

Frame/Portal/Nest/Net

("a thousand circlets...")

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Contents

Introduction	6
Contextual Review	10
Appendix I: Images	41
Appendix II: Methodology.....	54
Appendix III: Additional Notes	68
The Aesthetic of Wonder in Romantic Poetry as Wonder an Alternative to the Sublime	76
Ecopoetics, Ecocriticism, and Ecofeminism	80
Poetic Texts – Creative and Experimental Writing.....	89
Ecological Art without Natural Imagery?	91
Conclusion	94
 Bibliography	 96



INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, from the window of a car speeding down the highway, small clearings are visible in the scrubby deciduous forests that line the road. There might appear a circle of velvet green grass, studded with wildflowers and lit by a sunbeam. Or perhaps a silvery pond surrounded by stones, mirror-like in the early morning as fog swirls gently upwards from its surface. These places look enchanted, appearing suddenly amidst the banks of undifferentiated green and blasted-out rock

that enclose the pavement. They look like a respite from the rushing streams of hot exhaust and compressed timeframes. What would it be like to go to one of these places? To float out of the car like a ghost and sit amongst the mossy tufts?

It would be loud, polluted, dominated by its neighborhood of twisted guardrails and hurtling machinery. Would it be possible to contem-

plate nature in this setting? To find the tranquility that appeared in this place from the vantage point of a traveler on the road? Maybe these are views that only look good from one direction. They offer unequal exchanges, like a nostalgic recollection of a time before your own. But the past, unlike a clearing by the side of the freeway, is not a physically accessible place. If you could inhabit a moment of collective nostalgia like a roadside meadow, would you pick up the garbage thrown by other travelers out their windows as they rush by, moving forward into the future? Would it make a difference in the aesthetic quality of the place? Would your presence make the view less beautiful to those watching from the other side?

Human-created garbage is sometimes used by animals in the construction of their homes.¹ That doesn't transform litter into something good or beautiful. It is evidence of an exchange, however unequal. The detritus of a culture can tell stories unlike those found in the written record of official histories.² A nest can be like a net, capturing cast-off (or antagonistic) histories so we can view them from the relative safety of the inside.

British Romantic poets sought to reconcile human consciousness and natural systems at the dawn of the anthropocene – what could their ideas mean at its sunset? Could folding these timelines together give rise to visual languages that speak of alternate, asynchronous romanticisms? These strange histories and futures are not fixed, but flicker like embers or films, animated by a 'plastic and vast... intellectual breeze.'³ Ersatz gothic windows repeat and dissolve, casting lacy shadows. Plush portals imitating gilded frames, opening onto views of views, of mirrored frames and silhouetted figures, identifiable as 19th-century European subjects with puffy sleeves and stiff postures,

standing before grand vistas. Their images are roughly transmitted through video signals and printed fabrics, disintegrating and fading into gray, as they look at something beyond their picture's frame. If you could look back through a tunnel of time at the forward-marching story of history, what would you see? How far is the distance between the flattened people in those paintings and the ones standing here in three dimensional space? What does the distance distort, what light bends, what colors shift? Can you see through the tunnel walls?

1 Josue Corrales and Luis Sandoval, *Our Garbage, Their Homes: Artificial Material as Nesting Material*, *The Nature of Cities*, December 11 2016

2 Katherine J. Wu, *1,500-Year-Old Trash Piles Hint at a Byzantine City's Collapse*, *Nova Next*, March 25 2019

3 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp", 1795



CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

The following poem, titled “a thousand circlets...,” is 258 lines of iambic pentameter blank verse composed of excerpts from my research materials. I selected passages that relate to or evoke themes that are important to my work. I also wrote two rhyming English sonnets, which are embedded within the main poem as though they themselves are quoted from another source. Footnotes cite the source of each line, and include additional explanations or related quotes. The overall effect is of something that seems at first to be grammatically accept-

able, narratively lucid, but which begins to break down or spin out of control as phrases stack on top of each other in accumulating chaos. This labyrinthine, contra-rational, poetic text takes the place of a more traditional contextual review, and is a manifestation of my methodology (see Appendix II).

A Thousand Circlets...

Perchance when you are wandering forth⁴

Most poet-like where brooks and flowery weeds⁵

resist ubiquitous entropy in⁶

a wary re-enactment of the past.⁷

beauty's pleasurable affirmation⁸

Of thy new paradise, extended,⁹

4 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*, 1829.

Wordsworth's poem describes a small "island" created by erosion along the banks of a lake. "Perspective is here doubled, as the text sees the isle from the shore, and from an imagined memory projected onto the lake from the shore in the future." (FEDER, RACHEL. "The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth." *Studies in Romanticism* 53, no. 4 (2014): 541–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43973871>.)

5 John Clare, *The Yellowhammer's Nest*, 1835

The ontological significance of the bird nest in Clare's poetry is explored by Sharon Nobel, in her essay "Homeless at Home: John Clare's Uncommon Ecology." Nobel's idea of the nest derives from the Greek root of ecology, oiko, or home, and centers instability, both physical/local and conceptual/definitive. See Appendix III for a detailed discussion.

6 Louise Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature*, 2016, Palgrave Macmillan

Economides discusses the "environmental sublime" and "ecological melancholia" as aesthetic and affective reactions to nature's current state of human-driven ecological collapse. But she also cautions that "... the environmental sublime [can] aestheticize pollution..." and that although "... ecological melancholy is (in many ways) the affective analogue to what [has been characterized] as the environmental sublime. ... its focus upon irretrievable loss can impede the emergence of new forms of political agency." See Appendix III for a detailed discussion.

7 Will Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*, Plumwood Mountain, Vol. 7 No. 2, Oct. 2020

Alexander's essay puts forth an ecopoetic, hyperobject-style account of climate change, including its historical and scientific contexts and its philosophical implications. See footnote 200 for an explanation of the hyperobject; see Appendix III for a detailed discussion.

8 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

9 Mary Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*, 1806

Robinson was a friend and colleague of Coleridge's, and this poem has been interpreted as an admiring homage to the then-unpublished "Kubla Khan." However, when read in the context of Robinson's satirical poems like "Female Fashions for 1799," these verses might be reinterpreted as lightly critiquing the figure of the (male) poet-genius and his sublime visioning.

Placeless, as spirits, one soft water-sun¹⁰

Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,

no cloud must come between your eyes and (this)¹¹

ruthless and brilliant intensity¹²

"Our relationship to landscape is not¹³

Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness:—¹⁴

it has the force of law, a norm against¹⁵

a representation of something that¹⁶

promises it isn't ready to keep.¹⁷

10 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution*, 1802

This poem follows a lovestruck subject on a dreamy walk through the woods. His reverie on the banks of a forest stream is interrupted by a nymph's playful disturbance of the beautiful reflection on the water's surface, marking a turn in the poem towards the sad reality of his unrequited romantic situation. I was struck by the poem's description of the "thousand circlets" that shatter the image on the pool, which "regains its smoothness" yet is never quite the same as it was. This is the source of my poem's title.

11 Beatrice Warde, "The Crystal Goblet or Printing Should be Invisible" from *The Crystal Goblet, Sixteen Essays on Typography*, Cleveland, 1956

Warde's pithy remarks in this famous essay on typographical design assert that form can and should be a fully transparent container for meaning. I disagree, but it's still a great essay

12 Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 2009, Harvard University Press p. 6 Morton's book is concerned with the possibility of a "truly ecological" aesthetic framework, both in literature and in art. See Appendix III for a detailed discussion.

13 Laura van Straaten, *At Storm King, 2 New Works Faced a Challenging Birth*, *The New York Times*, May 20, 2021

See Appendix I for images of artworks by Sarah Sze at Storm King.

14 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude," 1816

15 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* p. 14

16 Jill Heydt-Stevenson, "The pleasures of simulacra: rethinking the picturesque in Coleridge's Notebooks and 'The Picture; or, The Lover's Resolution.'" *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2002, p. 20+. Gale Academic OneFile "The picturesque reminds us that the 'other' we strive to understand is, like landscape itself, 'a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right.'"

17 Annie Godfrey Larmon, *Looks Just Like You: Sondra Perry at Bridget Donahue Topical Cream*, February 19th, 2018

Artist Sondra Perry uses blue screen (Chroma key) effects in her work to critique ideas of technological utopia and address the intersectionality and contingency of identities. See Appendix I for images of artworks by Sondra Perry at Bridget Donahue.

Yet the lost fragments shall remain,¹⁸
interacting, and you are one of them.”¹⁹
And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms²⁰
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls²¹
Buried beneath the glittering Lake!²²
And like as though the plague became a guest,²³
unlike a toxic owl signalling²⁴
for its reflection, only to find none.²⁵
the play between the original and
original and copy, copy and²⁶

18 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

The last lines of this poem (this is the second-to-last line), evoke a persistent kind of existence beyond individuality, that is experienced as an expanded form of being.

19 Morgan Meis, “Timothy Morton’s Hyper-Pandemic,” *The New Yorker*, June 8, 2021

In this interview, Meis writes of Morton’s view that “we are not, as many of the most influential twentieth-century philosophers would have it, trapped within language or mind or culture or anything else. Reality is real, and right there to experience—but it also escapes complete knowability. This realness cannot be avoided or backed away from. There is no “outside”—just the entire universe of entities constantly interacting, and you are one of them.”

20 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

The “fragment,” a narrative or poetic device, was popularized in the Romantic framework by German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. “For Schlegel, a fragment as a particular has a certain unity ([a] fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog,” *Athenaeum* fragment 206), but remains nonetheless fragmentary in the perspective it opens up and in its opposition to other fragments. Its ‘unity’ thus reflects Schlegel’s view of the whole of things not as a totality but rather as a ‘chaotic universality’ of infinite opposing stances.” (Speight, Allen, “Friedrich Schlegel”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/schlegel/>)

21 William Wordsworth, *There was a Boy*, 1800

The famous lines describing a young boy’s haunted, illusory interactions with echoes and reflections (foreshadowing his mortality), are the theme that guided my selection of the following lines from Dorothy Wordsworth, John Clare, Will Alexander, and Timothy Morton.

22 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

23 Clare, *The Yellowhammer’s Nest*

24 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*,

25 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 14-15

26 Heydt-Stevenson, “The pleasures of simulacra:

hesitation between an obscure source²⁷

and the fiery heart of the liquid.²⁸

copy, and copy and simulacrum²⁹

those hidden are reflected in the Lake³⁰

With its soft neighbourhood of filmy clouds,³¹

Once did I see a slip of earth,³²

immediately comprehensible³³

‘Tis strange there was one only cypress tree,³⁴

He like her shadow has pursued, where’er³⁵

27 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 43

A specific type of rendering Morton identifies, called ecomimesis, aims to offer a transparent representation of natural entities or settings. “Obscuring” the sources of sounds and other environmental sensory factors is one strategy commonly used in ecomimetic writing.

28 Warde, “The Crystal Goblet...”

29 Heydt-Stevenson, “The pleasures of simulacra:

30 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks* 1, 553

This line from Coleridge’s notebooks evokes the idea that certain concepts or subjectivities cannot be depicted directly, but are perhaps better represented through what Louise Economides terms “clearings,” or strategies in language, art, and technology “through which we glimpse the wonder of beings in ways that would not be possible without these forms of mediation.”

31 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

32 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

33 Sean Williams, *Little Switzerland: Alpine Kitsch in England*, Public Domain Review, Dec. 8, 2021

34 Letitia Elizabeth Landon, “Erinna,” from *The Golden Violet*, 1826

Landon, known professionally as L.E.L., wrote this poem about a Grecian lute-player whose genius gives way to fame and disillusionment, a story that readers often connected to the author’s own biography. L.E.L.’s use of poetic tropes, symbols, and emotion bordering on melodrama, is now interpreted as a critical strategy: “(Landon’s) poetry enables its conventional readership to (mis) recognize the artificial conventions of sentimentality, even to enjoy those conventions, and certainly to buy them, while her poetry simultaneously mocks, parodies, and bitterly criticizes those sentimental illusions—first by making them visible as constructed illusions, and secondly by emplotting disillusionment.” (Terence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, L.E.L.’s “Verses” and *The Keepsake* for 1829, *Electronic Editions*, October 1998, *Romantic Circles*, <https://romantic-circles.org/editions/lel/lelbio.htm>)

35 Shelley, “Alastor,”

her body does not continue under³⁶

silicon jungles lattices of light,³⁷

The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale.³⁸

a deep shimmering crimson in colour.³⁹

Untwist her beauteous web, disrobe her charms,⁴⁰

to tear to pieces the aesthetic screen⁴¹

36 The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, (gallery label text) Raphaëlle Peale (American, 1774 - 1825), *Venus Rising From the Sea---A Deception*, ca. 1822, oil on canvas, 29 1/8 x 24 1/8 inches

"In *Venus Rising from the Sea*, Raphaëlle Peale created the illusion of a cloth hiding a bathing woman. Technical examination, however, reveals that her body does not continue underneath the linen. The visible figural elements add to the deception. They were derived not from life, but from a print of an earlier canvas by the Englishman James Barry." See Appendix I for image of the artwork

37 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

Economides discusses the concept of the "technological sublime" in which nature's ability to inspire transcendental awe and fear is stripped by human mastery and reassigned to man-made technological advances (often emblemized by nineteenth-century proto-cinematic inventions like magic lanterns, "cranky" panoramas, and zoetropes). "The Kantian vision of sublimity as an experience illuminating humanity's capacity for ethical transcendence disappears within late capitalism's silicon jungles and lattices of light, and so too, it would seem, does any hope that sublimity might be re-claimed as discourse of social critique."

38 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude," 1816

"Alastor" tells the story of a poet searching for transcendent knowing or unity with existence, who is spurred on to dangerous adventures by the titular muse-figure. He ultimately finds his true inspiration in the natural world, signaling perhaps a triumph of the Romantic spirit. In Shelley's later works, he seems to question the utility of this conflict, and the validity of the philosophical "sides" represented, bidding muses like Alastor "to quiet ("Peace!") and dismiss ("Depart!") their entire line of inquiry, particularly the second voice's notion of a portal to a world beyond appearances." (Schey, Taylor; "Skeptical Ignorance: Hume, Shelley, and the Mystery of 'Mont Blanc,'" *MLQ* 79.1 (March 2018): 53-80.)

39 Warde, "The Crystal Goblet..."

40 Anna Letitia Barbauld, *The Invitation*, 1773

Barbauld wrote this poem as an ode to Warrington Academy, an institution at the cutting edge of scientific inquiry, where her father taught. Themes of natural and scientific exploration as vehicles for spirituality and the result of religious freedoms, recurred in her poetry, although I would argue that many of these lines have an ominous, almost violent undertone from the perspective of a contemporary reader.

41 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 35

This line could be read as the destruction of aesthetic layer between human and nature, but I see it as an echo of the ecocritical idea that "English Romantic poetry aspires to reconnect us with the natural world, yet it simultaneously creates fissures or loopholes through which what we think of as 'nature' tends to be continually transformed." (Aretoulakis, Emmanouil; "Towards a PostHumanist Ecology: Nature without Humanity in Wordsworth and Shelley," *European Journal of English Studies* 18, no. 2 (2014): 172-90) The image of a fissure evokes volcanism and the creation, destruction, and transformation of earth, suggesting the potential to radically reshape the idea of nature.

a groundless existence entails loving⁴²

without dispelling their mystery.⁴³

And I'll contrive a sylvan room

I'll dress the sand rock cave for you,⁴⁴

I hear her voice — thy "sunny dome",⁴⁵

Behold'st her shadow still abiding there,⁴⁶

Lured by the gentle meaning of his looks,⁴⁷

without repugnance fancy trees talking⁴⁸

Hoping to still these obstinate questionings⁴⁹

observe him with a familiar gaze.⁵⁰

Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,⁵¹

Loosed from its hold; — how no one knew⁵²

42 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

43 Meis, "Timothy Morton"

44 Charlotte Smith, *Beachy Head*, 1807

Smith's epic poem has been likened to the visible strata of geological time in places like the seaside cliffs where the poem is set. *Beachy Head* takes readers through eons of human and natural history, and shifts from micro- to macro-scales. Within the poem are sort of "mini-poems," like one described as being etched into the walls of a sea-cave. These lines read to me like a break in the fourth wall, as the poet reveals her intentions. They are also part of the inspiration for the two rhymed sonnets within "a thousand circlets..."

45 Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*

46 Coleridge, *The Picture...*

47 Shelley, *Alastor*

48 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1677

"For those who are ignorant of the true causes of things confuse all things, and without repugnance fancy trees talking as well as men, and that men are formed from stones as well as from seed, and they imagine that any kind of thing can be changed into any other. In the same way those who confuse the divine nature with the human easily ascribe to God human emotions, especially as long as they are further ignorant how the emotions are produced in the mind."

49 Shelley, *Alastor*

50 Charles Baudelaire, "Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers," *Correspondences*, 1861

This poem, from *Fleurs du Mal*, can be read as a description of the transcendent connection with nature that can only be achieved through sensuous poetic interpretation.

51 Shelley, *Alastor*

52 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

Leaving a houseless home, a ruined nest—⁵³

whereby subjectivity defines itself⁵⁴

one thought is limited by another.⁵⁵

precisely this emphasis on mastery,

identified with scientific knowledge

disposition toward what he calls ‘novelty,’

never quite accomplishes ... paradise.”⁵⁶

To keep the relique? ‘twill but idly feed⁵⁷

retroactive former stability⁵⁸

*An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine;*⁵⁹

*Of whom we read, the man whom we behold*⁶⁰

53 Clare, *The Yellowhammer’s Nest*

The image of the ruined nest may be inspired by Clare’s actual habit of robbing birds’ nests. One explanation of such behavior is that it is an “enactment of life’s predatory actualities... a kind of ecological realism,” (Poetzsch, Markus; “The Brighter Side of ‘Dark Ecology’: John Clare and Henry David Thoreau,” *The John Clare Society Journal* 34 (2015): 63.) but I see it as connecting to a sublimated destructive streak apparent in poems like Wordsworth’s *Nutting*. From a feminist viewpoint, this theme seems to imply the narrator’s benevolent intentions by dangling the threat of violence, raising “the possibility of the defloration of the ground (and of the Lady), only to allay fears by confidently asserting that such violence is absent for the moment.” (Fulford, Tim; “Wordsworth’s “The Haunted Tree” and the Sexual Politics of Landscape,” *Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Romanticism and Ecology*; eds. McKusick, James; November 2001; <http://romantic-circles.org/praxis/ecology/index.html>)

54 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

55 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*

56 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

Economides says that “Romantic hostility toward knowledge’s demystification of the world can, in this account, be seen as the result of a problematic dichotomy that pits wonder against knowledge instead of grasping the underlying codependency of these forms of intellectual engagement.”

57 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

58 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*,

59 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

60 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Thirteenth, 1850

*(Describing Arcady) “I would recline;*⁶¹

*The awful ruins of the days of old.*⁶²

*The portal, and the ruin’d battlements;*⁶³

*And wall impregnable of beaming ice.*⁶⁴

*The mind is lord and master - outward sense*⁶⁵

*‘Bathes’ us in potential paradise.”*⁶⁶

*Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly*⁶⁷

*Unfinish’d sentences, or half erased,*⁶⁸

*How well the narrator imparts immediacy!*⁶⁹

61 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

This line is a combination of excerpts from two lines of Smith’s poem: “I would recline; while Fancy should go forth,...(Scenes all unlike the poet’s fabling dreams/ Describing Arcady)”

62 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Alastor*,

63 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

64 Shelley, *Mont Blanc*, 1817

Taylor Schey describes Percy Shelley’s poem “Mont Blanc” in terms of David Hume’s concept of “skeptical ignorance,” which I found to be very much aligned with my own feelings about knowledge, mystery, and otherness. Schey explains skeptical ignorance as a stance that “eschew(s) the masculinist quest to penetrate the secrets of the natural world, (offering) a quiet solution to the mind-nature problem by dissolving its existence as a problem.” (Schey, Taylor; “Skeptical Ignorance: Hume, Shelley, and the Mystery of ‘Mont Blanc,’” *MLQ* 79.1 (March 2018): 53-80.)

65 Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Twelfth, 1850

This language of domination and property ownership may be of a particular time, but it is relevant to contemporary conversations surrounding climate injustice that offer evidence of such concepts’ insidious tenacity in culture. “The whiteness of Romantic studies is a symptom of amnesia. It bespeaks a massive act of forgetting on the part of contemporary scholarship, an institutional disavowal of the economic conditions that help make cultural production during the Romantic Era possible: the maritime economy of the Atlantic.” (Paul Youngquist & Frances Botkin, “Introduction: Black Romanticism: Romantic Circulations”, *Praxis Series, Romantic Circles*, October 2011)

66 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 86

67 Shelley, *Alastor*...

68 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

69 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 35

Ecomimesis deploys a variety of strategies, including repetition, framing devices (“as I write this...”) listing, and extravagant description, in the service of presenting a purportedly transparent representation of natural entities or settings.

To furnish food for fickle taste.⁷⁰

In progress through this Verse, my mind hath looked:⁷¹

Not because the chain hangs from a transcendental hook⁷²

Environment is a transcendent sign,⁷³

the shadow tethered in the reader's mind,⁷⁴

nature's manifold otherness is not⁷⁵

a mere empty placeholder for a host...

"So 'nature' occupies at least three places⁷⁶

Smaller in magnitude, yet all the greater⁷⁷

70 Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800

71 Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Fifth, 1850

72 Marjorie Levinson, *Thinking Through Poetry*, p. 117

In her discussion of Spinozan philosophy, Levinson explains that "the chain of necessity is infinite, and infinitely complex, and only partially knowable through human science; not because the chain hangs from a transcendental hook nor because 'elements of the chain are conceptually beyond the reach of human reason but because science can-not empirically take account of the whole of such a sequence.'"

73 Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others: Contemporary Poetics and the More-than-human*, Plumwood Mountain, February 2017

In an essay about poetry by Eugenio Montejo, Cooke contrasts the poet's idea of "earthdom" with "conceptions of the earth as an empty container, into which things like flora and fauna are then placed. Such conceptions are largely derived, argues Morton, from the German Romanticism of Humboldt and Herder. Here, organisms can be inserted or removed from the environment, but the ontological status of "the environment" remains unchanged; in other words, the environment is a transcendent sign. With the benefits of modern biology, however, we know that '[e]nvironments coevolve with organisms.'"

74 Nora Khan/Alex Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?* Interview with Nora Khan, the Yale Maquette, Issue 2

In this interview, writer and art critic Khan explains her early experiences as a reader: "I was drawn to *A Wrinkle in Time* and the *Earthsea Trilogy* the most, because I remember certain images and feelings of the unknown in those books. In *Earthsea*, the protagonist Ged has this figure, a shadow double of himself, that starts to follow him across the landscape. That image—of this dark self—staying with Ged, stayed with me, and I returned to it often in my mind. I loved the way Le Guin described it, the way the shadow was tethered in the reader's mind, even if not directly described. A hole, or gap, was opened up by the image; an atmosphere of emotions was evoked."

75 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

76 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 14

77 Williams, *Little Switzerland*:

magical forms of differentiation⁷⁸

comprehended and understood at once.⁷⁹

all the objects on the opposite Coast⁸⁰

Like vaporous shapes half seen; beyond, a well,

Dark, gleaming, and of most translucent wave,⁸¹

in an epistemological sea,...⁸²

The glorious lightning of the kindled eye,⁸³

an inauthentic imaginary⁸⁴

superstition, struck deep roots in their minds⁸⁵

78 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 52

Morton explains that many "innovative" approaches to ecological thought fall into this trap – "if 'new and improved' versions of continuity between inside and outside, such as nuance, are suspect in their attempt to smooth over the quantum difference that the re-mark establishes, then magical forms of differentiation – for example, ones that are miraculously 'nonhierarchical' or 'nonlinear' – are out of bounds too."

79 William Wordsworth, Text for Rev. Joseph Wilkinson's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, Ackermann, 1810 (transcription via *Romantic Circles' Electronic Editions*)

From the introduction: "The essay now known as William Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* initially appeared as the anonymous letterpress to *Select Views of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, a collection of forty-eight sketches of Lake District landscapes by the Reverend Joseph Wilkinson. Marketed primarily to affluent collectors, printed on high-end folio paper, and distributed by leading art publisher Rudolph Ackermann, *Select Views* was, as Wordsworth remarked in 1820, "an expensive work, and necessarily of limited circulation."

80 Coleridge, *Notebooks 1*, 553

81 Shelley, *Alastor*

82 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 27

83 Landon, "Erinna"

84 Williams, *Little Switzerland*: Public Domain Review, December 8, 2021
Discussing the popularity of "Swiss Gardens" in England, the author describes Wordsworth's assessment of the trend: "As Wordsworth remembers the miniature scene, it was not only delightful, but also pleasurable in a "solid" and "substantial" way. The Alps at scale allowed him to survey the scenery in one go, like a diorama, and to understand, supposedly, its total, overall effect. Wordsworth goes on to admire a "tranquil sublimity", which was apparently true of the English Lake District too."

85 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*,
Spinoza was a controversial figure in his time because of what his philosophy implied about God and the church – he was expelled from the Jewish community in Amsterdam.

where the root base of a large tree had once been.⁸⁶

No myrtle-walks are these: these are no groves⁸⁷

Among them may be heard the stranger's songs.⁸⁸

but when the poet finally hears the voice

"The Trees", whose thoughts are so "vague" and "fragmented,"⁸⁹

starts to follow him across the landscape.⁹⁰

this new ventriloquial arrangement

incapable of transmuted impact⁹¹

at once appreciative and naïve,⁹²

converting its 'companionable' forms

86 van Straaten, *At Storm King*...

Artist Sarah Sze chose to site her work for Storm King "in a grassy 36-foot divot, where the root base of a large tree had once been. 'What was most important for me is this idea of negative space and positive space,' she said, 'And how they generate one another.'"

87 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

88 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

The mention of the "stranger's songs" evokes the "stranger" in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," which "unites opposites: it is both the burnt residue of the fire and the harbinger of a new arrival; it is both a remnant and an omen... the imagined stranger remains in the multiplicitous realm of imagination and has not yet crystallized into a singular, real person... dissolves the boundaries of the self and draws the poet toward something distant. In this case, the distance is temporal; watching the "stranger," the poet recalls old memories and also vividly imagines his son's future. In the imagination, multiple time frames coexist at once; time is no longer simply a linear progression." (Katherine Robinson, *Poem Guide*, Poetry Foundation, February 26, 2016)

89 Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others: Contemporary Poetics and the More-than-human*, Plumwood Mountain, February 2017

"But just as Wright was more wary of straying into Aboriginal cultural realms than Murray, so too does she steer clear of entering into the fabulous, non-human semantics that Murray explores in *Translations from the Natural World*. Instead, poems like 'Lyrebirds' (from *Birds*, 1962), are almost possessed by a fear of touching the Other, so adamantly do they make clear their inability to see it. A magnificent, Orphic 'master', bearing 'like a crest the symbol of his art,' the lyrebird nevertheless 'ought to be left secret, alone.'"

90 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

91 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*, Ventriloquism might be thought of as another, perhaps slightly critical, metaphor for the role of the poet – instead of acting as a conduit for the inherent spirit of nature, does the poet simply "throw his voice" into the treetops and hope that it becomes altered by the journey?

92 Williams, *Little Switzerland*s:

in opposition to what it is not."⁹³

Man walks through these forests of symbols which⁹⁴

I consciously have injured, but still loved⁹⁵

and then tried to construct some point of view⁹⁶

a foundation for transcendental 'truth,'⁹⁷

As an invisible world--unheard, unseen,⁹⁸

93 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

Economides pits Wordsworth and Coleridge against each other: "Coleridge's most memorable depictions of sublimity typically dramatize a failure of this aesthetic to establish a Wordsworthian unity between the creative imagination and nature's power, perhaps due to the younger poet's suspicion that such identification erases nature's ethically significant otherness, converting its 'companionable' forms into a hall of mirrors that bolsters anthropocentric subjectivity."

94 Baudelaire, "Qui l'observent..."

"The act of perception which is integral to this poem – the observation of this pine tree – also relies on this very tree: the pine tree is not an object, but is rather like a kind of cybernetic (or symbiotic) enhancement to the senses of the otherwise solitary poet: 'It feels', he writes, 'as if my five senses were linked to another creature.'" (Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others*;)

95 Shelley, *Alastor*

96 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

"... my voice sounded like I read a lot of books, which I had, and then tried to construct some point of view from them. You have to shed all of that, and just go deep, deep, into your mind to try and find the voice that sounds authentic. Writing was about trying to find the motivation, or the strange place, that would keep you doing this for life, no matter if anyone was looking. What is that feeling? Where is that place?"

97 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"Accepting the wonder of a groundless existence entails loving the other as other, not seeking to use the other as a foundation for transcendental 'truth,' or reducing the other to a reliable means whereby subjectivity defines itself in opposition to what it is not."

98 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

"The glitch for me is a point of interest because mechanical glitches force us to think about the space between body and machine; they remind us that when we are using machines, there is actually distance between us and these things that we are using. That distance is usually invisible, but we notice it when things break down. The glitch is an error, but it can be productive, too, because it pushes us in different directions. It makes us think about how our bodies are, or are not, able to operate across different systems. It allows us to see where systems succeed, and where they fail. Maybe it even creates ways to think about building worlds differently, so that our bodies can be better housed as they transform, change, and get free." (Lynn Hershman Leeson, *A Glitch in the System: Legacy Russell and Lynn Hershman Leeson in Conversation about "Glitch Feminism"*, *Topical Cream*, September 28th, 2020)

A hole, or gap, ... opened up by the image;⁹⁹
yet shifting ...like an old fashioned cranky¹⁰⁰
set pieces, artifice, and layers of¹⁰¹
a world that mirrors our reality¹⁰²
Of light and odour — the rich violets¹⁰³
Each wildflower on the marge inverted there,¹⁰⁴
underwritten by a more threatening void,¹⁰⁵
representative of no setting at all.¹⁰⁶
there is a blankness that is structural¹⁰⁷

of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble¹⁰⁸
The pool becomes a mirror; and behold¹⁰⁹
an illusory window into depth¹¹⁰
As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven.¹¹¹
Nature is a temple where living columns¹¹²
Come trembling back, unite, and now once more¹¹³
reflection then dissolves ... tranquility¹¹⁴

99 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

Again, this passage calls to mind Morton's ecocritical "fissures," or Economides' "clearings," as well as "glitch feminism," which suggests that representations of glitchyness can expose inequities and power imbalances, metaphorically, through media.

100 van Straaten, *At Storm King...*

101 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

102 Victoria Keddie, Gretchen Bender: *Stepping into the Particle Universe*, Topical Cream, November 18th, 2019

Keddie describes video artist Bender's work: "Television is an envisioned surface. Up close, it's a series of electronic particles, but as we step backward, it forms into a world that mirrors our reality, or an embodiment of a hyper one—echoing movement, replicating symbols emotive and tragic." See Appendix I for images of the artwork.

103 Landon, *Erinna*

104 Coleridge, *The Picture...*

105 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 43

106 Williams, *Little Switzerlands*:

In regards to the decreasing authenticity (and implicit decline in moral or artistic value) of "Swiss style" gardens and cottages in England in the nineteenth century, the term kitsch was used: "It's about making the sublime insignificant and unthreatening. It renders the exotic everyday; the uncertain quotidian. There is no transcendence of the trivial." Contemporary contexts change this perception: "Such qualities may have been true for the experiences of Little Switzerlands in earlier centuries, but not nowadays. Swiss kitsch is problematic when we compare it to the original Switzerland — but not if we don't perceive a relationship between Little Switzerlands and the actual Alps any longer."

107 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 43

Morton's discussion of ecomimesis in writing concludes that "at the very depth of the illusion of rendering, there is a blankness that is structural to our accepting of the illusion itself." This blankness, or neutrality, evades what he sees as a valuable element of Romanticism, its hesitation and irony.

108 Warde, "The Crystal Goblet..."

"Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favorite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine... Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wine-glass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that obviates fingerprints on the bowl. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes and the fiery heart of the liquid. Are not the margins on book pages similarly meant to obviate the necessity of fingering the type-page? Again: the glass is colourless or at the most only faintly tinged in the bowl, because the connoisseur judges wine partly by its colour and is impatient of anything that alters it."

109 Coleridge, *The Picture...*

Reflection and mirroring are enduring metaphors for much of the human experience in creative work: "So, I was getting into using mirrors to implicate the audience in a particular way. As I moved toward wanting the work to be more about perception and placing the audience in a particular position in relation to given work, the glass became a really great opportunity, because it gives so little other than that. It kind of throws everything back on the viewer." (Rachel Hahn, *Aria Dean on Conceptual One Liners and Her Least Personal Show Yet*, Topical Cream, June 17th, 2019)

110 catalog essay, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 13, 2002–March 2, 2003, no. 12.

111 Shelley, *Alastor*

The sequence of this and the two preceding lines might provoke questions regarding whether the beholder or their double are being compared with the reflected moon — are we "beholding" just as the ocean's moon is?

112 Baudelaire, "Qui l'observent..."

113 Coleridge, *The Picture...*

114 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 36

Morton cites Wordsworth's introduction to *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he "insisted that poetry not only is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' but also is 'recollected in tranquility.' Although reflection then dissolves this tranquility until 'an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind,' the process thus becomes delayed and mediated."

A strabismus that enables wilfully¹¹⁵
the gazing subject's vulnerability
erased in this vision of unity.¹¹⁶
My voice sound(s) like I read a lot of books,
loving descriptions of works that deploy¹¹⁷
utopian possibilities built¹¹⁸
To fertilize some other ground.¹¹⁹
The spatial distance required for this
profitable transformation of nature¹²⁰
is thought to sit sideways to ... narrative.¹²¹
There is no "outside"—just the entire
vast network of interpenetrating¹²²
'clearings' through which we glimpse the wonder of¹²³

this figure, a shadow double of himself,¹²⁴
Genius of heav'n-taught poesy!¹²⁵
Just as snow makes us painfully aware¹²⁶
paved surfaces, ... absorb and radiate¹²⁷
Switzerland seen through a lessening lens,¹²⁸
of solid gold, wrought in ...exquisite patterns¹²⁹
Resembling writing scrawls which fancy reads¹³⁰
yet is not certain that it is not false!¹³¹
Representation might, in editing,
be transported anywhere any moment,¹³²

115 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*, Strabismus is a condition in which the eyes do not align with each other as expected, meaning that they cannot focus on the same thing at once. What does this mean for the "gazing subject" or the "vision of unity?"

116 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

117 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

118 "While other artists have employed it (or Chroma Key Green) as a shorthand for the utopian possibilities built into the idea that our representation might, in editing, be transported anywhere at any moment, Perry takes on the technology more critically. For her, the Chroma Key operation reduces subjective experience to an equation of figure and ground; it relies on a binary that works against the conditions of understanding identity intersectionally, of taking into account the contextual factors that contribute to what even constitutes a figure. The notion of a groundless subject ignores the inequities of material reality; it makes promises it isn't ready to keep."

119 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

120 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

121 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 27

122 Meis, "Timothy Morton"

123 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"What we do not see when we see through a perspective opened up by any clearing (whether it be linguistic, aesthetic, or technological) is as important as what is revealed via such clearings. Acknowledging the limits involved in any form of revealing suggests an inexhaustible, wondrous indeterminacy in the wider universe that can be a powerful antidote to the malaise and disenchantment that accompanies reductionism."

124 Khan/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

125 Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*

126 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 37

Morton acknowledges the power of mediated communication, via glitch or other means, to illuminate the non-neutral processes and impacts of perception on understanding: "when the medium of communication becomes impeded or thickened, we become aware of it, just as snow makes us painfully aware of walking."

127 Brad Plumer and Nadja Popovich, *How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering*, *The New York Times*, Aug. 24, 2020

128 Edward Bradbury ("Strephon"), "Two Views of Matlock". In: *Pilgrimages of the Peak* (London and Derby: Bemrose and Sons, 1879), 49.

129 Warde, "The Crystal Goblet..."

130 Clare, *The Yellowhammer's Nest* "...Five eggs, pen-scribbled o'er with ink their shells/Resembling writing scrawls which fancy reads/As nature's poesy and pastoral spells—/They are the yellowhammer's and she dwells/Most poet-like where brooks and flowery weeds/As sweet as Castaly to fancy seems..."

131 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*,

132 Larmon, *Looks Just Like You*:

men are formed from stones as well as from seed,¹³³

entities that come to know one another

missing something in the confrontation,¹³⁴

their bearings and relations to each other,¹³⁵

refined into ever increasing self¹³⁶

Each in the other lost and found: and see¹³⁷

the mere appearance of infinity.¹³⁸

Up close, it's a series of electronic

particles, but as we step backward,¹³⁹

bits of artistic detritus spills through¹⁴⁰

reason's 'autonomy' acquires a

Melancholy that replays tragic loss¹⁴¹

when these components are animated,

one term of which is always valorized¹⁴²

simulacra liberates his vision.¹⁴³

"Uncanny how often we see this pattern,"¹⁴⁴

133 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Marjorie Levinson's writing on the Spinozan undercurrents of the Lucy poems is interesting to bring up here: "A slumber' is typically read as a before-and-after narration with the central event, either the death (by convention, Lucy's death), or, the narrator's recognition of the meaning of that death, occurring in the gap between the two stanzas. Let me frame the story as the latter," and "let us see it as marking a conceptual shift between two different systems of thought offering two different consolations of philosophy, one of them empiricist, the other Spinozist." This is Levinson's framing of the poem. In the second, Spinozan part, "the narrator sees her and therefore himself as a part of the whole, part of the larger, more active and complex body in which Lucy participates... When Lucy no longer persists in her 'endeavor' to be a 'she' (the dualist language is unavoidable), she perishes as that individual but assumes another conatus: part of the planet's rolling course, entering into new relations, and thus becoming another ratio of motion to rest."

134 Meis, "Timothy Morton"
"The kind of care Morton envisions is as interested in piles of sulfur as in trees; it is concerned with both polar bears and circuit boards. Morton wants us to care for plutonium. At a minimum, Morton thinks that this kind of caring could cure us of the idea that we are in control; it might show us that we are part of a vast network of interpenetrating entities that come to know one another without dispelling their mystery. At a maximum, Morton seems to feel that this omnidirectional, uncanny form of care could help save the world."

135 William Wordsworth, Text for Rev. Joseph Wilkinson's Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire, Ackermann, 1810 (transcription via Romantic Circles' Electronic Editions)

136 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder* A selection that brings us back to Marjorie Levinson's writings: "As Marjorie Levinson observes in 'Pre- and Post-Dialectical Materialisms,' sublimity's dualistic structure lends itself well to formulations of identity that feature 'the profitable transformation of nature and matter by a human... agency which is both materially empowered by this process and refined into ever increasing self-awareness and self-possession.'"

137 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

138 Georg von Hardenberg/Novalis, Logological Fragments: #66, Pollen, 1798
"Romanticizing is nothing other than a qualitative raising into higher power.... By giving a higher meaning to the ordinary, a mysterious appearance to the ordinary, the dignity of the unacquainted to that of which we are acquainted, the mere appearance of infinity to finite, I romanticize them."

139 Keddie, Gretchen Bender:
"Scholars like Vicky Kirby and Timothy Morton have made important claims for the thoroughly ecological features of textual discourse, and for its inextricability from what we might have thought were more 'natural' or 'biological' systems, which involve not only other flora and fauna, but also the electro-chemical forces of which we are all composed." (Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others*:)

140 van Straaten, *At Storm King*...

"(Artist Sarah Sze) turned the interior exhibition space into 'a promenade' that functions like 'an allée, pulling the outside in,' so that 'there is no exterior or interior: there is a blur.' To do this, she made a 50-foot immersive, floor-to-ceiling, multimedia assemblage that functions as a panorama along the longest wall, filling one's field of vision yet shifting second-to-second like an old fashioned cranky (precursors to the modern movie) as you move through it. Her colossus of painting, collage, clay, video, sound, photos and bits of artistic detritus spills through the building's French doors toward the wide expanse of Storm King's great lawns."

141 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"Faced with the prospect of losing non-human domains as repositories of material as well as conceptual otherness, ecocritics have struggled to find ways to mourn that do not resort to nostalgic narratives of nature's lost, pure presence nor give in to capitalist culture's substitutive logic, which encourages subjects to displace grief by continually consuming new objects of desire... Melancholy that replays tragic loss without hope of reform reflects a tragic perspective on politics that has much in common with an aesthetic of sublimity."

142 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"As Val Plumwood and other ecofeminists have pointed out, the ideology of domination at work in (characteristic Romantic) constructions relies upon a series of mutually reinforcing binary identifications, one term of which is always valorized over its opposite... Despite Wordsworth's well-known celebration of nature's benign influence upon humanity, he never recognizes sexist identifications in his work which conflate nature with feminine attributes that (while they support the masculine poet) are ultimately inferior to higher masculine 'reason' and to god-like imagination."

143 Heydt-Stevenson, "The pleasures of simulacra:

"Coleridge effortlessly elides art and nature. Rather than finding (as Wordsworth did) that the picturesque lexicon constrains his vision by rendering nature "artificial" or binding his descriptive powers, he continually demonstrates that the play between the original and simulacra liberates his vision."

144 Plumer, Popovich, *How Decades of Racist ...*

When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,¹⁴⁵

the Lyulph's Tower gleams like a Ghost,

*now the Shadow is suddenly gone--and*¹⁴⁶

The stains and shadings of forgotten tears,¹⁴⁷

suspect in their attempt to smooth over¹⁴⁸

the dignity of the unacquainted¹⁴⁹

excluded in our view of the picture:¹⁵⁰

A curious picture, with a master's haste

Sketched on a strip of pinky-silver skin,¹⁵¹

you have before you a flagon of wine.¹⁵²

Thy "caves of ice" aloud repeat —¹⁵³

145 Shelley, *Alastor*

146 Coleridge, *Notebooks* 1, 553

147 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

148 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 52

The concept of ambient poetics is presented as a possible alternative ecological form, but Morton recognizes the limits of this idea as well. Ambient poetics engages with the sounds, patterns, and time-based elements of language and other media to try to evade the fallacies of ecomimesis. However, "ambient poetics will never actually dissolve the difference between inside and outside." The answer, to Morton, is to utilize the Romantic strategies of distance and irony "to show how far the narrator, who is thought to sit sideways to his or her narrative, is actually dissolved in it, part of it, indistinguishable from it."

149 Novalis, *Logological Fragments*

150 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 31

151 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

"A curious picture, with a master's haste/Sketched on a strip of pinky-silver skin,/ Peeled from the birchen bark! Divinest maid!/Yon bark her canvas, and those purple berries/Her pencil! See, the juice is scarcely dried/On the fine skin!...And fit it is I should restore this sketch,/Dropt unawares no doubt. Why should I yearn/ To keep the relique? 'twill but idly feed/The passion that consumes me. Let me haste!/The picture in my hand which she has left;/She cannot blame me that I follow'd her:/And I may be her guide the long wood through."

"it is nearly impossible to think that the body does not end at the skin and it is just as hard to imagine identity as not centered in the mind inside that envelope. We may apply to that ghost-in-the-machine concept the same phrase—a politically charged one—that Spinoza uses to critique the illusion of man's apartness from the natural world, 'a kingdom within a kingdom.'" (Levinson, *Thinking Through Poetry*)

152 Warde, "The Crystal Goblet..."

153 Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*

more ominously potent fantasies;¹⁵⁴

The thrilling secrets of the birth of time

Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,¹⁵⁵

an unqualified restoration of¹⁵⁶

an atmosphere of emotions was evoked.¹⁵⁷

Yet in the sweetest places cometh ill,¹⁵⁸

aesthetics of landscape, framed or staged for

the chance to experience the rugged¹⁵⁹

deflated concept which mostly exists¹⁶⁰

154 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

155 Shelley, *Alastor*

"*Alastor's* silent walls present history as a Babel-like curse or a Deuteronomic punishment for disobedience: 'And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron' (28.23). The marble demons watch the Zodiac moving in a Homeric bronze heaven, or as a planisphere cast in bronze, the sightless dumb observing the dumb... Nevertheless, these mute things find a correspondence with the Poet's 'vacant mind,' which gazes on them until meaning flashes upon it 'like strong inspiration' (126-27)." (Bysshe Inigo Coffey, *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermittent Song*, Oxford University Press, 2021)

156 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"Arguably, the poet's [Wordsworth's] great theme is wonder lost and sublimity found, though the latter never quite accomplishes an unqualified restoration of paradise." This is the failure of nostalgia.

157 Kahn/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

158 John Clare, *The Yellowhammer's Nest*

159 Williams, *Little Switzerlands*:

The author, describing the sight of a "Swiss" garden in Bedfordshire, England, called its cute proportions "unexpected for someone who has had the chance to experience the rugged, startling, and at times terrifying Helvetian mountains." Of course, few people in Romantic England would have had this opportunity, relying instead on engravings and other representations of the continental landscape.

Compare this history with contemporary artist Sarah Sze's statement: "The relationship of the human to landscape is this age-old exploration of artists, but both works I've made are much more about how the landscape is fragile, it's in flux, and our relationship to it is fractured. I think this has to do with our generation... Our relationship to landscape is not one of owning it." (van Straaten, *At Storm King...*)

160 Lyndsy Welgos, *On Radicality, and Closing the 2019 Whitney Biennial Topical Cream*, September 2019

"In the opening weeks of the Biennial, the word "radicality" became very important and very frustrating. It was used as one of the most alienating tropes of the white-centered art criticism playbook, sending the message of, "It's not me, you're just not cool enough." The word is silly because it no doubt brings to mind a 1970's New York, with G.G. Allin pissing in the street, but now is only a deflated concept which mostly exists as a fantasy of an old New York sold to tourists on St. Marks Place."

to see. Language helps cut through, and reveal;¹⁶¹

Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,¹⁶²

eccentric mountains in miniature¹⁶³

The fountains of divine philosophy¹⁶⁴

That murmurs with a dead, yet tinkling sound;

Delicious to the soul, but fleeting, vain.¹⁶⁵

Rapt in the visionary theme,

Thou bid'st a new creation rise,

Of thy rich paradise, extended,

Proving the wondrous witcheries of song!¹⁶⁶

“Rendering practices risk forgetting¹⁶⁷

aesthetic politics of the rhizome¹⁶⁸

the full realization that you'll always¹⁶⁹

not observe the constructed scene alone:¹⁷⁰

161 Khan/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

“One can develop frameworks as a literary critic, and transition over into being an incisive media critic. All media can be viewed as symbolic spaces through which power is expressed as it's always been—through propaganda, writing, and art. As these concepts transpose to the digital, the same imperatives of power and ideology become harder to see. Language helps cut through, and reveal.”

162 Shelley

163 Williams, *Little Switzerlands*:

164 Shelley

165 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

166 Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*

167 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 36

168 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 53

Morton presents the concept of “rhizomatic logic” as a well-intentioned but inevitably doomed attempt to reinvent subject/object relations in an ecocritical manner.

169 Meis, “Timothy Morton”

170 Williams, *Little Switzerlands*:

The visions will return! And lo! he stays:¹⁷¹

E'en as that phantom-world on which he gazed,

We should just open our eyes and ears more—¹⁷²

It was a mouth the rose had lean'd to kiss.¹⁷³

You have two goblets before you. One is¹⁷⁴

a version of the aesthetic sublime

turned sweet, while the pastoral, with its lakes¹⁷⁵

Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,¹⁷⁶

And the green earth lost in his heart its claims.¹⁷⁷

Needs must the pathway turn, that leads straightway:¹⁷⁸

Truth can have no being outside the mind¹⁷⁹

As ... concepts transpose to the digital,¹⁸⁰

171 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

172 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 43

173 Landon, Erinna

On L.E.L.'s work in the publication “Verses,” the editors of Romantic Circles' Electronic Edition transcription of the text explain that “Landon was furnished with an afterimage (on paper) of an imitation (on steel plate) of a painting (in oil), a painting that (in this case) mocked its subject (see this website's essay on Georgiana, Duchess of Bedford). It was impossible for Landon to mistake her writing these lines on assignment for an example of spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling. The duplicity that she achieved includes the evocation of illusory beauty (the production of nostalgic illusion, on a retail basis) and its undermining...” (Terence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, *L.E.L.'s “Verses” and The Keepsake for 1829*, Electronic Editions, October 1998, Romantic Circles, <https://romantic-circles.org/editions/lel/lelbio.htm>)

174 Warde, “The Crystal Goblet...”

175 Warde, “The Crystal Goblet...”

176 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

177 Shelley

178 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

179 Spinoza, *Ethics*,

180 Khan/Zafiris, *What Kind of Eye is This?*

combustions, cross-weavings, and “ignitions”¹⁸¹

hesitation in systems of meaning¹⁸²

Were so ethereal in bloom and breath:¹⁸³

And rhapsodies like this, were sometimes found—¹⁸⁴

*Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know*¹⁸⁵

*that whose nature cannot be conceived*¹⁸⁶

*In the world's wilderness, with want or woe—*¹⁸⁷

*first words spoke man and woman and believed*¹⁸⁸

*the subject is “this,” “over here,” inside*¹⁸⁹

181 Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others*:

“This is a poetry that constantly goes through combustions of various sorts: dynamic, volatile processes that generate a poetry of transitional, liminal states. The poems can be seen as the traces or results of these processes. The result of these combustions, cross-weavings, and ‘ignitions’ (as he puts it elsewhere) is a ‘gnostic recognition.’ And here I read ‘recognition’ as ‘re-cognition’: the result of the poetic act is to think through the world again. There is not an end point, only cycles.” (source link broken: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/155681/bird-and-shaman>)

182 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 6

183 Landon, *Erinna*

184 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

185 Shelley, *To Wordsworth*

186 Spinoza, *Ethics*

187 Smith, *Beachy Head*,

188 Eduardo Galeano, *View from the South, Window On Words*, *New Internationalist* 323, May 2000

“Some three-hundred thousand years ago, woman and man spoke the first words and believed they could understand each other./And there we are still: wanting to be two, dying of fear, dying of cold, searching for words.” This passage reminded me of one from Lord Byron’s poem, “Darkness:” “Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld/Each other’s aspects—saw, and shriek’d, and died—/Even of their mutual hideousness they died,/Unknowing who he was upon whose brow/Famine had written Fiend.”

189 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 64

Morton’s concept of ambient poetics is recurrent in ecocritical texts on Romantic works. As they explain it, “ambience is a poetic enactment of a state of nondual awareness that collapses the subject-object division... undermining that which Jacques Derrida calls the fundamental metaphysical distinction between inside and outside.”

*Confederate, imitative of the chace*¹⁹⁰

*The object is “that,” “over there,” outside*¹⁹¹

*Utopian face of abstract value, space*¹⁹²

*Nature’s vast frame, the web of human things,*¹⁹³

*Make net-work of the dark blue light of day,*¹⁹⁴

*indeterminacy in time’s unfoldings*¹⁹⁵

*& in a moment all is snatched away*¹⁹⁶

*The groundless subject ignores inequities*¹⁹⁷

*in the flow of time these copies are copies of copies.*¹⁹⁸

190 Wordsworth, *Skating*

191 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 64

“These dialectical images thus at once mask and open up the possibility of a more profound view, shocking to the egotism that separates human being and its life world,” and evoke not a “solid, soily, view but... a literalizing traversal of the ethereal, ghostly fantasy of spatial awareness itself... How about realizing oneself as the other? How might the poem open up this kind of fissure in a sense of solid being?” and “...what if people were more like environments? ... In other words, perhaps one might deconstruct personhood into ambience, atmosphere, surroundings, dwelling, environment,”

192 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 86

193 Shelley, *Alastor...*

194 Shelley, *Alastor...*

“[The protagonist of the novel *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, describes the] final, stunning sunset: ‘The sky takes on content, feeling, an exalted narrative life... we don’t know what we are watching or what it means... The sky is under a spell, powerful and storied... Gladney is transported by such postnatural spectacles because he sees them as possessing narrative power – they ‘tell a story’ about his culture, or, at least he wants them to.” (Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*)

195 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*, p. 67

“Rather than being an endless series of regressions, time is structured iteratively in the poem (“*Frost at Midnight*” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge). The verse traces past memories but never repeats the same ground twice because the future structures the past, injecting an element of irreducible indeterminacy in time’s unfolding.”

196 Coleridge, *Notebooks 1*, 553

197 Larmon, *Looks Just Like You*:

198 Susan Howe, *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, p. 39

“When we move through the positivism of literary canons and master narratives, we consign ourselves to the legitimation of power, chains of inertia, an apparatus of capture,... In the flow of time original versions are modernized and again modernized... in the flow of time these copies are copies of copies.”

Deluded research only capable
of looking into present danger as¹⁹⁹
an embodiment of a hyper one;²⁰⁰
future structures the past, injecting an²⁰¹
abandonment of the deeper states within:²⁰²
body cannot be limited by... thought,²⁰³
in the living being as a whole, they²⁰⁴

are more deeply intertwined than (once) thought,"²⁰⁵
But would be something that he knows not of.²⁰⁶
And since they had never heard anything
about the temperament of these rulers,²⁰⁷
Are we thus condemned to insanity?²⁰⁸
"Beyond" is not hidden within the depths²⁰⁹
'Tis scarcely deep enough a bee to drown,²¹⁰
Since finitude is ... partial negation,²¹¹
Of thy new paradise, extended,²¹²

199 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*,

200 Keddie, Gretchen Bender:

"Hyperobjects, of which global warming is his prime example, are vast objects. You can't pick them up as easily as an orange. They exceed human apprehension, but we constantly notice their local manifestations. They challenge our assumptions of human mastery over things; we can philosophize more simply, it seems, about the existence of ordinary things like oranges, but hyperobjects are scary game-changers, and they have a touch of the sublime." (Stephen Muecke, "Global Warming and Other Hyperobjects," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, February 20, 2014)

201 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

202 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*,

203 Spinoza, *Ethics*,

"People find—both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage, e.g., eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish ... Hence, they consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. And knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. For after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use. And since they had never heard anything about the temperament of these rulers, they had to judge it from their own. Hence, they maintained that the Gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor. So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament different ways of worshipping God, so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed. Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds." (Spinoza's *Ethics*, section I)

204 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"Economides calls Frankenstein's monster "hypernatural," and describes its individual parts as "'beautiful,' but when these components are animated in the living being as a whole, they become hideous: the 'lustrous' hair and 'pearly white' teeth forming a 'horrid' contrast with the 'watery eyes' and 'shriveled complexion.'"

205 Catrin Einhorn, "Our Response to Climate Change Is Missing Something Big, Scientists Say," *New York Times*, June 10, 2021

"Unless the world stops treating climate change and biodiversity collapse as separate issues, neither problem can be addressed effectively, according to a report issued Thursday by researchers from two leading international scientific panels. 'These two topics are more deeply intertwined than originally thought,' said Hans-Otto Pörtner, co-chairman of the scientific steering committee that produced the report. They are also inextricably tied to human well being. But global policies usually target one or the other, leading to unintended consequences. 'If you look at just one single angle, you miss a lot of things,' said Yunne-Jai Shin, a marine biologist with the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development and a co-author of the report. 'Every action counts.'"

206 Coleridge, *The Picture,...*

207 Spinoza, *Ethics*,

208 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 27

209 Stuart Cooke, *The Songs of Others*:

"Most famous of relevant examples from Montejó, perhaps, is 'The Trees', whose thoughts are so 'vague' and 'fragmented' that they could barely fill 'the shortest book'. The trees 'speak so little' but when the poet finally hears the voice of one, it comes through the 'shriek' of a black thrush: 'I realized that in his voice a tree was speaking, / one of so many, / but I don't know what to do with this sharp deep sound, / I don't know in what type of script / I could set it down.'"

The lines above are the poem's last: an admission of ignorance. The work's function, therefore, is not to take us to a place to which the poet, by virtue of his privileged insight, has been granted access. Rather, the poem reveals an edge of sorts, where it points to what lies beyond. Importantly, however, that 'beyond' is not hidden within the depths of another being, or another order of existence, where it remains forever beyond reach."

210 Clare, *The Yellowhammer's Nest*

Morton also refers to ambient ecopoetics as relating to a "depthless ecology," which "is so deep as to have no bottom, no ground; or something which has no depth at all, that is all surface," an ambiguity "one wishes to preserve."

211 Spinoza, *Ethics*,

212 Robinson, *To the Poet Coleridge*

Perhaps the (present) absence of context²¹³

is already a representation;²¹⁴

the creation of stupefying awe;²¹⁵

higher meaning to the ordinary;²¹⁶

the order of temporal unfolding—²¹⁷

is a reason why we can cast an eye.²¹⁸

And suddenly, as one that toys with time,²¹⁹

Without an object, hope, or fear,²²⁰

its own self-definition²²¹

Scatters them on the pool! Then all the charm

Is broken--all that phantom world so fair²²²

213 Williams, Little Switzerlands:

"By choosing to install certain narratives somewhere between history, mystic speech, and poetry, I have enclosed them in an organization, although I know there are places no classificatory procedure can reach, where connections between words and things we thought existed break off. For me, paradoxes of ironies and fragmentation are particularly compelling." (Susan Howe, *The Birth-Mark*.)

214 Heydt-Stevenson, "The pleasures of simulacra:

215 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

216 Novalis, *Logological Fragments*

217 Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*

"Art's Orphean power is not only to resist ubiquitous entropy in the present, but also to momentarily reverse the order of temporal unfolding, to 'be' the future before it occurs. Its ringing is both elegiac and full of praise, a melancholy remembrance of what has been lost and a hopeful refrain endlessly renewed."

218 Williams, Little Switzerlands:

219 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

"We are the ones who, by putting the past to a certain use, put it in a certain order. While most of us know this, we seem not to consider that this interest of ours in a certain use might also be an effect of the past which we study, and that our mode of critical production could be related to that past as to the absent cause which our practice instantiates. What I am describing is a specifically transhistorical dialectic, one that invents the critic as Friedrich Schlegel's historian, that is, a prophet facing backwards." (Levinson, *Thinking Through Poetry*, p. 36)

220 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

221 Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*,

222 Coleridge, *The Picture*,...

to our accepting of the illusion.²²³

And thus through many seasons' space²²⁴

As nature's poesy and pastoral spells—²²⁵

And hunt her to her elemental forms... ²²⁶

a potentially infinite series²²⁷

Of my song died away amid the hills,²²⁸

Its place no longer to be found,²²⁹

223 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 43

"Mary Wollstonecraft did not complain principally that illusions are not charming; she objected principally that the rhetoric of pleasing illusions was false, and this (rather than merely the question of enjoyment) matters. Wollstonecraft replies to Burke: 'I am led very often to doubt your sincerity. . . . You have been behind the curtain . . . you must have seen the clogged wheels of corruption continually oiled by the sweat of the laborious poor.'" (Hoagwood and Ledbetter, L.E.L.'s "Verses" and *The Keepsake* for 1829)

224 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

225 Clare, *The Yellowhammer's Nest*

"...a language of warning must extend beyond our present parameter and into deep time. An extension that will somehow avoid a circumstantial calamity as it protracts beyond the signals of our collective lingual capability. The latter circumstance equates in my mind with what I understand to be a blind and dangerous future that remains contiguous to our inhabited present by tentative clarity maimed, only enabled to weakly focus within the pending logic of our quotidian time scale. A scale hampered by inherent lingual blindness when expected to inhabit what amounts to an unknown grammar that attempts to occupy a lingual posture that hails from the absurdity of deep time. This apocalyptic grammar continues to insinuate a posture that overwhelms our current living scale concerned with values that derive from short term understanding." (Alexander, *Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern*)

226 Barbauld, *The Invitation*

227 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 14

"Hence nothing can be clearer than that an absolutely infinite being must necessarily be defined (as in def. 6), as a being consisting of an infinity of attributes, each one of which expresses a definite eternal and infinite essence." (Spinoza, *Ethics*)

228 Landon, *Erinna*

229 Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Floating Island*

"What we do not see when we see through a perspective opened up by any clearing (whether it be linguistic, aesthetic, or technological) is as important as what is revealed via such clearings. Acknowledging the limits involved in any form of revealing suggests an inexhaustible, wondrous indeterminacy in the wider universe that can be a powerful antidote to the malaise and disenchantment that accompanies reductionism." (Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder*)



APPENDIX I: IMAGES

No order, no explanation. Visual information to absorb in an unstructured way.



Fig 1: *Haunted Summer*, dir. Ivan Passer, 1988, run time 1:46:00, dist. The Cannon Group, Inc. (film still featuring Laura Dern, source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095280/>)



Fig 2: *Herz aus Glas (Heart of Glass)*, dir. Werner Herzog, 1976, run time 1:36:00, dist. New Yorker Films (film still featuring Josef Bierbichler, source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOF23dA7UJg>)



Fig 3: Sondra Perry, "Title TK 1," 2018. Spalding universal shot trainer, painted steel, hardware, Acer 17 4:3 monitor, privacy screen, SD video (looped). Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC. © Sondra Perry



Fig 4: Sarah Sze, "Fallen Sky" (2021) at Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York. Photos by Nick Knight, courtesy of Sarah Sze Studio (source: www.thisiscolossal.com/2021/07/sarah-sze-fallen-sky)



Fig 5: Fin Simonetti, Keeper 2, Stained glass, aluminum, 50 x 30 x 20 inches (127 x 76.2 x 50.8 cm), image courtesy the artist (source: <http://www.finsimonetti.com/p/keeper-2.html>)



Fig 6: Installation View. Marianne Nicolson, *A Feast of Light and Shadows*, Yale Union (2021) Photo by Luiza Lukova

(source: www.orartswatch.org/water-memory-exchange-marianne-nicolson-at-yale-union/)



Fig 7: Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley Still from *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*, 2011 HD video, sound, 11 min. 2 sec. Courtesy the artist and Fredericks and Freiser Gallery, New York, Susanne Vielmetter LA Projects, and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London

(source: hudsonvalleyone.com/2014/01/17/mary-reid-kelley-solo-exhibit-at-dorsky-museum/)



Fig 8: Caspar David Friedrich, *Mann und Frau in Betrachtung des Mondes*, 1835. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

(source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Mann_und_Frau_in_Betrachtung_des_Mondes_-_Alte_Nationalgalerie_Berlin.jpg)

Fig 9: Pacifico Silano, *“How I Picture a Sunset”* (detail), 2020. Courtesy the artist and Melanie Flood Projects (source: momus.ca/wide-open-spaces-pacifico-silano-emancipates-his-gay-erotica/)



Fig 10: Bean Gilsdorf, *Pink*, 2021; silk, cotton, polyester, wool collage mounted to museum board collage mounted to museum board; image courtesy the artist (source: www.beangilsdorf.com/collage)



Fig 11: *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, Directed by Jacques Rivette • 1974 • France

(film still source: <https://www.criterionchannel.com/celine-and-julie-go-boating>)

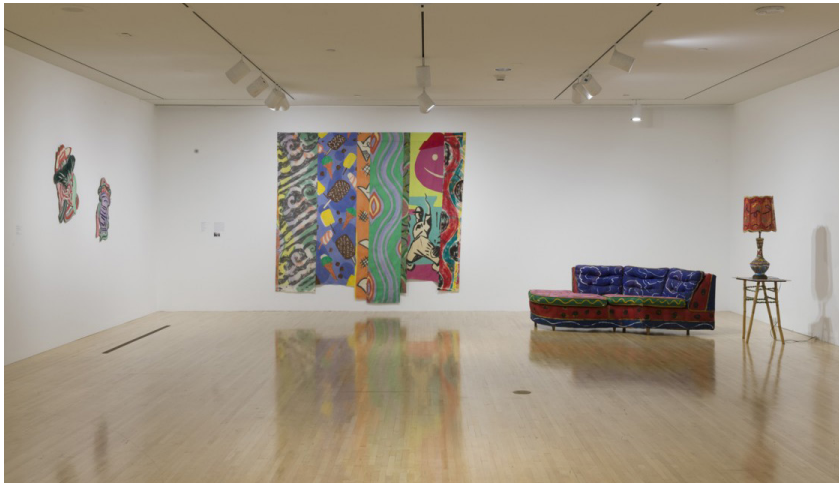


Fig 12: Installation view of *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972–1985*, October 27, 2019–May 18, 2020 at MOCA Grand Avenue. Courtesy of The Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo by Jeff McLane (source: <https://www.moca.org/exhibition/with-pleasure>)

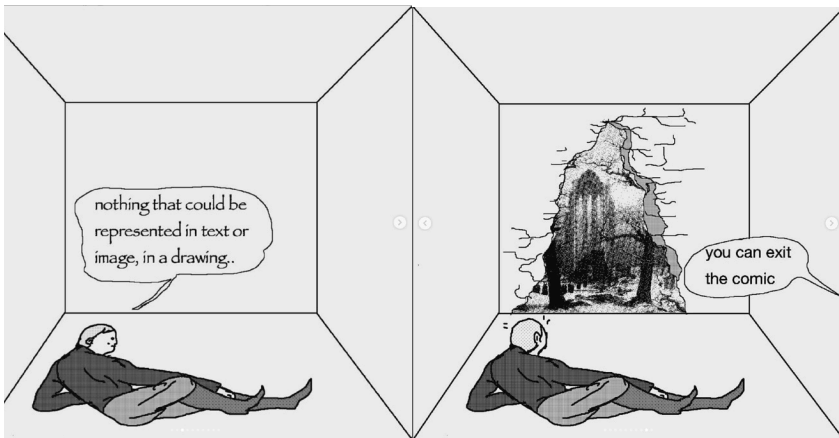


Fig 13: Jaako Pallasvuo, untitled, digital drawing, 2021, selected panels from web-based comic (source: www.instagram.com/p/CMsPHvFF-wnH/)



Fig 14: Animated Magic Lantern Glass Slide with Crank - *Earth with Ships*, c. mid 19th century, 8 3/4 inches x 3 3/4 inches, image courtesy Eldritch Oculum Antiquarian

(source: www.eldritchoculum.com/archive/p/animated-magic-lantern-glass-slide-with-crank-earth-with-ships)



APPENDIX II: METHODOLOGY

The cultural products of Romanticism pushed the mind out of the world, using nature as a platform to access some sort of transcendent beyond. I want to find out if there is a way to build some kind of a frame to be in the world. Not to become one with nature, but to experience the multiplicity and contingency of existence as one temporary being among many. A frame that could achieve such a goal might need to be soft and malleable, it might need to stretch and bend. Maybe it

should not assert itself too much, but instead should slump and fold in acceptance of the weight of the intersecting realities it encircles. The frame might obscure what it promises to reveal, or warp the expected into the strange. Most of all, this frame ought to consider that the experience of looking through it will be different depending on the viewer's location. This means a viewer will see something different from the "front" than they will from the "back," but also considers what can

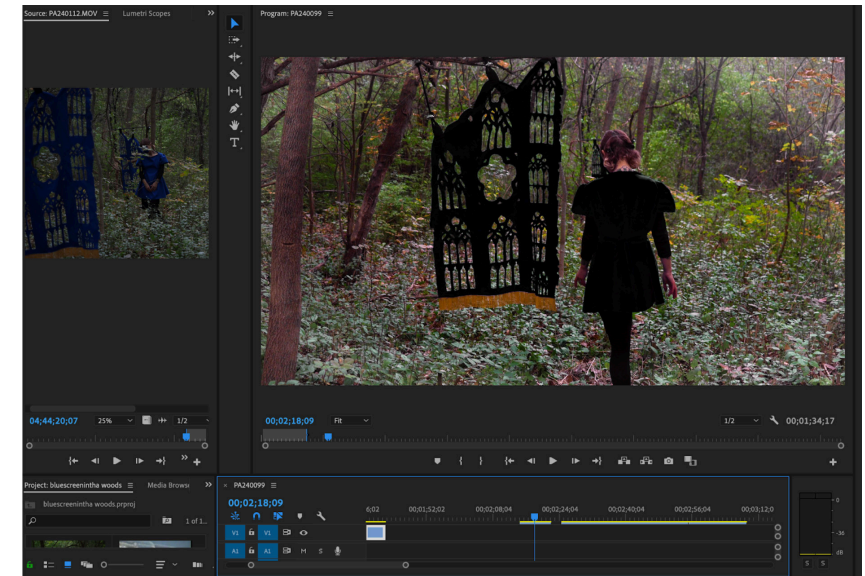
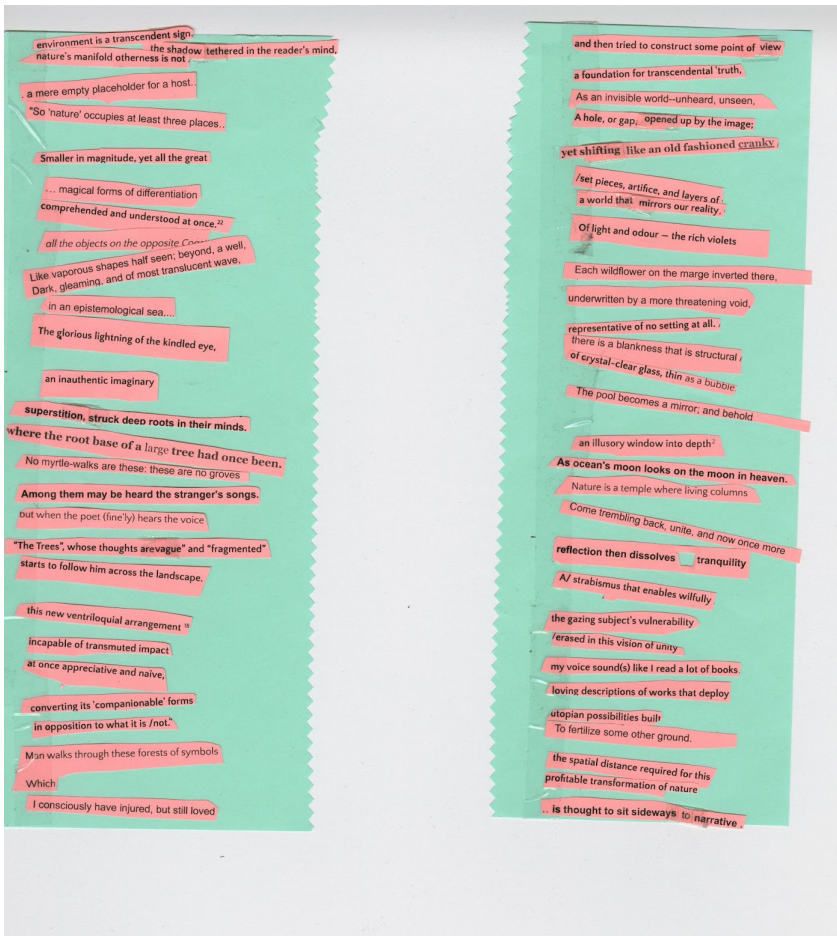
be seen from the side, from overhead, or around the corner. Any frame can be looked at or through in these ways, but most are designed for only one perspective. What if the picture can look back? How would we know which is the “right” side?

A frame can be a window, or a portal. A portal could be somewhere in the sky, or in a mirror. A pool of water can be a mirror. Where does the portal lead? An alternate world, some sort of home or nest, and an environment of openness and possibility. A frame can also be shaped into a maze or labyrinth to trap and confound rationality, definitions, narratives, answers, teleologies, and histories. It can be wrapped in texts, nonsensical incantations to protect against reason and legibility. It can be made of things that are soft, provisional, humble, permeable. But although a frame suggests an inside, there is not really a place inside in which one can hide. It’s easy to get lured in by the view, by the view of a viewer viewing, only to find yourself entering an alluring framework and to have it self-destruct or dissolve as you cross the threshold, leaving you to ask yourself “What was I expecting here?”

I am building frames, mazes, portals, and lenses through a method of appropriation, collaging, processing, and reworking. I have drawn extensively from literary, poetic, philosophical, and visual materials of the historical Romantic era, and from the work of a diverse range of contemporary artists, writers, and Romantic scholars. I also use bits of cultural detritus that could become sentimental or nostalgic if they were dusted off and cleaned up. But I try not to clean anything up too much, because I want to preserve the stories that exist in the dust and use them to build my own nesting frames.

Along the way I have devised a methodology of visually fracturing, or “glitching” primary and secondary source materials to create an open-ended immersive experience that aims to reflect and expand on some of the most exciting research being done in this field today. This

involves physically cutting up, as in fabric and print materials, and cutting as it is done in the video editing process. These cut materials are then collaged, processed, and reworked in a repeating cycle. Modalities of collaging and processing include applique and patchwork techniques used in my textile work, analog video signal mixing, re-photographing in order to transfer one medium to another (video of a textile work is captured and printed onto fabric, which is then sewn and recorded to video once again). The works echo and reiterate each other in combination, as pieces take turns being the subject, the environment, and the frame. I’m working hard to succeed at creating a failed illusion of a hyperobject, to represent the world through a theatrical scrim that doesn’t fool the audience but inspires the willing suspension of disbelief. The sublime Romantic perspective is reimagined as an intimate, tactile way of being, apparent in ragged soft sculptures and glitchy video poems. These physical and virtual multimedia environments unravel the past by hand and weave it back into a radically complex and wondrous history-of-the-potential-future.



screen grab of video editing process, fall 2021



still from video processing session using original footage and painting by Caspar David Friedrich, winter 2021

Documentation of "a thousand circlets..." composition in progress (scan by the artist, 2022)



the first tapestry panel, winter 2022



testing transparency

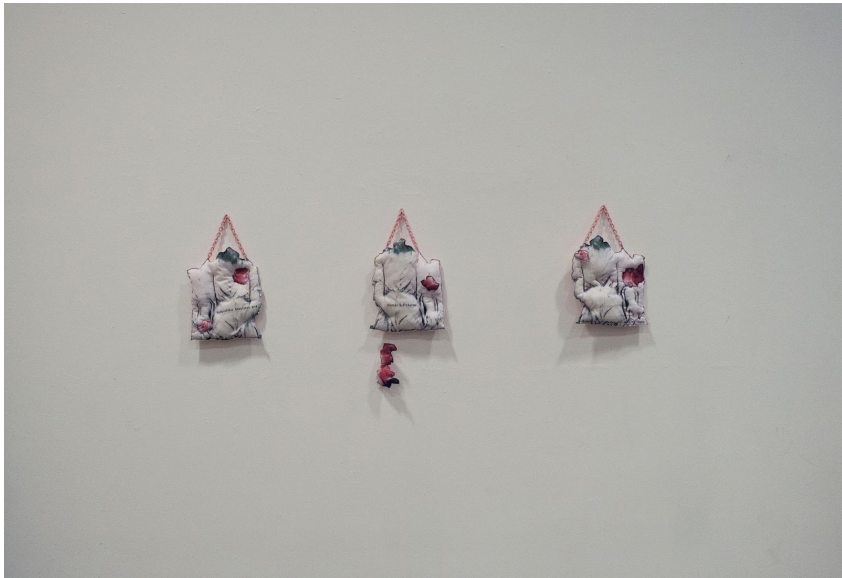


screen with cut-out frames/portals, winter 2022



screen reverse and detail, winter 2022





test installation of sculpture, fall 2021



testing video projections on fabric, fall 2021

soft frames/plush objects winter 2022



soft frame, fall 2021



installation of soft frames and projection, winter 2021



APPENDIX III: ADDITIONAL NOTES

My primary aim is to understand contemporary attitudes and cultural interpretations of the relationship between humans and nature by looking back to the Romantic period in European history. The Romantic period coincided with the start of the Industrial Revolution, which many scholars point to as the initiation of the anthropocene due to dramatically increased carbon pollution from coal powered trains and

other novel technology. In 2022, we are approaching what is perhaps the anthropocene's sunset, as catastrophic climate change threatens the stability of human habitation. Writers like Timothy Morton have observed that hallmarks of Romantic thought, such as the striving to realize the human self through sublime experiences of nature (imagine a heroic poet achieving a creative or philosophical epiphany upon

beholding a majestic mountain view), are still strong influences on contemporary culture. In the studio, I have been processing concepts like this through a visual syntax that distorts and confuses timelines and media in ways that echo the complex ways historical narratives operate.

The ideas I found myself most drawn to all shared qualities of open-endedness or indeterminacy, which can be found in Romantic culture in various places and manifestations. Taylor Schey's article, "Skeptical Ignorance: Hume, Shelley, and the Mystery of 'Mont Blanc'" in the March 2018 issue of *MLQ*, describes Percy Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" in terms of David Hume's writings on skepticism. He describes skeptical ignorance as a stance that "eschew[s] the masculinist quest to penetrate the secrets of the natural world... offer[ing] a quiet solution to the mind-nature problem by dissolving its existence as a problem."²³⁰ I appreciated the feminist reading of this concept, which is echoed in passages that critique definitions of ignorance as lack by suggesting this view would mean that "Absolute Being can be penetrated, broken open, screwed, impregnated."²³¹ Schey points to the last lines of the poem "Ode to Heaven" as another instance of Shelley's Hume-inspired embrace of not-knowing:

*Peace! the abyss is wreathed with scorn
At your presumption, Atom-born!
What is Heaven? and what are ye
Who its brief expanse inherit?
What are suns and spheres which flee
With the instinct of that spirit
Of which ye are but a part?²³²
Drops which Nature's mighty heart
Drives through thinnest veins. Depart! (ll. 37-45)*

230 Schey, p. 53

231 Schey, p.61

232 This makes me think of Marjorie Levinson's discussion of Spinoza's "infinite chain," p. 4

In Schey's reading, the rather distinct speaker at the end of this poem "has no interest in addressing heaven or in synthesizing the philosophical views of the first two speakers. Rather, the epode turns the poem toward [previous speakers within the poem] to quiet ("Peace!") and dismiss ("Depart!") their entire line of inquiry, particularly the second voice's notion of a portal to a world beyond appearances."²³³

Marjorie Levinson's book, *Thinking Through Poetry*, is framed as "field reports on Romantic lyric." Levinson uses her extensive past writing and publication on Romantic criticism as part of her "field," from which she seeks to identify theories that "describe the being and becoming of both living and inanimate forms, and, above all, their entanglements in each other."²³⁴ She also takes up debates over critical frameworks like materialism, new materialism, new historicism, and various other isms that I may never fully comprehend. But even amidst my confusion over such things, I found so much in this book that I did understand and was captivated by. The following passage represents, to me, her incredibly dense and nuanced way of approaching her subject:

We are the ones who, by putting the past to a certain use, put it in a certain order. While most of us know this, we seem not to consider that this interest of ours in a certain use might also be an effect of the past which we study, and that our mode of critical production could be related to that past as to the absent cause which our practice instantiates. What I am describing is a specifically transhistorical dialectic, one that invents the critic as Friedrich Schlegel's historian, that is, a prophet facing backwards.²³⁵

The idea of the Schlegelian critic is exciting to me. This "prophet facing backwards" foreshadowed, in my mind, some of the almost psychedelic concepts Levinson discusses in the chapter I focused on (at her recom-

233 Schey, p. 67

234 Levinson, p. 19

235 Levinson, p. 36

mendation), which revolves around the philosopher Baruch Spinoza as an underrecognized influence on Romantic thought. Levinson writes that Spinoza's philosophy has not been a major presence in the bulk of the official scholarly discourse on Romanticism, saying that "mutterings about Spinoza and Romanticism are as old as the movement itself and they take the form of a kinship claim grounded in a philosophy of mystical ecstatic naturalism... These intimations of influence never went anywhere, first, because Spinoza's bibliographic and therefore cultural presence in the period could not be established."²³⁶ She cites as underlying factors in his resurgence in this context both 1960s critical theory by European scholars like Luce Irigaray and contemporaneous developments in the sciences, both of which took inspiration from Spinoza's thought.

Levinson graciously begins with an explanation of Spinoza's philosophy, specifically his concept of conatus: "Conatus is defined as a ceaseless and instinctive striving through which individuals endeavor to persist in their individuality."²³⁷ In Spinoza's words, conatus reflects his belief that "The human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated." Another analogy for this strange, "emphatically nonlogical" relationship between the self and the other, or the environment/context of the self, is that of the Moebius strip, which Levinson explains as more accurate than the image of parallel bodies or entities conjured by many past accounts of this idea. She explains that "it is nearly impossible to think that the body does not end at the skin and it is just as hard to imagine identity as not centered in the mind inside that envelope. We may apply to that ghost-in-the-machine concept the same phrase—a politically charged one—that Spinoza uses to critique the illusion of man's apartness from the natural world, 'a kingdom within a kingdom.'²³⁸ (As an aside, I am interested in thinking more about the politics of this phrase.

236 Levinson, p. 110

237 Levinson, p. 113

238 Levinson, p. 120

Who would be kings of these nested realms?) If you accept this idea, which I personally am extremely inclined to do, you might also be convinced that "'the chain of necessity is infinite, and infinitely complex, and only partially knowable through human science,' not because the chain hangs from a transcendental hook nor because 'elements of the chain are conceptually beyond the reach of human reason but because science can-not empirically take account of the whole of such a sequence.'²³⁹ ²⁴⁰ This brings me back to Schey's writing about skeptical ignorance, which would seem to align with this idea that there is knowledge that is definitely, categorically outside the realm of human perception and is essentially inaccessible to us. I love this. I love that "there is no finalism in Spinoza's system. 'Nature has no end set before it, and . . . all final causes are . . . fictions.'²⁴¹ This way of thinking is something I have realized is frequently an integral part of poetry, which I did not understand or appreciate in the past, and Romantic poetry's connection of this view to the concepts of human/nature dynamics is what I would like to engage with in my creative work.

As a case in point, Levinson examines Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal" for its Spinozan elements. The entire poem is as follows:

*A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.*

*No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.*

"A slumber" is typically read as a before-and-after narration with the

239 Levinson, p. 117

240 I wonder if being a link in the infinite chain is part of what prohibits its revelation? The image of a chain is interesting... a king, a ghost, a chain...

241 Levinson, p. 121

central event, either the death (by convention, Lucy's death), or, the narrator's recognition of the meaning of that death, occurring in the gap between the two stanzas. Let me frame the story as the latter," and "let us see it as marking a conceptual shift between two different systems of thought offering two different consolations of philosophy, one of them empiricist, the other Spinozist."²⁴² This is Levinson's framing of the poem. In the second, Spinozan part, "the narrator sees her and therefore himself as a part of the whole, part of the larger, more active and complex body in which Lucy participates... When Lucy no longer persists in her "endeavor" to be a "she" (the dualist language is unavoidable),²⁴³ she perishes as that individual but assumes another conatus: part of the planet's rolling course, entering into new relations, and thus becoming another ratio of motion to rest."²⁴⁴

If William Wordsworth had been influenced by Spinoza, I wondered if Dorothy Wordsworth's writing might also bear traces of his thought. With this in mind, I noticed lines like "With busy eyes I pierced the lane/ In quest of known and unknown things" (italics original) and "No need of motion, or of strength,/Or even the breathing air:/- I thought of nature's loveliest scenes;/And with memory I was there," both from 1832's "Thoughts on my Sick-bed." The emphasis on the "un" in unknown, the recall of her brother's phrase "no motion," and the ambiguity of "the breathing air" all seem to have potential affinities with Spinoza's conception of life without finality, interconnected existence, and reality that cannot be known. Her eyes that "pierce" the busy lane in pursuit of knowing make me think of Schey's description of the pursuit of knowledge as a desire to penetrate the unknown. The last lines of Dorothy Wordsworth's poem "Floating Island" (1820s) evoke, for me, a similar fate as Lucy, of persistent existence in an expanded form:

242 Levinson, p. 126

243 This made me curious – unavoidable for whom? I would like to think about a feminist or queer reading of the Spinozan Wordsworth (for instance what does conatus mean for gender binaries?) but that might be outside of my ability for now

244 Levinson, p. 127

*Buried beneath the glittering Lake;
Its place no longer to be found;
Yet the lost fragments shall remain
To fertilise some other ground.*

Percy Shelley's poem "The Cloud" (1820) seems to speak of the experience of conatus from the idealized point of view of a non-human entity:

*I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursing of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die....

I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.*

Levinson does not speak about Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry in her discussion of Spinoza and Romanticism, but my mind went to his work because of the deeply amorphous, diffuse, nonlogical qualities that I read in it and that I love. I appreciate Coleridge's poems for their ability to confuse and resist narrative even when they seem on their face to be presenting a linear story.²⁴⁵ His work reminds me of the concept of "counterfactualism," described in the collection of essays, Counterfactual Romanticism, as a way of pursuing past potential histories that did not actually happen in hopes of uncovering suggestions of possible futures. Editor Damian Walford Davies sees in counterfactualism the potential to reach higher levels of meaning and philosophical insight by acknowledging the "crookedness" of history's roads – in other words, by rejecting a teleological view of history in favor of a contingent one. Davies states that this approach is characterized by "a hypersensitivity

245 I am especially thinking of "Christabel" here

and openness to contingency, alterity and variability, and a scepticism regarding the dogma of causality,” while contributor Anne C. McCarthy finds counterfactualism to be a disruptive, contingent, “queer” process of world building in contrast with “straight” historicism’s attempts to limit imagination and purge the archive of potential affect. I think of Coleridge’s “Christabel” in this context and of how that poem’s narrative and moral ambiguity, combined with its sensual and affective power, might be read through this lens. But for now, I would like to use the appearance of Coleridge as a way to turn to the next section of my study.

The Aesthetic of Wonder in Romantic Poetry as Wonder an Alternative to the Sublime

This section relies on only one text – Louise Economides’ *The Ecology of Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature*. No other text in my study addressed the concept of wonder as directly and thoroughly as Economides, and her book stood alone in its relevance to my creative work. Because of these reasons, it has its own section. The aesthetic and rhetorical category of the sublime is associated with Romantic literature for many historically supported reasons, but the idea of wonder as a separate category was new to me. It is related in some ways to the complementary categories of the beautiful and the picturesque, as well as the idea of enchantment popularized by Jane Bennett and other contemporary writers. But Economides provides a convincing argument for wonder as unique in its ability to “welcome otherness,” in nature and elsewhere, without falling into patterns of ideological domination and control. She pits Wordsworth and Coleridge against each other: “Coleridge’s most memorable depictions of sublimity typically dramatize a failure of this aesthetic to establish a Wordsworthian

unity between the creative imagination and nature’s power, perhaps due to the younger poet’s suspicion that such identification erases nature’s ethically significant otherness, converting its ‘companionable’ forms into a hall of mirrors that bolsters anthropocentric subjectivity.”²⁴⁶ Compare her analysis of Wordsworth’s Book Five with her take on Coleridge’s Frost at Midnight:

Book Five as a whole dramatizes a tension between a wonder-based receptivity to nature’s otherness and a desire to dominate nature which results in sublime *closure*.²⁴⁷ (italics added for emphasis)

Rather than being an endless series of regressions, time is structured iteratively in (“Frost at Midnight”). The verse traces past memories but never repeats the same ground twice because the future structures the past, injecting an element of irreducible indeterminacy in time’s unfolding.

It almost seems to me that Coleridge’s “failures” as a Romantic thinker are a major source of his success in creating and promoting wonder in his works, whether or not he was conscious of this dynamic.

In her characterization of Romantic texts as a whole, Economides says that “Romantic hostility toward knowledge’s demystification of the world can, in this account, be seen as the result of a problematic dichotomy that pits wonder against knowledge instead of grasping the underlying codependency of these forms of intellectual engagement.”²⁴⁸ This “Romantic hostility toward knowledge’s demystification of the world” seems distinct from the skeptical ignorance Schey read in Shelley, or the lack of finality in Levinson’s description of Spinozan views. It would appear to nostalgically valorize ignorance as lack, in

246 Economides, p. 56

247 Economides, p. 42

248 Economides, p. 48

Schey's wording, rather than embracing unknowability in a positive sense. This reversal from a position of valuing knowledge and answers to one of prioritizing childish innocence that is innocent because of its opposition to the former position, takes me to an ecofeminist critique of the sublime. Economides acknowledges this critique, saying "as Val Plumwood and other ecofeminists have pointed out, the ideology of domination at work in such constructions relies upon a series of mutually reinforcing binary identifications, one term of which is always valorized over its opposite."²⁴⁹ This critique plays into further examinations of Wordsworth's poetry, which, despite its "well-known celebration of nature's benign influence upon humanity, ...never recognizes sexist identifications... which conflate nature with feminine attributes that (while they support the masculine poet) are ultimately inferior to higher masculine 'reason' and to god-like imagination."²⁵⁰

Economides points to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a feminist rejoinder to the idea of the sublime, in particular the concept of the technological sublime, in which nature's ability to inspire transcendental awe and fear is stripped by human mastery and reassigned to man-made technological advances (often emblemized by nineteenth-century proto-cinematic inventions like magic lanterns, "cranky" panoramas, and zootropes). This connection has certainly been made before, but somehow I haven't gotten tired of it yet. The following passage was an exciting connection of many of my interests:

[Mary] Shelley's novel conjures up an uncanny ghost that haunts the new machine age, an angry spirit which the technological sublime's ethos of 'progress' strives to repress. The creature's violent, active agency and unthinkable, boundary-blurring embodiment make a lie of mechanistic paradigms which construe nature as feminine, pliable, and

249 Economides, p. 90
250 Economides, p. 90-1

powerless in the face of modern technology.²⁵¹

Economides calls the monster "hypernatural," and describes its individual parts as "'beautiful,' but when these components are animated in the living being as a whole, they become hideous: the 'lustrous' hair and 'pearly white' teeth forming a 'horrid' contrast with the 'watery eyes' and 'shriveled complexion.'"²⁵² This description reminded me of Timothy Morton's evocative writing about the ecocritical power of works in which "the stitches are showing,"²⁵³ an allusion to the monster's hypernaturalism.

Our conception of nature in its current state of human-driven ecological collapse could perhaps be considered hypernatural. Economides discusses the "environmental sublime" and "ecological melancholia" as aesthetic and affective reactions to this state. But she also cautions that "the environmental sublime [can] aestheticize pollution as something that is 'beyond' human control or (conversely) as something that can be easily controlled through technological innovation,"²⁵⁴ and that although "ecological melancholy is (in many ways) the affective analogue to what [has been characterized] as the environmental sublime ... its focus upon irretrievable loss can impede the emergence of new forms of political agency."²⁵⁵ I believe this critique of the environmental sublime/ecological melancholia can be related to Emmanuel Aretoulakis' article on Romantic dark ecology, which I discuss later in this essay.

Economides closes her book with a chapter on the idea of "clearings," or strategies in language, art, and technology "through which we glimpse the wonder of beings in ways that would not be possible with-

251 Economides, p. 93
252 Economides, p. 103
253 "Frankenstein is an ecological novel... because it questions the very idea of nature... insofar as [the monster's] nature is abject and its stitches are showing, [its] 'essence' includes arbitrariness and supplementarity." Morton, p. 194-96
254 Economides, p. 115
255 Economides, p. 119

out these forms of mediation.”²⁵⁶ She explains this concept through the use of two versions of the term “technē” – one which is “‘enframing’ (artifice that attempts to master nature in the tradition of the technological sublime) and [the other which acts as] as ‘poiesis’ (artifice that allows us to experience nature as wondrous and which resists instrumentalist reduction).”²⁵⁷ These terms are derived from writing by Martin Heidegger, whose work I know a little bit about, and am content to encounter on a secondhand basis. Anyway, I was taken with Economides’ statement about the ecocritical importance of clearings:

What we do not see when we see through a perspective opened up by any clearing (whether it be linguistic, aesthetic, or technological) is as important as what is revealed via such clearings. Acknowledging the limits involved in any form of revealing suggests an inexhaustible, wondrous indeterminacy in the wider universe that can be a powerful antidote to the malaise and disenchantment that accompanies reductionism.²⁵⁸

This connects, in my mind, to skeptical ignorance – an embrace of the limits of the knowable and of the shapes of reality that prevent understanding in the first place. It is also like Spinoza’s infinitely unknowable chain in its highlighting (through hiding) a sense of the inexhaustible within a wider universe of wonder.

Ecopoetics, Ecocriticism, and Ecofeminism

Ambience, dark ecology, and oikos

As a transition to this section from the last, I’ll quote Louise Economides discussing Timothy Morton’s analysis of Coleridge’s “The Eo-

256 Economides, p. 32
257 Economides, p. 33
258 Economides, p. 169

lian Harp”: “Morton interprets the poem’s immersion of readers in an ‘ambient’ (312) soundscape as a reflection of the speaker’s ‘queer’ (317) openness to his environment, a radical passivity that welcomes penetration by the outside/the ‘other’ as something pleasurable rather than abhorrent.”²⁵⁹ ²⁶⁰

Morton’s concept of ambient poetics is recurrent in ecocritical texts on Romantic works. As they explain it, “ambience is a poetic enactment of a state of nondual awareness that collapses the subject-object division... undermining that which Jacques Derrida calls the fundamental metaphysical distinction between inside and outside.”²⁶¹ They describe ambience as capable of opening “a sort of gate into another dimension, a dimension that turns out to be none other than the nowness that is far more radically ‘here’ than any concept of ‘here,’ such as nation, race, gender...”²⁶² In keeping with his dominance over the British Romantic canon, Wordsworth is resurrected as an example of this idea with his “Boy of Winander” and the attendant echoes and owls and reflections and inversions that complicate the poem. “These dialectical images thus at once mask and open up the possibility of a more profound view, shocking to the egotism that separates human being and its life world,”²⁶³ and evoke not a “solid, soily, view but... a literalizing traversal of the ethereal, ghostly fantasy of spatial awareness itself.”²⁶⁴

Morton also refers to ambient ecopoetics as relating to a “depth-less ecology,” which “is so deep as to have no bottom, no ground; or something which has no depth at all, that is all surface,” an ambiguity “one wishes to preserve.”²⁶⁵ This, along with various statements such as

259 Economides, p. 63

260 This made me curious about why “penetration by the other” is considered specifically queer and not also feminist? Is it because woman is inherently the other? Or because heterosexual sex is inherently (in theory) abhorrent from the female perspective? Maybe queer encompasses any non-cis/het male perspective? I would be interested to find out more about this distinction, and will have to add more queer theory to my reading lists.

261 Morton, p. 52

262 Morton, p. 52

263 Morton, p. 52

264 Morton, p. 56

265 Morton, p. 56

“how about realizing oneself as the other? How might the poem open up this kind of fissure in a sense of solid being?”²⁶⁶ and “what if people were more like environments? ... In other words, perhaps one might deconstruct personhood into ambience, atmosphere, surroundings, dwelling, environment,”²⁶⁷ seem deeply connected to Marjorie Levinson’s words regarding the double meaning of field and the Spinozan continuity between self and environment, or individuality and the field or context within which it resides and which simultaneously cocreates it.

Emmanouil Aretoulakis’ article, “Towards a PostHumanist Ecology : Nature without Humanity in Wordsworth and Shelley,” is heavily influenced by Morton’s ecocriticism, but left me with a sometimes confusing impression of the author’s aims. Unlike many of the other writers in my study, Aretoulakis seems to be looking for an actual solution to our ecological crises within, or at least trying to assemble a practicable ethics from, Romantic poetry. “The postanthropocentric element in my essay lies in actually (but tacitly) privileging the nonhuman – the environment in the case at hand – by uncannily ... leaving it alone: the underlying assumption here is that even if humans mean well in treating, representing, protecting or securing the environment, they are still going to harm it, pollute it, misrepresent it or objectify it, merely by trying to be with it.”²⁶⁸ It seems to me that “leaving it alone” is not necessarily equivalent to human noninterference with nature. Isn’t this also a treatment, a representational mode, a form of protection?

I felt that I was catching a glimpse of Aretoulakis’ emotional response to ecology in moments like “...nature hardly stands a chance unless it is somehow related to humans, who either treat it like an object, which results in its exploitation, or like a subject, which it is not,”²⁶⁹ and “abstaining from talking about or preoccupying oneself with either nature

266 Morton, p. 54
267 Morton, p. 54
268 Aretoulakis, p. 174
269 Aretoulakis, p. 176

or ecology, since to deal with them directly is to contaminate them with the human viewpoint.”²⁷⁰ In these words, as well as the quotes in the previous paragraph, I sensed a bit of what Economides called ecological melancholia, or the affective analogue of the environmental sublime. There is something that feels profoundly anthropocentric about taking up this aesthetic under the guise of a “truly” ecological framework. It felt a bit paternalistic towards nature as well, a patriarchal undercurrent that was echoed in his discussion of Wordsworth’s “Nutting.” Aretoulakis alludes to the speaker’s “ravaging behaviour” and “ruthless despoilation” of nature, but does not take the obvious opportunity to engage with an ecofeminist reading of the gendered sexual violence that occurs in the poem, instead settling on the coolly abstract conclusion that “identification with the environment involves the possibility of destroying it,” and “the projection of the self into inanimate things is followed by their destruction.”

Despite the things I didn’t love about this article, Aretoulakis did leave me with an image that I find beautiful and generative for my creative practices: “English Romantic poetry aspires to reconnect us with the natural world, yet it simultaneously creates fissures or loopholes through which what we think of as ‘nature’ tends to be continually transformed.”²⁷¹ I have been turning this picture over in my mind ever since reading this sentence, and am reminded of Economides’ “clearings” of language and art, which reveal as they simultaneously imply that which is concealed. I love the image of a fissure, which evokes volcanism and the creation and destruction of earth, holding the potential to transform the idea of nature.

Another text inspired by Morton’s writings on “dark ecology” is Markus Poetzch’s “The Brighter Side of ‘Dark Ecology’: John Clare and Henry David Thoreau,” which examines the predatory practices of the two authors as an ecologically informed methodology. In using the

270 Aretoulakis, p. 177
271 Aretoulakis, p. 175

word “predatory,” Poetzch speaks much more literally than one might expect: “Like Clare, Thoreau is ‘faithful to the predatory actualities of life’—his own no less than those of other animals,”²⁷² and “Clare’s repeated attempts to ‘rob’ a barn owl’s nest, for which he is ‘attacked’, and his eventual discovery of a wryneck’s nest from which he takes six eggs, leaving the hissing female to ‘s[i]t on the rest.’”²⁷³ This enactment of life’s predatory actualities is explained at first as a kind of ecological realism – like the clichéd narrator of a nature documentary reassuring his audience that the lion devouring the gazelle is just “nature taking its course.” Later in the essay, Poetzch introduces the idea that Clare’s and Thoreau’s intrusions into nature also serve an edifying function: “Nests are not ego-enhancing treasures that attest to Thoreau’s undisputed lordship; rather, by revealing the astonishing range of avian habitats, ingenuity and sensory perception, they serve to reorder the hierarchy of human-avian relations.”²⁷⁴ I found this idea to be less convincing, and also at odds with some of the philosophical leanings I had picked up by this point in my study. Could the acquisition of knowledge really “reorder the hierarchy of human-avian relations?” Perhaps more importantly, the image conjured by this particular statement was an almost comically on-the-nose performance of the empiricist’s drive for knowledge, to possess, in Schey’s quotation of James Ferrier, “a lever powerful enough to break open the innermost secrecies of nature” and “lay open the universe from stem to stern.” More appealing is Poetzch’s conception of the bird nest, which “gathers in the traces of a broad and variegated world of birds, plants, insects, animals and humans... (an embodiment of) the idea, namely, that all living things exist intimately in ‘a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection [and, I would add, interdependence] without a definite center or edge’.”²⁷⁵

The ontological significance of the bird nest is also explored by Sha-

272 Poetzch, p. 64
 273 Poetzch, p. 65
 274 Poetzch, p. 69
 275 Poetzch, p. 72

ron Nobel, in her essay “‘Homeless at Home’: John Clare’s Uncommon Ecology.” Nobel “also present[s] Clare as an ecological poet, but for reasons that are predicated upon a different understanding of ecology as read through its etymological root: oikos.”²⁷⁶ Similar to Poetzch’s suggestion of the nest as an indeterminate, interwoven object/environment, Nobel’s idea of the nest centers instability, both physical/local and conceptual/definitive. This involves a reinterpretation of her keyword, oikos: “whereas ecocritics have tended to look to oikos as an original, stable site of unity and identity, I read oikos as a place of difference: a home of uncommon ground. Specifically, I read oikos as an ecological site where experiences of both unity and discontinuity between humanity and nature are intensified and celebrated.”²⁷⁷ The idea of a site of simultaneous unity and discontinuity once again reminds me of Levinson’s explanation of Spinoza’s philosophy. The nest can hold many individualities at once, and remain a nest so long as it persists in striving to retain its own individuality through conatus. Conveniently for my study, Nobel analyzes the poetic structures of Clare’s short poem, “Birds’ Nests” for evidence of this concept.

*Tis Spring warm glows the South
 Chaffinchs carry the moss in his mouth
 To the filbert hedges all day long
 & charms the poet with his beautifull song
 The wind blows blea oer the sedgey fen
 But warm the sunshines by the little wood
 Where the old Cow at her leisure chews her
 cud*

“Clare’s rushed lines (achieved through the lack of punctuation), his disregard for the rules of grammar, and his rapid multiplication of images operate less semantically than musically (155)... Clare does forge syntactical relationships, after all, but they are suppressed as much

276 Nobel, p. 171
 277 Nobel, p. 172

as possible in order to present the images 'all as parts not so much of a continuum of successive impressions as of one complex manifold of simultaneous impressions' (157).²⁷⁸ This interpretation excited me, and offered some potential strategies for me to consider in my creative writing experiments.

I'll end this section with a return to Wordsworth by way of Tim Fulford's essay "Wordsworth's 'The Haunted Tree' and the Sexual Politics of Landscape." "The Haunted Tree" is a poem from later in Wordsworth's career (1820) and not one that I was familiar with prior to this article. I had read many times about the more conservative leanings of his later work, and found it useful to read a thoughtful analysis of this example. In Fulford's examination, I noticed a sort of parallel with "Nutting:" "The Haunted Tree" contains a vision of men and women living in harmony in an unspoiled nature. It is, to all appearances, a "green" poem, in Bate's sense, because it discovers social community in a landscape of peace. The ground is not raped, the soil not exploited—and neither are the people who live close to it. And this balance between humans and the natural environment that they have nurtured is explicitly opposed to other, exploitative, kinds of relationship both within human society and between humans and nature.²⁷⁹

The conservative note sounded here lies in the ingredients and arrangement of this "landscape of peace." Wordsworth's vision appears at first:

*Those silver clouds collected round the sun
His mid-day warmth abate not, seeming less
To overshadow than multiply his beams
By soft reflection—grateful to the sky,
To rocks, fields, woods. Nor doth our human sense
Ask, for its pleasure, screen or canopy*

278 Nobel, p. 179
279 Fulford, part 5

*More ample than the time-dismantled Oak
Spreads o'er this tuft of heath,*

But this pastoral idyll is revealed to have been shaped by contemporaneous political realities: "Michael Wiley has reconstructed the complex ways in which natural space was understood by early nineteenth-century geographers. He has suggested that Wordsworth's poetic organization of the prospect-view was shaped by surveyors who began to map the Lake District. Robin Jarvis, meanwhile, has restored to view the varied cultural and political significances of rural walking in the period.... Most helpfully, the work of geographers Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins has correlated the aesthetics of the picturesque with the practical management of nature on estate-farms."²⁸⁰ These influences contribute to a poem that "may endorse an ecological balance, but it conceives that balance in terms of traditionalist and hierarchical eighteenth-century models—models that presume the continuing social and political inferiority of rural laborers and of women."²⁸¹ This point suggests an ecofeminist reading that I had been missing in many of the other ecocritical texts in my study, and I was grateful for it. The patriarchy is again summoned as a "protector" of the feminine, a dominating paternal force that proves its benevolent intentions by dangling the threat of violence, raising "the possibility of the defloration of the ground (and of the Lady), only to allay fears by confidently asserting that such violence is absent for the moment."²⁸²

The titular tree is connected to the ever-present specter of Edmund Burke, who "depicted Britain's form of government as tree-like, of ancient growth: it "moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation and progression" in "the method of nature" ("Reflections" 120). The people were "great cattle reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak" (181),²⁸³ and the poetry of William Cowper,

280 Fulford, part 4
281 Fulford, part 6
282 Fulford, part 21
283 Fulford, part 8

whose poem “Yardley Oak” depicts “an aged tree (which) is made a symbol of Britain’s ancient constitution, a constitution so deeply rooted in the past that, like the landed gentry on whose estates oaks grew, it should offer stability.”²⁸⁴

Fulford also critiques Wordsworth’s use of Orientalism as a foil for his British paradise. He “opposes his English tree to an Oriental monarch—to a Sultan—a standard figure of political and sexual despotism:

*Nor doth our human sense
Ask, for its pleasure, screen or canopy
More ample than the time-dismantled Oak
Spreads o’er this tuft of heath, which now, attired
In the whole fulness of its bloom, affords
Couch beautiful as e’er for earthly use
Was fashioned; whether by the hand of Art,
That eastern Sultan, amid flowers enwrought
On silken tissue, might diffuse his limbs
In languor; or, by Nature, for repose
Of panting Wood-nymph, wearied with the chase.*

Colonialism’s parallel, or intersecting, dynamic of structural oppression reiterates the patriarchal and anti-ecological structures at work here. In a statement that recalls Aretoulakis’ fears about the representation of nature, Fulford says that “to love nature, Wordsworth shows, involves remaking it in our own image—an image in which traditional hierarchies and inequalities not only persist but are desired.”²⁸⁵

Poetic Texts – Creative and Experimental Writing

I included in my study authors whose work does not directly address Romantic poetry or involve formal academic exposition but is valuable to the creative and interpretive aspect of my plan. The first is poet Will Alexander, whose essay “Our Climate: A Coalescing Eclipse Pattern” puts forth an eco-poetic account of climate change, including its historical and scientific contexts and its philosophical implications. It does all this in a form that to me is powerfully evocative of something like the idea of a hyperobject, a term coined by Timothy Morton to describe the massively distributed quality of climate change. Alexander begins as though he had been writing long before the start of the essay: “Not thought as evolved complexity or psychic definition as philosophical splendour but the reality of both not only as our inner climate, but as our devolved inner climate as well. This is what I will call a coalescing eclipse pattern.” This feeling of stepping into the middle of a continuous and perhaps infinite soliloquy (or is it a dialogue?) reminds me of Spinoza’s chains and kingdoms, and of John Clare’s tumbling rushed verses. The essay is a virtuosic rendering of the idea of a four-dimensional mesh of time, space, bodies, perspectives, that has been percolating in my mind as a result of this course of study. An excerpt:

Let me return to a plinth of threats that encompass the natural kingdom. To paraphrase our present condition the gist of the current moment has researchers examining “the impact of climate change on nearly 80,000 plant and animal species in 35 of the world’s most diverse and naturally wildlife-rich areas.” Within this scenario ‘southwest Australia could face local extinction by the turn of the century due to climate change . . .’ “This indeed is not an abstract liminality where

the body can be sustained by simple clinical exhibit that

284 Fulford, part 11

285 Fulford, part 26

extends to the heavens of Ganymede or Enceladus.* The latter existing as non-liveable options. Within our current context our human experiment seems to be marking time having for the most part on the surface seem to run its course. It remains not unlike a toxic owl signalling its own self-definition. Not necessarily an ending but a transition to unknown psycho-physical states that cannot at present sustain this new ventriloquial arrangement given that this less visible reflex remains neurologically subordinated by our current neural legislation. We indeed remain a species currently incapable of transmuted impact imprisoned as we are from habitual abandonment of the deeper states within ourselves.

I'm not sure it would be realistic to hope to attain something like the level of intricacy that this work involves, but this is an exciting inspiration for me. During the experience of reading this, I heard in my head so many delicate (and heavy) links and echoes and reversals. Its meaning comes through intuitively and through the sounds of the words almost as much as through their meaning. I was also hoping to include Alexander's newly published poem *The Combustion Cycle* in this study, but since it is nearly 700 pages long I decided to save it for another time.

The last text I'll discuss is Susan Howe's *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*. This book is a work of literary and historical research in the form of a sort of textual collage assembled from primary source documents, with original experimental writing connecting these excerpts. The focus is the antinomian crisis of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which centered around allegations of heresy on the part of settler Anne Hutchinson. I don't have a particular interest in this subject, but Howe's formal strategies are similar to what I hope to achieve in my creative work. She offers something of an explanation for her approach here: "By choosing to install certain narratives somewhere between history, mystic speech, and poetry, I have enclosed them in an organization, although I know there are plac-

es no classificatory procedure can reach, where connections between words and things we thought existed break off. For me, paradoxes of ironies and fragmentation are particularly compelling."²⁸⁶ This approach seems connected to Economides' idea of clearings, as well as a kind of indeterminacy that relates concepts discussed by many of the authors featured here. Howe also explains a bit of her view on historical narratives here: "When we move through the positivism of literary canons and master narratives, we consign ourselves to the legitimation of power, chains of inertia, an apparatus of capture,"²⁸⁷ and here: "In the flow of time original versions are modernized and again modernized... in the flow of time these copies are copies of copies."²⁸⁸ I feel a connection with these statements, and they remind me of the "counterfactualism" of Davies' collection. Keeping such sentiments in mind and finding ways to realize their significance through the content and form of my creative work is the goal I have set out for myself.

Ecological Art without Natural Imagery?

Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* is concerned with the possibility of a "truly ecological" aesthetic framework, both in literature and in art. Morton's slightly counterintuitive suggestion is that "the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art."²⁸⁹ By this, he means that the very concepts of nature, environment, or ecology, as commonly understood, have been shaped by a particular worldview that has also created the unsatisfactorily ecological culture that he hopes to address through aesthetic innovation. Morton asserts that contemporary art is the most favorable environment within which to cultivate such an aesthetic, because of its ability to "(evoke) what is often excluded in our view of

286 Howe, p. 45
287 Howe, p. 46
288 Howe, p. 39
289 Morton, p. 1

the picture: its surrounding frame, the space of the gallery itself, the institution of art altogether. In a very significant way, these experiments are *environmental*.²⁹⁰ But he also positions contemporary culture as a continuation of the Romantic era, saying that “we are still within the Romantic period in a number of very significant ways,”²⁹¹ and that the products of that time and place “still (influence) the ways in which the ecological imaginary works.”²⁹²

Ecology Without Nature echoes points made in many other works I have encountered in my past and current research. For instance, his comment that “putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman,”²⁹³ brings to mind the ecofeminist theory of Val Plumwood and others. Quotes like the following – “But if this God is nothing outside the material world, why not just call it matter?”²⁹⁴ – remind me of Baruch Spinoza’s philosophy, which states that “the active, productive aspect of the universe—God and his attributes, (are that) from which all else follows... The other aspect of the universe is that which is produced and sustained by the active aspect, *Natura naturata*, ‘natured Nature.’”²⁹⁵ Morton’s skepticism that ecological thought must be melancholic or otherwise “condemned to insanity”²⁹⁶ made me think of Louise Economides’ critique of ecological melancholy as an approach that risks indulgently reenacting tragic loss without offering an alternative path or solution.

Morton’s rigorous analysis of popular contemporary ecological aesthetics was especially interesting to me. I am already inclined to agree with the idea that “a truly theoretical approach is not allowed to sit

smugly outside the area it is examining,”²⁹⁷ or that “...deconstruction searches out... points of contradiction and deep hesitation in systems of meaning.”²⁹⁸ The detailed discussion that followed touched on the idea of rendering, through language, sound, or visual media, which “attempts to simulate reality itself: to tear to pieces the aesthetic screen that separates the perceiving subject from the object...”²⁹⁹ and yet inevitably fails to do so. A specific type of rendering, ecomimesis, aims to offer a transparent representation of natural entities or settings. Ecomimesis deploys a variety of strategies, including repetition, framing devices (“as I write this...”) listing, and extravagant description. Morton senses that “ecomimesis wants to reassure us that the source is merely obscure – we should just open our eyes and ears more. But... at the very depth of the illusion of rendering, there is a blankness that is structural to our accepting of the illusion itself.”³⁰⁰ This blankness, or neutrality, evades what he sees as a valuable element of Romanticism, its hesitation and irony. He cites Wordsworth’s introduction to *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he “insisted that poetry not only is ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ but also is ‘recollected in tranquility.’ Although reflection then dissolves this tranquility until ‘an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind,’ the process thus becomes delayed and mediated.”³⁰¹ This emphasis on the importance of mediation, and the risks of ignoring its inevitability, reminded me of discussions surrounding “glitch feminism,” which suggests that glitchiness can expose inequities and power imbalances, metaphorically, through media. Morton agrees, saying that “when the medium of communication becomes impeded or thickened, we become aware of it, just as snow makes us painfully aware of walking.”³⁰²

290 Morton, p. 31

291 Morton, p. 27

292 Morton, p. 1

293 Morton, p. 5

294 Morton, p. 15

295 Nadler, Steven, “Baruch Spinoza”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/spinoza/>>.

296 Morton, p. 27

297 Morton, p. 12

298 Morton, p. 6

299 Morton, p. 35

300 Morton, p. 36

301 Morton, p. 36

302 Morton, p. 37

The concept of ambient poetics is presented as a possible alternative ecological form, but Morton recognizes the limits of this idea as well. Ambient poetics engages with the sounds, patterns, and time-based elements of language and other media to try to evade the fallacies of ecomimesis. However, “ambient poetics will *never* actually dissolve the difference between inside and outside,”³⁰³ and thus seems to be trying, and failing, to “sit smugly outside the area it is examining.”³⁰⁴ Morton explains that many “innovative” approaches to ecological thought fall into this trap – “if ‘new and improved’ versions of continuity between inside and outside, such as nuance, are suspect in their attempt to smooth over the quantum difference that the re-mark establishes, then magical forms of differentiation – for example, ones that are miraculously ‘nonhierarchical’ or ‘nonlinear’ – are out of bounds too.” The answer, to Morton, is to utilize the Romantic strategies of distance and irony “to show how far the narrator, who is thought to sit sideways to his or her narrative, is actually dissolved in it, part of it, indistinguishable from it.”³⁰⁵ This is what I hope to achieve in some way through my creative practices.

Conclusion

Sometime after I wrote this, I went for a run. I took a trail along the edge of a wooded nature area. The trail split off at multiple points, leading deeper into the pale, knotted spring forest. I stayed on the trail along the edge, which runs parallel to a major highway that connects Ann Arbor to Detroit. The traffic was louder than I thought it would be. It drowned out the sounds of dry leaves rustling in the wind. A few deer appeared, silently, or at least they were silenced by the noise from the road. We startled each other and then we silently ran away. It felt like I was in one of the clearings that looked so beautiful from the

303 Morton, p. 52

304 Morton, p. 12

305 Morton, p. 27

perspective of the traveler, and it wasn't a place of pristine tranquility. But its polluted nature was not impossible to feel connected to, now it was the road that was rendered inaccessible, framed by a network of barren tree branches. I couldn't make out much of any of the people in the cars going by, I could only see that there were people inside their enameled frames and smokey windows. And I don't think anyone passing by on the road could actually see me watching them either. They were driving much too fast.

Breaking the fourth wall, as in beginning a sentence with the phrase “Sometime after I wrote this,” is a strategy of ecomimesis, discussed by Timothy Morton in *Ecology Without Nature*. Ecomimesis is intended to offer a more authentic, immersive imitation of nature, to escape the page for a more “real” reality. But as Morton notes, the “attempt to break the spell of language results in a further involvement in that very spell.”³⁰⁶ This ecomimetic impulse echoes some of the motivations of the Romantic era – a desire to reconnect with an idea of nature that has only begun to reveal itself in opposition to the ways in which it is now seen to be transforming. It strives for a crystal goblet, “thin as a bubble,”³⁰⁷ from which to drink reality's uncontaminated essence.

Instead of getting tangled up in trying to free perception and representation from language, I propose that one can build a web, using filaments of text and strands of culture, that twists old stories into new meanings. It operates by fixing unexpected points of connection into nodes that bend the past but do not rewrite it, that turn the indelible qualities of language into palimpsests that activate multiple channels of meaning and layers of history. This approach will not provide access to the kind of otherness that nature is often called on to represent. Instead, I hope that the nets, nests, portals, and frames I make can offer ways to think about delicate tension that allows such an abundance of subjectivities to exist and interact within and across timelines.

306 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 30

307 Warde, “The Crystal Goblet...”

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