's moment of composition is the reason, I argue, that it is the most narratively cluttered and spatially limited. For Scott, the closer one gets to one's own present the harder it is to put things in order, to decide what has already happened and what is yet to come. This novel offers no long views, only the "sequestered dell," the journey to which is already a result of coincidence, lateness, accident. It is full of spaces that are aesthetically pleasing and full of unexpected contrasts, but that do not represent the landscape as a whole or provide a clear path for future progression. *The Antiquary*, by extension, is the final installment in a trilogy that has backed itself into too tight a space, too close and too present to keep moving.

What I hope to have elucidated, in my own final installment, is how that spatial compression serves to pressurize, to make heavy and tangible, the novel's own durational time-

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[307] Anne-Lise Francois' *Open Secrets* does much to elucidate the importance in Romantic and Victorian literature of knowledges that cannot be articulated or acted upon. Francois, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*.

sense, in which some of the most common binaries by which we organize temporal experience –

cause and effect, linearity and cyclicality, past and present, work and life – are confused or made

to exist together all at once. This is why intention and accident are such useful descriptors of this

novel's formal and narrative movements. Unlike with cause and effect, intention makes a gesture

toward a consequence that it cannot manifest, and so is instead turned upon itself, transformed

into an accident, into a mishap of history or a supplement of the text, a false alarm. In this sense

*The Antiquary* is the anti-*Waverley*, the first novel's formal and generic intentions made into

accident.[308] But this dead-ending of the *Waverley* trilogy does not mean that *The Antiquary*

offers no sense of possibility for the future – its emphasis on contingency and potential, the

happier side of accident, make that clear. It means only that this novel's primary attentions are

elsewhere: on the fragments of the past, on the local ground, on domestic life, on the act of

waiting itself, on all the little things. Like Oldbuck's notes, *The Antiquary* happens *en attendant*,

in the midst of a waiting for that is also a drawing near, a gesture of closeness.[309] This study has

attempted to follow its example.

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[308] Ian Duncan argues something similar about *Rob Roy* in an effort to correct a long critical history that has taken *Waverley* as the singular representative of Scott's canon and his construction of the historical novel. Duncan's focus is on *Rob Roy*'s representation of the Highlands as a colonial frontier and its disruption of the *Waverley* model in which the past is rendered in a "rationally or sentimentally clear perspective" (101). Duncan and I are aligned in the belief that *Waverley* does not synecdochally represent the entirety of Scott's cannon and its representations of history. Duncan, "Primitive Inventions: Rob Roy, Nation, and World System."

[309] In the Old French root, "to attend" means also to "stretch to," to turn toward and wait upon. Here waiting becomes an act of care, an attention that is also an act of intimacy. "attend, v.". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/12780 (accessed February 05, 2023).

## CHAPTER VI

## Coda

As much of this project has probably made clear, I am not all that fond of closure. Even since my earliest days as a reader, I have always been more partial to beginnings than to endings (except, as in *The Antiquary*, for the ones that are hardly endings at all). As a result, I prefer to think of this final chapter as yet another extension, as a gesture toward thoughts ongoing. So, in one final, indulgent attempt to delay the end, I would like to use these final pages to go back, briefly, to the conceptual beginnings of this project and to present some last, lingering ideas about formal duration and this project's personal and social contexts.

The first iterations of this project lie rather predictably with Wordsworth, but less predictably with the very short "Old Man Travelling: Animal Tranquility and Decay," drafted between 1796 and 1797 and published in *Lyrical Ballads* and again, heavily edited, in *Poems by William Wordsworth* in 1815.[310] In that poem, Wordsworth's speaker describes the Old Man thus:

> in his face, his step,
> His gait, is one expression; every limb,
> His look and bending figure, all bespeak
> A man who does not move with pain, but moves
> With thought – He is insensibly subdued
> To settled quiet
>
> (3-8)

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[310] William Wordsworth, "Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquility and Decay, a Sketch," in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014).

The fantasy here is that the Old Man's external appearance and movements are somehow the perfect embodiment of his internal state of being. The Old Man's "face," "gait," and "limb[s]" are thoroughly readable, unambiguous, and in harmony – they are "one expression." But this fantasy is promptly and repeatedly debunked as the poem goes on. On the narrative level, that debunking occurs when the Old Man finally speaks, relaying that he is actually on his way to visit his dying son, and so is, we may infer, the very opposite of someone who "does not move with pain." Formally, however, the fantasy is disrupted even earlier, in the very midst of the speaker's initial description. Lines six and seven, when taken together, read as if the movements of the mind are the Old Man's propelling force: he "moves / with thought." This works well with the speaker's initial reading of the Old Man's perfect, unified expression. But the seventh line alone reads like thought might actually be something that slows or suppresses him: "with thought – He is insensibly subdued." The enjambed lines are the first crack in the poem's mind/body alignment façade, and they leave us with a doubled, contradictory reading in which thought (and, by extension, the poetry by which thought is conveyed) might either be the thing that pushes one forward or that slows one down, both propelling and hindering progress at the same time.[311] The lines embody well what Giorgio Agamben labels as a poetic "hanging back," when the enjambed line forms an "ambiguous gesture, that turns in two opposed directions at once: backwards (*versa*), and forwards (*pro-versa*)."[312] The tension of the passage lies somewhere in that doubled movement, in the "ambiguous gesture" of enjambed blank verse that allows the moving and subduing functions of poetry to overlap and that turns the Old Man's movements, his

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[311] There is, of course, another way of interpreting the seventh line: the thought that subdues the Old Man may not be his own but the speaker's, whose interpretation of what the Old Man's movements "bespeak" is, itself, an elision of the very real emotional pain and grief that are the true motivation for the Old Man's journey. This reading reveals another, equally characteristic anxiety of the poem – that thought and poetry itself may suppress the bodies and minds it depicts in the very act of depicting them. In this reading, the poem anticipates much of the criticism of Wordsworth's oeuvre in modern scholarship.

[312] Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 41.

"expression," into another kind of "ambiguous gesture." Here the reading eye becomes

vulnerable to the same complications as the other bodily and intellectual movements the lines

themselves describe: the verse's thematic ambiguity and formal enjambment push the reader

forward and backward at the same time.

"Old Man Travelling" is an early articulation of a set of problematics that I have long

read as central to Wordsworth's oeuvre and that, in turn, have been central to this project since

its own earliest days. The first of those problematics is that ambiguity listed above, in which

thought and poetry are forces that simultaneously energize and exhaust, initiate and slow

movement or progress. Thematically, Wordsworth often seems to want poetry to initiate

movement and progress – in this way he is rather Wanderer-esque – but enacts, in his formal

composition, an equal and opposite commitment to poetry as a particularly difficult, slow kind of

rhetorical terrain. Second, "Old Man Travelling" equivocates about to what degree affective and

intellectual experience may manifest or be "read" in and on the body, a problematic that also

figures the moving/subduing dichotomy as itself related to questions of phenomenology and its

representations in poetry. Wordsworth reworks some version of these questions in multiple

poems. "The Old Cumberland Beggar" (1800), "The Discharged Soldier" passage in *The

Prelude*, and the many iterations of *The Ruined Cottage*, among others, each reexamine these

questions without ever really resolving them.[313] *The Excursion*'s more extended contemplation

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[313] Julia Carlson's reading of "The Discharged Solider" also depicts Wordsworth as chiefly concerned with a politically disempowered and physically and emotionally depleted figure – the soldier – who is reanimated by his conversation with the speaker as the poem progresses. Carlson sees Wordsworth as attempting to navigate a dynamic similar to the one I identify here, but ultimately reads Wordsworth as solving the problem of slowness or disempowerment through the "restorative" powers of blank verse, which itself mimics the embodied movements of the men through landscape (163). In my reading, Wordsworth is not so decided one way or the other about the problem of poetry as a potentially energizing or exhausting force. Or, at least, I see this problematic as, itself, energizing for the very fact that it *is* a problem, and remains so throughout Wordsworth's career. On the whole, though, Carlson's project has been a particularly helpful articulation of how the ordinance survey, the inclusion of Wordsworth's poetry in local guidebooks, and contemporary debates about elocution gave Wordsworth's blank verse a distinctly embodied and emplaced temporality relevant to the temporalities I discuss throughout this project.

of the interpretive difficulty that faces, figures, and other "frames" pose is itself evidence of Wordsworth's prologued engagement with these questions, and of how those questions inform poetic form and reading practice in general.

This tension is an apt, condensed analogy for the broader tension that Jonathan Sachs identifies as emerging in the Romantic era between the sense of speediness enacted by modern clock time – which Wordsworth himself laments in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* – and the much slower and vaster temporality of a newly-discovered deep time.[314] Sachs highlights Romantic poetry as portraying "temporal experiences" that "suggest that experiences of slowness and acceleration are intricately entangled."[315] The interplay between moving and subduing in "Old Man Travelling" is another rendering of this entanglement of acceleration and slowness. That that interplay depends so heavily upon the form of the poetry itself is further evidence of how the poetry makes its readers "develop skills of attentiveness and a newly resonant awareness of slow time."[316] My reading of "Old Man Travelling" highlights how blank verse perpetuates this rather discombobulating oscillation between opposing temporalities and how this tension may be an uneasy one, particularly in its connections to difficult or painful phenomenological experience.

This dynamic pops up throughout Romantic poetry, often as a function of the formal operations of that poetry. What I have attempted to show by focusing on long works in particular are the ways that these embodied and emplaced temporal concerns are expanded and

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Julia Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in the Fields of Print* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[314] Jonathan Sachs, "Slow Time," *PMLA* 134, no. 2 (2019): 316.

[315] Sachs, 316. Sachs also uses "Old Man Travelling," along with Smith's *Beachy Head* and Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," as examples of Romanticism's engagement with and depiction of slow time. Sachs also sees Wordsworth mimicking the "labored quality" of the Old Man's movements in the poem's formal construction, but instead argues that the poem associates slowness with "the use of thought to overcome pain and invisible violence" (320).

[316] Sachs, 318.

complicated by the equally pressing formal problem of length (which also introduces another, more readerly dimension to poetic "slowness"). Although my interests have primarily been oriented toward the poetry of the era, the moving/subduing dynamic I have laid out here echoes a larger thematic throughline that I identify in all four works studied in this project. Each text is in some way committed to problematizing the concept of action itself, in that each work configures formal duration as part of a process that accentuates the intellectual, emotional, and physical difficulty of certain acts (traversing the terrain of local landscapes, reckoning with trauma and grief, writing, reading) along with their pleasures. And that, in turn, complicates these texts' engagement with broader organizational structures like narration, plot, chronology, and closure. That these complications manifest in and through formal length adds an important layer to Sachs' claim that Romanticism offers a "new sense of how a seeming lack of eventfulness can be understood as eventful when placed on a longer timeline."[317] *Forms Less Solid* speaks to and moves with the sorts of readerly and thematic eventful non-happenings so central to Romantic long forms.

Wordsworth's early hunch that poetry may be inextricably involved with a slow or slow*ing* time-sense, for better and for worse, is itself one of the more important points on this project's own "longer timeline." It was "Old Man Travelling," even before *The Ruined Cottage* or *Beachy Head* or any other text, that sparked my interest in something like durational modes or slow temporalities. In my own thinking, that early encounter with poetic slow time has become intimately connected with another event, in our time, whose sociopolitical and personal effects have fundamentally affected this project. I began work on *Forms Less Solid* in March of 2020, just a few weeks before the world went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Forms*

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[317] Sachs, 317.

*Less Solid,* as a result, is and has always been a COVID project, both because its composition began at roughly the same time as the pandemic and because its arguments have been deeply informed by pandemic life. As my engagement with Wordsworth's early poetry shows, I had already been thinking for quite a while about something like duration when the pandemic began, but lockdown gave those temporalities a new and much more immediate context.

As it was for so many of us not on the frontlines, COVID significantly changed the structure of my everyday life in that it left me without much structure at all. Without the regular habits of going back and forth to campus to attend classes and lectures or the social engagement that comes with teaching in person, attending conferences, and seeing friends, the lines of separation between the different areas of my life began to blur. Partly because I was researching a project about extended temporalities, I came to recognize pandemic life (both during and after lockdown) as having a time-sense of its own, one with a few key characteristics. First, the prevailing experience, for me, of the pandemic was a generalized sense of ongoing-ness brought about by the simple fact that no one knew how long the pandemic would last or if it would have an end date at all. This remains true now: three years later, we are no longer in lockdown, but to say that the pandemic has ended, full stop, is also not possible. Our relationship to COVID has changed but not disappeared; it, too, is an event ongoing. Second, the pandemic brought to the forefront a certain kind of embodied awareness, one that comes with constantly checking each other's temperatures and monitoring ourselves for possible symptoms. Even with the privilege of being a relatively young person with no underlying conditions, COVID made me more aware of my own body, its aches and pains and little changes, than I had been before. Third, lockdown brought with it a new attention to the details of my immediate surroundings – my neighborhood, my backyard, the daily activities of my close neighbors – and to my own home and domestic

habits. This project's occasional, underlying engagement with domestic life and interior spaces is partly a consequence of how important and present my own domestic space became during lockdown, both as a space of confinement and as a shelter that I was newly thankful to have even if it felt smaller than ever before.

Note that the components that so characterized my experience of pandemic time – a new awareness of my body and local environment, as well as a work schedule no longer distinct from other aspects of my life – match up well with E.P. Thompson's definition of task-orientation and its corresponding time-sense. As I lay out in more detail in the introductory chapter, Thompson's definition of localized, task-oriented conceptions of time relies on the intersection between the body, the local landscape or environment, and the natural rhythms that mark time's passing independently of the clock. The ongoing-ness of pandemic time is reminiscent of that older (though certainly not extinct) structure of temporality, one that does not necessitate or allow for the work-life separation central the modern industrial system. In addition, the fact that the beginning of the pandemic matched up so well with my own transition from classwork to more individualized dissertation research brought a new awareness, for me, of how academic research can also initiate a more task-oriented work practice. Christina Lupton, in *Reading and the Making of Time*'s own coda, references Thompson as a reminder that universities have long been places in which a task-oriented relationship to reading has been allowed to persevere, building off a claim Thompson makes at the end of "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" via a reference, it so happens, to Wordsworth.[318] My point here is that both the pandemic and the academic research that formed this project give rise to something like durational modes,

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[318] Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 155. E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (December 1967): 97.

engendering very similar spatiotemporal and phenomenological experiences to those detailed in the Romantic texts I study. Much like the flock of birds that interprets its environment via its own form, *Forms Less Solid* has both emerged from and is a reflection upon the pandemic and academic temporalities that felt so pressing during its composition.[319]

The experiences I have detailed here, one readerly and one simultaneously social and personal, are key components in the development of this project and its methodology. As for the first, "Old Man Travelling" and its formal toggling between acceleration and slowness, thought and embodiment, has been a model (also like Elspeth in *The Antiquary*) for a readerly movement-in-place, an interpretive oscillation between modes, scales, and temporalities reminiscent of the poem's own enjambed "hanging back." Throughout this project, I have attempted to occupy the space in between what "moves" and "subdue[s]," and to draw out the ways that the Romantic long form inhabits and complicates that unique spatiotemporality as a function of formal duration itself (a dimension that "Old Man Travelling," as a short lyric, cannot fully model). Like Wordsworth, I do not pretend to have answered in full these questions about what is the best or most effective pacing for reading and thought – I have not mastered this for myself. I do, however, hope to have offered a methodology uniquely oriented toward long-form works, toward recognizing and inhabiting, rather than ignoring or fighting against, the many extended temporalities that populate Romantic poetry and everyday life.

This formal rendering of duration is, for these texts and for my own work, a commitment to representing similarly durational experiences in real life. The pandemic made especially obvious just how much Romantic long poetry and prose still have to say about the way time feels in periods of great change or upheaval. In my experience, this has much to do with how the

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[319] Paul Jaussen, *Writing in Real Time: Emergent Poetics from Whitman to the Digital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2.

process of reading a long text puts the reader decidedly *in* her body: nothing makes time felt like sitting with a "long and laborious" text for long enough that the little aches and pains of reading – an aching back, tired eyes (especially when reading on a screen), a sore neck – make themselves known, especially when those discomforts are an ongoing part of the processes of scholarship and pandemic life. This phenomenon is of course not unique to Romantic long forms, but is yet another way that their formal difficulty brings temporal, embodied experience, including the reader's own, to the forefront. In this sense, the texts I study are fundamentally anti-escapist: if one of the major legacies of atemporal form is that it operates as an escape into the eternal and away from time and death (and thus the mortal body), the Romantic long form moves in the opposite direction, and narrates that movement as it goes. Smith's emphasis on marking, Wordsworth's on fronting, Barrett Browning's on holding together, and Scott's on accident, to name a few, are each different articulations of this commitment.

As an example, one final personal anecdote: in the summer of 2020, there was quite a bit of conversation online and within my own academic community about how and what to teach during lockdown. The obvious go-to was Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, whose frame story revolves around ten young people who, essentially, shelter in place together in order to escape the Black Death of 1348. I did not teach Boccaccio that year, but that discussion reminded me of my own first encounter with *The Decameron*, which I read for my very first English class in my first semester of undergrad.[320] In my final essay for that class, I argued

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[320] I did, however, teach a short story by Margaret Atwood that reworks the Griselda story, this time told by an alien attempting to sooth his human listeners (or captives?) with a story. In Atwood's version, the alien's misunderstanding of human norms undermines any escapism or comfort the story might otherwise have provided. Atwood's story is a humorous reminder of the fact that sometimes reality is so strange that even fiction can't escape from it. Margaret Atwood, "Impatient Griselda," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 7, 2020, The Decameron Project edition, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/07/magazine/margaret-atwood-short-story.html.

against Boccaccio's use of literature as an escapist tool, as an imaginative retreat in which to hide from the plague. The validity of that argument aside (I was not nor am I now an expert on Boccaccio), the essay led to an important personal revelation about my own reading habits, which I realized had, until that point, been just as if not more escapist, romanticized, and critically disengaged than anything depicted in *The Decameron*. Later, as a reader in the midst of another plague, that revelation took on a new urgency. *Forms Less Solid* is, as a result, a study of the ways that Romantic long forms confront head-on the pressures and difficulties of time, place, and embodiment *and* configure themselves as one way the reader might do so as well. They have, at the very least, been helpful tools in my own efforts to embrace the very durational modes that are reading, writing, and scholarship (an effort whose own beginnings lie with that essay on Boccaccio and then, again, with Wordsworth). For the Romantics and for me, the ultimate lesson seems to be thus: these pursuits take time, and are worthwhile largely *because* they do so. *Forms Less Solid*, above all, attempts to account for that temporal abundance.

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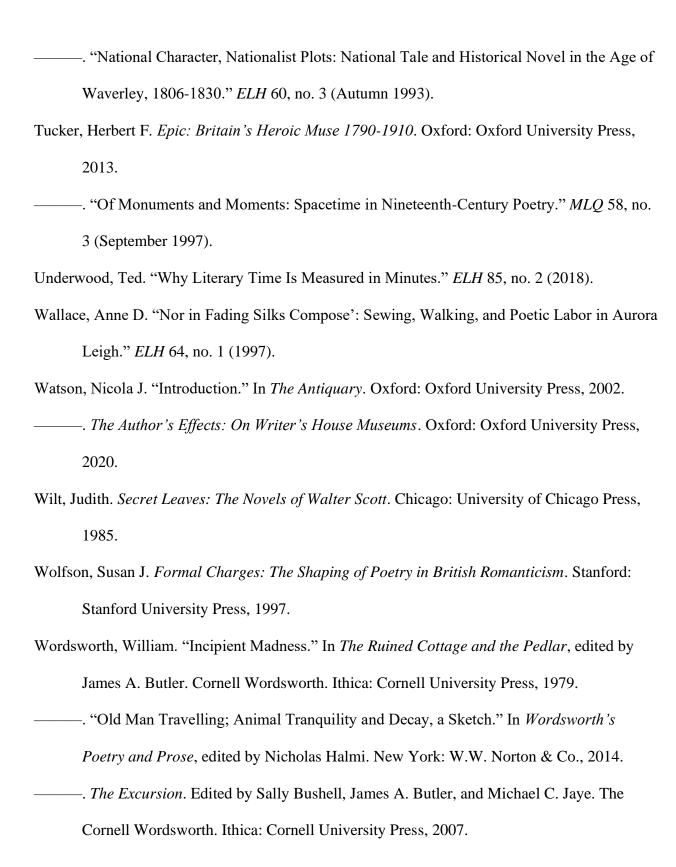
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