The Romantics and Their Contemporaries

Anna Letitia Barbauld

Note in several of the selections the combination of an easy, even comic, tone with graver issues: in The Mouse’s Petition, “liberty” and “freedom,” charged terms in the era (see Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy), and the contrast in Washing-Day between the subject of the “domestic Muse” and the formal invocations (“Come, Muse”), Latinate diction (“impervious,” “propitious”), and mythological and historical allusion (“Erebus,” “Guatimozin”). One might compare the memory of the childhood self that emerges in this context (58 ff.) with Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey. One might also ask students to compare Barbauld’s picture of, and distance from, “red-armed washers” (l. 14) with Wordsworth’s positioning of himself vis-à-vis those of a lower social class whom he encounters and the class considerations in the works included in Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy. Barbauld’s ameliorative view of the poor in To the Poor and at the close of The First Fire, in which she invokes the “assist[ance]” of “ye / On whose warm roofs the sun of plenty shines” so that they may “feel a glow beyond material fire” (ll. 79–81), as eighteenth-century sympathetic moralists urged, should likewise be compared to the social restructurings urged by the authors in that section and in Perspectives: The Wollstonecraft Controversy and the Rights of Women. Incription for an Ice-House similarly juxtaposes tones and genres: playing “fair Pleasure” against “the giant” stern Winter, and asking the reader to see in the lightest delicacies (the frozen berries and “sugared hail”) the sublime power that has produced them. The lofty couplets of Eighteen Hundred and Eleven mix panorama and prophecy, personifications (“Luxury” and “Want”) with a roll-call of the heroes of the liberal Whig tradition (Locke, Milton, Clarkson, Fox, Priestley). Barbauld patriotically declares her love for her country (67) and attacks its current policies. The eighteenth century had hailed “Commerce” (62, 228, 273) as the engine of wealth and the nurse of manners, but feared that as oppressive empire replaced free trade, decadence and retribution were inevitable. Barbauld envisions a Britain that is the latest example of this cycle of self-corrupting success (205–320); her poem is at once a review of the
progress of Liberty to the New World and a warning of Britain’s decline. The imag-
inative projection into a future in which “wanderers” from the New World, the new
seat of Liberty, inspired by Britain’s past glories, will view contemporary Britain,
mart and metropolis of the globe, as “gray ruin and . . . mouldering stone” (124),
produces a startling double vision that, as Croker’s review confirms, could only of-
fend those for whom resistance to Napoleon (4) mandated uncritical praise of
Britain. Barbauld’s view of the misery that Empire has brought London (316–20)
can be compared to Blake’s London and her impersonal manner to the self-portrayal
that grounds Byron’s development of similar themes in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.

Barbauld builds On the Death of the Princess Charlotte on the surprising shift
from the moment of general mourning to the King who cannot feel, whose in-
sensitivity is a death-in-life that uncannily repeats with even greater poignancy the
death that overtook his grand-daughter. The image of the King as a “scathed oak”
(l. 26) draws on a long tradition that identified the monarchy with that tree. In his
Reflections Burke, for example, had scornfully dismissed the insignificance of the
Revolution Society and their fellow radicals:

Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with
their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath
the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not
imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the
field; that, of course, they are many in number, or that, after all, they are
other than the little, shrivelled, meager, hopping, though loud and trou-
blesome, insects of the hour. (Unprinted here)

Barbauld gets full value from the contrast between the fixed tree and the signs of
“time’s incessant change”: “leaves bud, and shoot, and fall” (ll. 29, 27), an image
that plays against the death of the Princess and her stillborn child. See also the re-
marks on the poem in this manual (Perspectives: The Sublime, the Beautiful, and
the Picturesque, p. 297).

Charlotte Turner Smith

Although Smith’s two long poems, The Emigrants (1793) and Beachy Head (posthu-
mous), are returning to critical attention today, we have focused our selection on
Smith’s sonnets for two reasons. First, there is the rationale of the Romantic era:
these are the poems, collected in Elegiac Sonnets in all their performative pathos
and intertextual display, that brought Smith to public attention in the 1780s, and
continued to play well for decades after, influencing Wordsworth and Coleridge,
and then Keats and Shelley, as well as setting an example for many women poets,
most remarkably Mary Robinson. Smith defined the female poet as a kind of torch
singer, whose theatrical melancholy created the readers and commercial success by
which she was to be enjoyed. Second, there is a pedagogical appeal: sonnets are
quite teachable, in their compactness and in relation to sonnet traditions.
Smith is both working within and reworking the conventions of sonnet-writing. *To Tranquility* and *To Melancholy* use Petrarchan structure, both in the rhyme pattern and the strong turn (or volta) at line 9. *Far on the Sands* is Shakespearean, with the intricacy of the d rhyme in the second quatrain (*glows*/*repose*) echoing the b rhyme of the first (*flow*/*blow*), and the final couplet plays a standard Shakespearean off-rhyme (*prove*/*love*) that here might reflect the way love never really gets partnered, but remains alone—alone, too as, an extra iambic foot (in the alexandrine last line). Yet in the structure of thought, the second movement, the questions inaugurated by *Alas*’ seem almost to accelerate a Petrarchan pattern at line 7, as if Smith could not wait for the conventionally allotted time to announce her pain, but wanted to interrupt her second quatrain to do so. *Written in the churchyard* works Shakespearean patterning, with an even tighter closing couplet, and a nicely interlaced second and third quatrain (see the first 8 lines of *On being cautioned* for another instance of interlacing). But the form as a whole is dilated by a long footnote (Smith’s) that is part of the poem’s paratext. *To the Shade of Burns* is more dazzling still (ask students to trace the rhyme pattern and the units of argument: where is the volta?). No less impressive is *The Sea View*, where in a pattern of interlaced rhymes, the first sentence drives a steadily more sinister drama of description right into the middle of line 12, followed by two short declarative sentences, linked by a couplet rhyme and the spoil of the last line extended further with the alexandrine measure. Notice here, too, the paratext of Smith’s note.

The accumulating story of melancholy and world-weariness can be studied not only across Smith’s sonnet-sequence, but also in a comparison of Smith’s representations of these themes and their emblematic images to other poets: *To Melancholy* with Coleridge’s *Dejection Ode*, Wordsworth’s *Resolution and Independence*, and Keats’s *Ode on Melancholy*; *Far on the Sands* with Wordsworth’s *’Tis a Beauteous Evening* (also a sonnet on the beachside) and Smith’s announced intertext, the dialogue from *Macbeth* (is Smith giving a tragic dimension to her moods?). *To the Shade of Burns* and *The Sea View* show Smith turning her melancholy outward into political commentary and protest, on the model of Milton. The loss of Burns occasions elegy, but also political anger. Students may not realize how difficult it was to champion “Liberty” when this term, with its capital L, was taken to indicate support for the principles of the French Revolution; and to lament a world at war in the years when England was at war with France risked, no less than now, seeming anti-patriotic. *The Dead Beggar* is also political poetry, here satirically noting that in death the democratic principles of the revolution will be fulfilled; Death is the great leveler. Smith’s address to “a Lady” is not just a woman speaking to a woman, but one woman fallen from her former luxury (Smith) speaking to a woman whose title “Lady” designates a member of the gentry. Is this a poem of religious consolation? To what degree is the language of religious consolation also carrying a political critique? Compare to William Wordsworth’s various beggars (the veteran soldier, the beggar in London), Dorothy Wordsworth’s encounters with beggars, Robinson’s *The Old Beggar*.

The selection from the end of *Beachy Head*, an example of Smith’s much admired mastery of blank verse (also the measure of her two-book mini-epic, *The Emigrants*), reflects a theme in other Romantic-era writing: the lonely recluse still
bearing a human heart. Students might study this selection alongside Wordsworth’s *Michael*, to study these figures of human sympathy and their acute “reading” of the world of nature.

**PERSPECTIVES**

**The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy**

These excerpts make up a debate that is carried as much by the level of style as by disagreement over the key terms of nature, reason, and rights. The content does not always align neatly with the manner; students can be asked to consider the tensions between points made in the texts and the implicit assumptions about the audience of the texts.

Note Williams’s attempt to balance her enthusiastic faith in the Revolution with her revulsion at the execution of the king. Her insistence that despite the outcome “the foundation was laid in wisdom” can be set against Burke’s *Reflections*: her defense of “Principles . . . however unsuccessful may be the attempt to carry them into practice” should be played against his argument for judging practices rather than illusory principle. Williams’s response to the successive phases of the Revolution can be paired with Books 9 and 10 of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*.

For Burke the Revolution is a “monstrous tragic-comic scene” that simultaneously violates the hierarchy of society and the order of genres. The section “Liberties as an Entailed Inheritance” illustrates the elevated language that Burke believed appropriate to the conduct of politics, and its endorsement of the seeming paradox of a “choice of inheritance” (“choice” introduces will into the tropes of organism and family Burke also employs), in which rights are defined as traditional and conventional rather than as the conclusions of abstract reason, memorably focused the debate. His opponents charged that in choosing “the freedom of epistolary composition” (*Reflections* is cast as a letter to a young Frenchman) and elevating feeling over reason, Burke epitomized the hysteria he ascribed to the Revolutionaries. The portrait of Marie Antoinette, saturated with echoes of *Othello*, aroused the scorn of Wollstonecraft and Paine: their replies sharpen the questions of literary representation (narrative, rhetorical style, scene-painting) inseparable from the debate. Invoking the model of tragedy, Burke defends artifice as appropriate to represent the natural and the true, as before he insisted that it is the “wardrobe,” the clothing of “pleasing illusions” that makes men civilized. (Consider the tropes of architecture in the various writers.) Wollstonecraft attacks this rhetoric of elaboration as the symptom of “pampered sensibility”; her “sober” style enforces the distinction between appeals to reason and to passion. She develops the ethos of a plain speaker, countering Burke with specific challenges to his general formulations (“What do you mean by inbred sentiments?”) and economic instances (“Why cannot large estates be divided into small farms?”), insisting on the actual “continual miseries” Burke’s system perpetuates.
The appeal to a seemingly neutral observation of "fact" and the evidence of individual observation to arouse sympathy for the Revolution may be seen in Young's *Travels in France*, as with Williams. Yet note that despite Young's critique of the absence of papers and political discussion in France, his own (not cheap) work and implied audience suggest the confining of political discussion to men of property. His readers are more like Burke's than like Paine's, and as The Example of France demonstrates, the advance of the Revolution from the reform that Young welcomed to the specter of a universal attack on property hardened class lines. His responses to France and the trajectory of his politics offer a telling parallel to Wordsworth's narrative in Books 9 and 10 of *The Prelude*.

Paine's plain style is yet more democratic in its intended audience than Wollstonecraft's or Young's; the accessibility marks the expansion of political discussion beyond men of property and leisure. Paine's insistence that "Man has no property in man: neither has any generation in the generations which are to follow" epitomizes the break with the continuity of history that Burke affirms; in place of the historical process of English liberty, Paine returns to the "origin" of the rights of man at the creation: "Here our inquiries find a resting-place, and our reason finds a home." Burke sees history as an accumulation of meaning, Paine as an encrustation that must be stripped away, but note that his demystification requires an anchor that is more mythological, less demonstrable, than the particular documents Burke invokes. Likewise, if Paine charges that Burke has become "a composition of art," his climactic sentence brilliantly deploys parallelism, assonance, and alliteration: "the real prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon." The conflict is not between "the real" and the rhetorical, but between two forms of rhetoric.

The conjunction of Paine and Godwin illustrates the shifting relations among thinkers classed as radical. Paine's espousal of the "universal" truths of reason accords with Godwin, but whereas *The Rights of Man* was written in a plain style and cheaply disseminated, Godwin's *Political Justice* was published in an expensive format and addressed to an audience of intellectuals more elite than Burke's. The notorious thought experiment in which Godwin argued for saving the reputedly great public benefactor rather than one's own family member or particular friend, like his critique of marriage, abolishes the claims of the individual that Paine and Wollstonecraft urge. The contrast with Burke's affirmation of what he called (in passages not printed here) "just prejudice" and the legitimate claims of "the little platoon" to which we are allied by experience could scarcely be clearer. Moreover, Godwin's objection to "inflaming" the people rather than "informing" them and his patient faith in "sober thought, clear discernment and intrepid discussion" led to quietism rather than revolution.

Such cross-currents resonate with the poets. Some examples to consider: to what degree is Wordsworth's "nature" co-ordinate with history, as in Burke, and to what degree opposed? To what degree does the simplicity of Wordsworth's language align him with the radicals? and his cherishing of local domestic affections with Burke? Burke's evocation of chivalry underlies the medievalising *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but how does Burke's corporate, traditional sensibility accord with the radically personal effect of Byron? The Anti-Jacobian parody of Southey re-
peats the opposition of the delusions of speculative philanthropy (Burke’s charge against the Revolutionaries) versus particular action. Note that the debate hinges on shifting notions of particular and general: Burke charges that those who derive rights from universal reason indulge in fantasy and insists that systems can be judged only by results; the radicals urge against him the reality of misery that his system produces; here the conservative parodist invokes a particular instance against the ideological preconceptions of the speaker. The parody can usefully be set against Wordsworth’s poems (for example, The Solitary Reaper): how much does imagination depend on suppressing the voice of the other, here permitted to speak? To what degree is imagination a speculative and self-congratulatory sympathy divorced from engagement and action?

More’s Village Politics has been called “Burke for Beginners,” but the social situation of the pamphlet is complex. Burke wrote for the literate and well-off; More’s work acknowledges that in times of crisis political discourse had to address the lower class—Burke’s ideas in Paine’s style, as it were. The dialogue reveals itself as loyalist catechism when Jack tendentiously redefines Tom’s radical terms one by one: liberty, democrat, equality, and so forth, finally reducing them to “gibberish.” More’s use of catechism may be set against such Blake poems as The Lamb, and her use of the dialogue form against The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: what response does each hope to arouse in the reader? Her effort at common speech may be compared with his Songs generally (as well as the much-mocked simplicity of Wordsworth’s “real language of men”). More’s pious conservatism contrasts Blake’s libera-tory religion, but students might be asked to weigh the restricted availability of his handmade, expensive works with the cheap broadcast of hers. Though faced with the problems that arise when one class presumes to speak for another, More dramatizes the characters and idioms of the lower orders whose independence she opposes. If More did not teach the poor writing for fear of its insurrectionary potential, and her character Tom learns that he is unhappy only through reading, her tract assumes and perpetuates the spread of debate she wishes to stop.

William Blake

Note how All Religions Are One uses the form of logic to argue for a poetic genius that transcends empiricism and “experience,” and There Is No Natural Religion counters the Deist rational/empirical propositions of (a) in their own form with (b). One might compare Blake’s “Reason is the ratio of all we have already known,” associated with the “bound,” to the honorific sense of Reason in Paine, Wollstonecraft, and Godwin. The missing plate iii creates, whether intended or not, a crucial upsetting of linearity. The revolution for Blake will not proceed from reason, rights, and the stripping away of tradition, but from creative perception and desire. This emphasis might also be posed against the suspicion of desire in Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman.

The illuminated books raise several important questions. These expensive, hand-produced, limited editions may be compared with popular caricatures such
as Gillray’s Smelling Out A Rat and Cruikshank’s illustrations for Hone. The relationships between text and plate require the beholder both to read sequentially and view the design as a whole, thus escaping from what Blake elsewhere called the tyranny of “single vision and Newton’s sleep,” a linear, materialist perception of the world. Moreover, sometimes word and image support each other, and sometimes diverge, as in the portrait of the unthreatening Tyger, so that reading becomes a complex interpretative challenge rather than the smooth, uniform, reception of argument sought by the wielders of the plain style. Because each copy was unique, and available only from Blake, reading became an individual encounter with the artist. Compared to the purchase of a mass-produced book, the form thus suggests a radical enfranchising of individual perception; but to consider the tensions between the liberatory content of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and the mode of production, which restricted availability to the few, is to trigger a fruitful exploration of the terms “radical” and “democratic” in the period.

Much of the discussion of Songs of Innocence has turned on the possible ironies of the speaker’s voice. Although the poems reflect contemporary interest in children’s literature, and are written in simple forms with simple, traditional language, their world is not limited to that of children. The speaker of The Lamb is sufficiently instructed to know that Christ is Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. The last line of The Chimney Sweeper—“so if all do their duty they need not fear harm”—reflects the consolatory pieties of its child speaker, but can also generate a wider understanding that indicts those who expect the sweepers to do their duty while ignoring their own to the suffering poor. Likewise, The Little Black Boy may be seen as part of the humanitarian campaign against slavery, but also plays the awaited heavenly moment in which both children are “free” of color against the hint that the white child can love only one white like him, and the black boy’s fears that he can be loved only if white. The plates play out the problem in varying the tint of “black.” (See the color section.)

These instances suggest that even before Blake added Songs of Experience the poems of Innocence acknowledged the perspective of Experience; insofar as Innocence and Experience are the “contrary states of the human soul” they are both available at all times, rather than forming an irreversible progression. Blake’s schema can thus be set against the dynamics of individual memory in such Wordsworth poems as Tintern Abbey. Once Blake had joined the two—and Experience was never available alone—he produced pairs (such as the two Holy Thursday poems or The Lamb and The Tyger) in which the latter work may alter the meanings of the former. When Blake produced the joined volume, he moved The School-Boy from Songs of Innocence to Songs of Experience. Students may want to ponder the logic of this recategorization as well as the intertextual thickening by other songs of “Experience.”

Blake’s world may be pointedly juxtaposed with Burke’s; when to the repeated insistence on “charter’d” in London, as the term signalling constraint and limit just as it signals granted right and commercial opportunity, Blake adds the unfeeling Palace and Church he stigmatizes the network of institutional power that Burke lauded. Once unpacked by engaged readers, freed from the “mind-forg’d manacles” that led them to accept the social order as just or natural, the extreme metaphoric
compression of the poem reveals a cityscape “marked” as the crystallization of an oppressive system. Its inclusive effects invade domestic relations, poisoning the infant’s health with the diseases of prostitution. Blake’s city, everywhere the product of historically specific conditions, may be compared with Wordsworth’s Composed upon Westminster Bridge, where the beauty of the city depends on the suspension of the usual indices of urban activity, and his emblematic “Harlot” with the ambiguous social status of the subject of Wordsworth’s Poor Susan, trapped in the city but precariously endowed with restorative memory.

Blake’s linking of the social hierarchy to the relations between men and women is most visible in Visions of the Daughters of Albion, where Bromion figures both as a tyrant and the rapist of Oothon, whose lover Theotormon (literally, “god-tormented”) is so enmeshed by conventional notions that he sees her as defiled by an action in which her will took no part. Neither man is capable of responding to the cry of innocent desire that characterizes her. The situation thus illustrates the convergence of the movements against slavery and for women’s rights in the literature of the period, though Blake’s emphasis on the body and desire distinguishes him from those who argue for women’s equal intellectual capacity and status within marriage. The Proverbs of Hell in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, where emphasis on excess, desire, and the body is reinforced by rejection of the Burkean terms of respect for the dead, prudence, and restraint, make Blake’s antinomian impulses clear. But in this composite form, where the Proverbs mix with prophecy, dialogue, and satire, Blake does not simply invert the traditional associations of Good and Evil. As the declarations that “opposition is true friendship” and “without contraries is no progression” suggest, Blake rather sets in motion a continuing dialogue of competing perspectives. If, as he tells the Swedenborgian angel, “all that we saw was owing to your metaphysics,” his own point of view too is that of a dramatic speaker within the text rather than a privileged authority outside its play of argument. The revisionary interpretation of Paradise Lost, the conversation with Old Testament prophets, and the allegory of cultural transmission figured in the sequence from visionary dragon-men and eagles to library shelves, all suggest the necessity for readers to question for themselves. The task of the Marriage is both to demystify, by the corrosive fires of satire that parallel the acid etching of Blake’s printing, and to regenerate: cleansing the doors of perception is to set free the poetic genius of each reader. The intent of Blake’s drama can be set against the didacticism of Hannah More’s Village Politics and the implications of her wide dissemination weighed against the very few known copies of the Marriage.

PERSPECTIVES

The Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade

In 1771 James Somerset, a black slave from Virginia brought by his owner to England, refused to return. Lawyers for Somerset argued that “slavery is not a natural, ’tis a municipal relation, an institution therefore confined to certain places,
and necessarily dropt by passage into a country where such municipal regulations
do not exist." As one put it: "Will not all the other mischiefs of mere utter servitute
revive, if once the idea of absolute property, under the immediate sanction
of the laws of this country, extend itself to those who have been brought over to
a soil whose air is deemed too pure for slaves to breathe in it [?]" In his ruling,
William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, chief justice of the King’s Bench Court, de-
clared that "the state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being in-
troduced on any reasons, moral or political, but only positive law, which preserves
its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was cre-
ated, is erased from memory: It’s so odious, that nothing can be suffered to sup-
port it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a
decision, I cannot say that this case is allowed or approved by the law of England,
and therefore the black must be discharged."

The ruling did not ban the slave trade, nor slavery in the colonies, but in free-
ing Somerset Mansfield sharpened the discrepancy between what Britain permitted
at home and what it encouraged abroad. The distinction between “positive” or “mu-
nicipal” law, that is to say man-made law, and “natural” law, resonates throughout
the selections in this section, and with the other Perspectives sections: the claims of
property as opposed to individual right, in “The Rights of Man and The Revolution
Controversy”, and the relation of men to women in “The Wollstonecraft
Controversy and The Rights of Women”. Consider how the language and ideas of
of the Revolution controversy—liberty, freedom, tyranny, oppression—function in
the abolitionist controversy, and how the abolitionists shift categories such as “sav-
age,” “brutal,” “barbarous,” “slave,” “human,” and “inhuman” from their conven-
tional associations. Similarly, one might ask students to consider the ways in which
the racist vocabulary of black, white, light, and sable gets spun, from skin to soul.
(The link to Blake’s Little Black Boy is obvious.) One might also study the biblical al-
lusions and the rhetoric of Christian morality in the texts, available for advocates of
either side of the question, as indicated by the convergence with the notion of "benev-
olence" in Bellamy; with him the parallel with the conflict between the Paine dis-
course of rights and the Burkean discourse of “natural” individual feeling is particu-
larly suggestive. Against such moral arguments one can set the force of detail in
Dorothy Wordsworth, the selection from The Edinburgh Review, and particularly in
Clarkson’s reports. The vocabulary of “seeing” and “beholding” to arouse sympathy is
one tactic; the emphasis on the exemplary endurance and forbearance of the op-
pressed another. Newton’s well-known hymn, students might be surprised to learn,
was written by a former slave-trader turned evangelical Christian abolitionist. This
is but one instance of the way the evils of the slave trade were felt to extend beyond
the misery of the enslaved Africans to the moral corruption of their purchasers. In
Cowper’s The Negro’s Complaint (“complaint,” students may need to be told, does
not indicate whining; it’s a literary genre akin to “the blues”—of singing one’s heart
out, in pain, the “lover’s complaint” being a standard Renaissance genre), at once
indicts the “slaves of gold” (the purchasers, and, by implication the nations that sup-
port slave-trading and enjoy the goods and wealth produced by slave labor) and in-
ists on the humanity of the enslaved. A standard dualism of a free mind and soul
and a tortured body is politically motivated to make a case for a common moral and spiritual humanity. Southey’s ballad, *The Sailor, Who Had Served*, is sometimes read as the historically situated version of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Southey and Coleridge were brothers-in-law (both married to Fricker sisters); their poems were published the same year (1798), and begin in similar forms: a little explanatory headnote, similar first lines, and ballad stanzas. Like Coleridge’s *Rime*, too, Southey’s ballad makes the possibility of redemption questionable for a sailor so haunted. His sailor is forced into a kind of slavery himself aboard ship, turned into a “wretched” man by his forced torturing of a resistant slave, a “poor wretch.” The memory of torture is lurid, horrifying the reader even as it conveys the horror by which the sailor is haunted. For one who feels as irredeemably damned as Milton’s Satan (whom he echoes), the status of the conversion narrative at the ballad’s close is debatable: it does stage a scene dear to abolitionists who have been converted from their former lives of sin, and in so doing allegorizes the desired conversion of sinning (even if unconsciously) citizenry. But the language of ministry is very singsong, pat, and perhaps ultimately inadequate to the horrors it means to address. The constructions of the slaves by the abolitionists play against the voices of the exslaves themselves, *Equiano* and *Prince*, often within a single text; fables of patience and deliverance jostle against impulses of rebellion. The figure of the suffering woman is often exploited to focus outrage or pity: how does this work with or against the complex representation of women? Such tropes also point attention toward the common ground between the representation of women in the abolitionist literature and the poetry of sympathy generally, and the employment of slavery as analogy in the feminist critique of the marital relationship.

**Mary Robinson**

Poems such as *January, 1795*, *The Camp*, and *London’s Summer Morning* remind us that within the Romantic period poems in couplets, filled with crisply observed social detail and wit, continued to be written. The urban pastoral of *London’s Summer Morning* may be compared to Jonathan Swift’s *A Description of the Morning* and *A Description of a City Shower* (in volume 1); the panoramic view and play with classical conventions can then be set against *Poor Susan* to underscore Wordsworth’s focus on a single, lower-class consciousness. *Lyrical Tales*, an early response to *Lyrical Ballads*, shows the widespread interest in the poor and in unusual states of mind: comparison between Robinson’s *The Old Beggar* and Wordsworth’s *Old Man Travelling* discloses the differences between her emphasis on the scene, the sufferer, and the evoking of a sympathetic response, and his understated, cryptic handling of encounter. If *Lyrical Tales* suggests debt to Wordsworth and Coleridge, the indebtedness runs the other way with *Sappho and Phaon*; contemporary women poets (see also Charlotte Smith), and not alone his rereading of Milton’s sonnets in 1802, showed Wordsworth the power of the compact form. Robinson’s sequence endows the female protagonist with dignity and analytic power as well as passion, and combines the lyrical intensity of the single sonnet with narrative development.
Written just a few years after Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, this sonnet sequence, itself the display of a woman of learning and education, contests Wollstonecraft’s conviction that women may call on “Reason” to thwart and discipline the chaos of destructive passions, especially the erotic passions. In the productive discipline of sonnet form, Robinson sets love in conflict with Reason, even addressing two sonnets, 7 and 11, to this capacity. In 7, the octave seems promising in its call; students can ably list the informing oppositions, but if they sense a desperation of tone, they will have anticipated the second act staged in the sestet, where the closing lines “drear[y] labyrinths of mental night” repeat rather than redeem “the wayward wand’ring[s] of [the] mind,” and itself seems phantasmic. Still, they may want to ask if the poem sounds reasonable in its argument, and whether it is reason or passion that is managing the intricate poetic form. Robinson’s Critique of Reason (if that’s not too formal a term) continues in the string of questions that evolve from 7 to emerge as the primary rhetoric of protest and complaint in 11. With this unresolved conflict and contradiction in mind, students will be prepared to address Wollstonecraft’s ideology of “Reason” with some attention to how the biographical facts of Wollstonecraft’s life and times (movie-of-the-week passions, political and personal) have driven her to this standard. At the same time, students may also see a rather seamless continuity between Wollstonecraft’s critique of youthful physical beauty as the ephemeral measure of a woman’s value and Robinson’s earlier satirical *Ode to Beauty*, its sarcasm involving, as Wollstonecraft’s would, the iconography of Milton’s Eve, especially in the first stanza. The “fall” of Robinson’s beauty is wrought not only by social corruptions (ill-nature, jealousy, slander, flattery, and so forth) but also by the mere, and devastating inevitability of aging.

*To the Poet Coleridge* possesses a great deal of contextual interest. Robinson’s *Lyrical Tales* is an acknowledged response to *Lyrical Ballads*, but Robinson’s fame was such that Wordsworth briefly considered altering the title of the second edition to “Poems by W. Wordsworth” to avoid the “great objection,” as Dorothy Wordsworth put it, of confusion with a rival volume also published by Longman (Letter of 10–12 September 1800). In *To the Poet Coleridge* Robinson positions herself not merely as a member of the Coleridge circle, privy to Coleridge’s unpublished poem (as those who also recognized the echoes would realize), but as the senior established poet, the SAPPHO who welcomes him, and “weave[s] a crown” for him (l. 51) to offset Coleridge’s lost vision of an Abyssinian maid. In so doing Robinson converts the sublime aloneness of Coleridge’s speaker into a social experience: “with thee I’ll wander” (l. 2), “with thee I’ll trace” (ll. 5 and 27), “With thee . . . I’ll listen” (ll. 29–30). The sympathy that marks the action extends also to the form of the poem: Robinson adroitly mimics the “meander” and “varying sounds” (l. 4, ll. 7 and 57) of Coleridge’s poem, testimony to the compelling rhythm, the “wondrous witcheries of song” (l. 64), that gave Coleridge’s “airy dreams a magic all [their] own” (l. 72) at a level beneath meaning. In claiming to be “wake[d] . . . in ecstatic measures” by Coleridge’s nymph (l. 61)—and demonstrating by her verse that she has been—Robinson fulfills the role of the ideal Romantic reader, inspired by a poem to repeat the poet’s imaginative act.
Mary Wollstonecraft

In calling for “a revolution in female manners,” Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, extends the debate over rights provoked by the French Revolution to the private sphere of the relations between men and women—but her polemic is energized by the refusal to separate private from public in that fashion. Her figurative language repeatedly joins the treatment of women to the largest topics of the day—slavery, tyranny, injustice, power, rights—and proceeds in part by provocative rereadings of canonical writers, such as Milton, lauded (and condemned) radical ones, such as Rousseau, and the popular handbooks of female education. Her independence of mind emerges in her treatment of her two audiences: men, whom she would persuade to live up to their ideals by renouncing their illegitimate authority, and women, whom she satirizes, often harshly, in order to free them from complicity with the system of values which keeps them in subjection. A deceptively unflashy style thus serves a variety of rhetorical ends. Her work may be situated against several other texts: compare, for example, Wollstonecraft’s specific critique of female education with the treatment of children in Blake (who knew and admired Wollstonecraft) and Wordsworth’s visions of childhood in *There was a Boy* and *Three years she grew in sun and shower*. All these reflect the recent sense of the child as a particular stage of human development, shaped by environment, and hence improvable by changes in that environment, or, conversely, corrupted by experience rather than innately guilty. Wollstonecraft makes clear the contemporary gender demarcations of such social construction: one might ask students to consider what Wollstonecraft would have remarked about the social ideal of (girl) “Child,” “Maiden’s form,” and “Lady” shaped in Wordsworth’s *Three years*, and the implicit authority of the implicitly male narrator. Teasing out the relations between Lucy’s education by “nature” and the actual education of young girls in eighteenth-century society that Wollstonecraft criticizes reveals the intellectual toughness of Wollstonecraft’s dissenting tradition and the mythology of the private, inner life in Wordsworth’s poetry. With Wollstonecraft as a triangulating third party, the differences between the childhood Wordsworth accords the Boy of Winander (in early drafts a first-person recollection) and that he gives to Lucy in *Three Years* emerge. How does the “natural” foundation for the education of the boy differ in its lessons from that for the girl? One might also compare Blake’s sense of innocence as a precarious and vulnerable ignorance to Wollstonecraft’s aspersions on “innocent” as a term of praise for girls or women, and her exposure of the cultural ideal of keeping women in a state of innocence, or a state analogous to childhood, as a covering for the self-serving male ideal of deferral to and blind dependence on male authority.

But Wollstonecraft is too forceful a writer to figure only in relation to her male contemporaries. Jemima’s story, from her unfinished novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, published posthumously by Godwin in 1798, demonstrates at once her powers of fiction and of polemic. Its strength grows from its belief in the representative case: Jemima, though a compelling voice, is not a unique creation, in the way later novelists excelled in the creation of individual, often idiosyncratic, char-
acters. Rather she stands as the embodiment of conditions that Wollstonecraft presents as actual and typical. She speaks for herself, but of, and from, the social and material circumstances that have produced her. Her voice is the outcome of Wollstonecraft’s compression: she is at once character and argument. Students might be asked to compare the sense of the social situatedness of the individual, in Jemima as in the *Vindication*, with the representation of character in other texts of the period.

**Perspectives**

**The Wollstonecraft Controversy and the Rights of Women**

Much of the material in the selections from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is literary or literary-critical in nature, inviting productive treatment in courses of literary study. Wollstonecraft frequently writes as a literary critic: she notes keywords of description, and demystifies their habituated meanings and values; with the pressures of protofeminist critique, she reads literature from *Paradise Lost*, to Rousseau’s *Émile*, to Reverend Fordyce’s and Dr. Gregory’s advice manuals for young women, tracing out the informing and debatable ideologies of gender; she views cultural practices ("the prevailing opinion" and the systems of education that nurture it) as if these were structured and readable as a text, a system of language that might be illuminated and submitted to critical review. And across all these events, explicitly in *Maria*, she uses techniques of literary representation: characterizations and caricatures of deficient men and women, romances of idealized women, symbolic anecdotes and scenes, systems of metaphor and image, allusions to literary precedents from the Bible to contemporary poetry, all punctuate her polemic.

This textual emphasis is no less on display in the readings in this “Perspectives” section. Macaulay develops her argument for “No Characteristic Difference in Sex” (the document behind Wollstonecraft’s chapter, “The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character”) with reference to the same text from Alexander Pope (*Epistle II*) that focuses Wollstonecraft’s irritation. Like her, too, she finds Rousseau, Addison, and Chesterfield useful antagonists. Students may want to ponder the emergence of a “canon” of anti-feminist literature that comes to stand for the prevailing social text in these polemics, and compare the critiques developed of these influential works. Barbauld’s explicitly allusive poem, *The Rights of Woman*, is motivated in part by personal anger over Wollstonecraft’s criticism of her as a dismaying instance of a woman of sense writing poetry that is part of the problem. Like many male antagonists of women’s rights, Barbauld “misreads” Wollstonecraft as promoting a battle of the sexes for superiority. In a parody of conduct book instruction, Barbauld cautions that the battle may be won, but at the price of love and affection, where powerplays must dissolve in mutual love. Students may want to consider the suspension of political contexts in this idealization, and whether a privacy of mutual affection is sufficient in a world of un-
equal rights and opportunities. The political woman is on Southey’s mind, when he writes a sonnet urging Wollstonecraft not to be insulted by traditional terms of praise, and such figures (political and traditional) inform Blake’s verses on Mary as a kind of Blakean twin, despised and slandered for her rebelliousness.

Polwhele’s satire in Augustan couplets shows that Blake is not just being self-referential. His Unsex’d Females (unsexed by a lack of modesty; otherwise entirely too sexy) are monsters that defy fathers, nature, and even patriotic Englishness. Polwhele’s voluminous footnotes may look daunting and unattractive to students, but urge them to have a look, because in many ways the diatribe Polwhele conducts here is just as important, and on the subject of Wollstonecraft quite nasty and virulent. As the development of his poem makes clear, not only Wollstonecraft but any woman of public opinion, including many in our anthology (Barbauld, Williams, Smith, Yearseley, Hays, and Robinson) is prime for whipping. Polwhele’s hysterical but nonetheless credible (to conservative culture critics) polemic helps students see why the case for women’s rights virtually died away for more than half a century, and why Wheeler and Thompson’s tract was as risky as it was important when it appeared in the 1820s. The only cases possible by the end of the 18th century were twofold: more sensible education and respectable employment for women who had no other means of support. Wakefield cautiously positions her tract in behalf of the progress of Christian civilization and relies on almost novelistic scenes of abjection and dishonorable male usurpation of female opportunities to make her case. Radcliffe appeals to the values of Christian charity to argue for these opportunities for women, and like Wakefield relies on the techniques of novel-writing to paint scenes of abject misery. She also boldly invokes the parallel to slavery to describe women as “Christian slaves at home,” and hazards the rhetorical gambit that these women are more miserable than actual slaves. Students who want to put differential pressure on the feminist analogues between female oppression and chattel slavery will not want to skip over Radcliffe’s remarkable claims. More’s Strictures may strike students as patently conservative not only in its positioning against Wollstonecraft’s political argument but also in its insistence that women be educated on Christian principles of humility, patience, and service. Yet it is a sign of how ready even conservatives were for some changes that More shares with Wollstonecraft a critique of “sensibility” (a cultivation of emotional responsiveness) and the literary genres (especially the novel) that sustain it, and a desire for more rational education. One contradiction that More attempts to address is her own status as a woman (and a novelist, even) writing for the public sphere. Lamb, like More, was childless, unmarried, and a sometime author. Her essay on needlework takes up a female pastime that Wollstonecraft and other women regarded as mindnumbing, and in Lamb’s case, so aggravating as to spark fits of madness. Lamb recognizes that some women depend on such work for a living, so that the culture of needlework as a pastime is doubly pernicious. Not framed as an abstract economic tract, however, Lamb’s letter could almost be a draft for a chapter in a novel, setting a scene, populating it with characters, and unfolding the cultural and economic issues out of that fabric. Finally, Thompson and Wheeler offer a reprise not only of all these issues, but also of the techniques of literary repre-
sentation. In their protomarxist document, they discuss female authorship, Wollstonecraft and Hays, the analogies of female oppression to slavery (the 1820s were a hot decade in the abolition movement), and deploy techniques of novel-writing to advance a case for women’s rights that involves fundamental questions of political and social reform.

**Joanna Baillie**

Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” can be compared to Wordsworth’s 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which it anticipates in its emphasis on the analysis of passion and unadorned style; one might then also contrast Baillie’s manner of address to the reader with Wordsworth’s edgy critique of current taste, and consider the effects of Wordsworth’s connection of simplicity of language with the way of life of the north country small-holder. Baillie’s poems can also be inserted into comparisons: her *London* with Wordsworth’s sonnet, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*, and Book 7 of *The Prelude*, or Blake’s *London*, or Byron’s account of Juan’s approach to the city (*Don Juan*, 11), as instances of the poets’ efforts to represent the unprecedented impact of the metropolis; the domesticity of *A Mother to Her Waking Infant* and *A Child to His Sick Grandfather* with the poems of childhood and age in Blake and Wordsworth. The vernacular of “Dad” in the latter, like the Scotticisms of *Woo’d* and *Married* and *A’*, shows the familiar end of Baillie’s stylistic range, but *Thunder*, like her *London* (or Barbauld’s *Inscription for an Ice-House*), demonstrates that the sublime was not closed to the woman writer.

**Literary Ballads**

The revival of interest in the Romantic poets in the 1960s, after the denigration of them by modernist poets and critics (such as T. S. Eliot) who elevated wit and the precise, dry image over what they saw as Romantic vagueness of emotion and looseness of form, was nurtured by a revaluation upwards of terms such as imagination, vision, and apocalypse. To an older literary history Romanticism sprang not from its affinities with the infinite and the inexpressible but with the folk, with traditional communal life, and with elliptically understated narrative. Though ballad scholars divided between those who saw ballads as the product of the people and those who ascribed them to court minstrels, they agreed in emphasizing the contrast between the cryptic, often vernacular style of the ballads and the polish of Augustan poetry. Instructors may wish to consider how the tangy native particulars of *Sir Patrick Spens* and *Lord Randal* play against the universal affirmations of the Enlightenment; tradition here seems counter to the abstract prescriptions of reason that fuelled the Revolution. These aristocratic stories differ from the emphasis on peasant, or at any rate, traditional agricultural, life in Burns, which Wordsworth was also to emphasize in *Lyrical Ballads*. Here too an instructor may wish to play the democratizing implications of Burns’s language and sentiments, and his cheerful bawdiness, against the conservative, stabilizing qualities of such
regionalism. As Burns's familiarity with high-culture forms and language suggests, his earthiness was a sophisticated gambit, a choice of genre rather than the unmediated transcription of experience: Wordsworth admired how Burns “avail[s] himself of his own character and situation of society, to construct out of them a poetic self.” His lexicon may be placed against Wordsworth’s “language really used by men,” but “purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust,” as the Preface to Lyrical Ballads puts it, and with Clare’s dialect; likewise the range of experience he narrates against that of the Wordsworth known for “plain living and high thinking,” to use his own words. Moore adapts the regional to the polite: Wordsworth confessed that Moore had “great natural genius,” but complained that his “poems smell of the perfumer’s and milliner’s shops. He is not content with a ring and a bracelet, but he must have rings in the ears, rings on the nose—rings everywhere.”

William Wordsworth

Reviewing Wordsworth’s Descriptive Sketches (1793), the radical Thomas Holcroft exclaimed: “More descriptive poetry! Have we not yet enough? Must eternal changes be rung on uplands and lowlands, and forests, and brooding clouds, and cells, and dells, and dingles? Yes; more, and yet more: so it is decreed.” The debt to the picturesque tradition remained large in Wordsworth; his poetry may be seen to present as spontaneous personal experience what was already a highly codified, impersonal response to landscape (see the variant cited in the headnote to Tintern Abbey). Holcroft’s exasperation points to an issue recently contested in Romantic studies. The instructor who has followed the suggestions of tensions in earlier entries in the manual may wish to ask students to consider whether Wordsworth’s invocation of “nature” constitutes a withdrawal from the political issues of the period. By not including Tintern Abbey in the poem that bears its name, for example, Wordsworth avoids mentioning the beggars found there, noted in contemporary guidebooks; the “smoke” (18) reads as an evocative detail, divorced from the poor charcoal-burners in the neighborhood; the “vagrant” (21) becomes a surmise, interchangeable with a “hermit” (22), rather than a victim of injustice asking redress. If the date in the title, one day before the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille and the eighth anniversary of Wordsworth’s arrival in France (see The Prelude 6:339 ff.), suggests an allusion to the Revolution, contemporary violence and political disillusionment are distanced and generalized into the “still, sad music of humanity” (92). Likewise, the specific social ills Wordsworth enumerates in the letter to Fox accompanying Michael are not to be found in the poem, and the action is set in the past where intervention is no longer possible. To many these gestures have marked Wordsworth as a neo-conservative. Against this line of argument the instructor can set the excerpt from Francis Jeffrey’s comments on “the new poetry” as evidence of how subversive an intelligent contemporary found Wordsworth’s power to unsettle conventional hierarchies, literary and social. The address to the reader in Simon Lee, placing the burden of understanding on his or
her capacity for “silent thought” (74), urges a reformation in attitudes in a form that may be the most effective available after the reaction to Jacobin excess, not an abandonment of revolution but a change in strategy. Students may be asked to consider the contrast between the discourse of rights in Paine, for example, with the extensions of sympathy in Simon Lee (clinched by the surprise of “gratitude” instead of the stock “ingratitude”) and Old Man Travelling, triangulating these against Burke’s respect for tradition and feeling. Wordsworth’s project of reforming the reader—a process not always pleasant to undergo, as the Preface declares, and analogous to the Christian pattern of the necessity of humbling pride in order to enable exaltation—thus substitutes the formation of the individual’s power of silent, inward meditation for systematic social reform, and disguises its agenda by presenting it (as in Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned) as the mere outcome of the “nature” that Holcroft scorns, rather than as the abstract, conscious program of the rationalists that Burke lambasted. (Compare Burke’s scorn of “sophists and calculators” with the insistence on counting of the narrator of We Are Seven.) Tintern Abbey, the final poem of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, witnesses the new reflective sensibility.

The “experiment” of Lyrical Ballads thus challenges readers to become sensitive and skilled enough to fill in their gaps, understatements, and indirections. The difficulty of poems such as A Slumber or Lucy Gray does not arise from allusion to classical learning, but from an audacious minimalism and refusal to point to a moral or a conclusion; consequently, good reading depends not on high education, but on qualities of soul. The process is self-confirming: to be capable of reading Wordsworth is to have joined a new sort of elite, independent of class. Lamb’s indignant reply to Wordsworth’s pride in his union of “Tenderness and Imagination” makes clear the qualities the poet sought to form in his readers. As a term “lyrical ballads” had already pointed in two directions: toward the narrative of ballad and the inwardness of emotion in lyric, away from action and toward the quality of response. One might ask students to consider how the emphasis on “silent thought” affects narrative impulse. Instructors may also want to compare the relations between language and revolution in Wordsworth with other writers, particularly Wollstonecraft. How does the issue of gender enter in Wordsworth’s description of the poet as “a man speaking to men”? in his portrayal of women? Questions of gender and of narrative often converge: fruitful assignments spring from comparisons of the representation of male narrator and female subject in Poor Susan and The Solitary Reaper. Revision often highlights the issues: consider the effect of the omitted last stanzas of Poor Susan or of Strange fits of passion.

After Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth’s rejection of traditional literary artifice relaxes; students may compare the formalism of the sonnets with the earlier poems. Note also the sequence from Tintern Abbey, which Wordsworth did not “venture” to call an ode, to Ode: Intimations of Immortality, to Elegiac Stanzas. In all, the comparison between what one used to see and what one now sees spells the crisis of the poem, but the conclusions, the attempted resolution of the crises, differ. Students might be asked to compare the “abundant recompense” of Tintern Abbey or its last line with the last lines of the two later poems—“Thoughts that lie too
deep for tears” and “not without hope we suffer and we mourn”—and the processes by which these resolutions, if they are resolutions, are reached. What is the relationship between affirmation and mourning in the three texts? How does the mediation through art in Elegiac Stanzas signal a change in Wordsworth’s relationship to nature? How do we understand the difference in the treatment of landscape in Tintern Abbey (located, dated) from the general scene in the Ode? and of the speaker of Tintern Abbey, with a history and a sister, and that of Elegiac Stanzas, with a specific loss to grieve, from the “I-representative” of the Ode? Wordsworth placed the Ode as the closing poem in every collection that he published in his lifetime: students might consider the meaning of that gesture, and gauge its effectiveness. (The comparisons can be reordered by inserting the more Lyrical Ballad–like Resolution and Independence.)

Our companion reading, Mary Shelley’s lyric, On Reading Wordsworth’s Lines on Peele Castle, counterpoints this sequence in suggestive ways. Students might be asked to consider how Shelley’s “dirge” (l. 6), her fixed grief, contrasts with the consolation Wordsworth seeks in his Elegiac Stanzas, and still more in Tintern Abbey, Resolution and Independence, and Ode: Intimations of Immortality. Crossing, of course, Shelley’s re-reading of Wordsworth is her awareness of Percy Shelley’s elegy for Keats, Adonais (1821), whose plot and imagery are echoed in the waves and calling voice (lines 6–10) of her poem, tropes given retrospective poignance by Percy’s drowning in 1822. The intertextual density exemplifies the ongoing, charged conversation Romantic poems generate among themselves. If in 1814 Mary and Percy could declare that Wordsworth had become “a slave” (see p. 322 of this manual) it is through an encounter with his poem that she articulates her own sorrow a decade later.

Instructors will choose their own paths through the wealth of The Prelude, but a few general points may be helpful. Despite the chronological narrative flow that reflects the age’s interest in human development, of character as proceeding in stages from its beginning rather than as (in Aristotelian terms) that which shows the moral character of the fully formed adult in action, the poem is written in retrospect. If the bio moves forward, the graphy is thoroughly after the fact. Several consequences follow: the shifting spacing between the Wordsworth-narrated (the child of the early books) and the Wordsworth-narrator should not lead one to overlook that the Wordsworth-narrator is always remembering/writing in his present, aware of the constructedness of what he recounts: see, for example, his acknowledgment of “conjectures” in his tableau of the Blessed Babe (2.238) and, in a passage we don’t print, his recognition of Coleridge as one who understands that it is a “Hard task to analyse a soul, in which, / Not only general habits and desires, / But each most obvious and particular thought, / Not in a mystical and idle sense, / But in the words of reason deeply weigh’d, / Hath no beginning” (2.232–37). The overlay and interplay of past and present animates virtually every passage: the instructor should show students how fractured and multiple is the “I” of, for example, 2.28–33, where the “I” of the narrator observes the “two consciousnesses” in his own mind. The extended simile of the autobiographer as one trying to see into the depths of a lake (4.247–64) is another self-reflexive trope. The
drama of the poem repeatedly depends upon a saving reinterpretation, in which
the present narrator comes to understand a previous formulation as inadequate:
the sudden recognition, in the act of writing, in 6.535–49, is thus representative
of typical patterns. Note the affirmation at the close that “in the end / All [is] grat-
ulant if rightly understood” (13.385), which counterbalances the dynamic in
which the potent events come as shocks, or surprises in a moment of calm, of
which the meaning can be grasped only later: for example, the episodes of ice-skat-
ing, the stolen boat, the drowned man, unwittingly crossing the Alps, or There was
a boy, when it becomes part of The Prelude.

Moreover, as the composition of the poem stretched over many years, it in-
evitably entailed shifts in perspective on what was already written. Though we do
not print Book 8, entitled “Retrospect,” it may be useful to instructors to men-
tion its a retelling of what had just been told, in a kind of feedback loop in which
the revision of old material was needed to unlock the future, it epitomizes the
rhythm of the poem as a whole. Important to remember is that the writer is al-
ways posterior to the events he narrates: if the “spots of time” in Book 11 are out
of chronological order, the late placement is true to a central feature of
Wordsworth’s experience: the Wordsworth who wrote them, even he of the Two-
Part Prelude, was one who had lived through the French Revolution, and students
may profitably be asked to consider how the accounts of childhood terror and
abandonment, of guilt and chastisement, may have been inflected by what hap-
pened subsequently to their experience, but prior to their writing. The titling of
Book 5, “Books,” points to the centrality of writing in the construction of mem-
ory. Wordsworth’s assertion that he was not frightened by the apparition of the
drowned man because he had read about such sights before (450–81) may suggest
a reversed truth: that by writing them up Wordsworth gains control of potentially
traumatic experiences. Instructors might ask students to compare lines 473–481
to the version of the episode in the Two-Part Prelude, which concludes: “I might
advert / To numerous accidents in flood or field, / Quarry or moor, or ‘mid the
winter snows, / Distresses and disasters, tragic facts / Of rural history, that im-
pressed my mind / With images to which in following years / Far other feelings
were attached—with forms / That yet exist with independent life, / And, like their
archetypes, know no decay” (1.279–87). The exercise shows Wordsworth’s inten-
tion as less to recover what the child “really” felt than to subject “experience” to
continuing revision, according to the aims and needs of his present; the differ-
ences between the accounts should precisely focus lively discussion. Similarly, it
is provocative to compare the accounts of the 1790s given by The Prelude with the
poems written in that period; the apostrophe to Burke we print from 1850 can
start a discussion of whether it is a late graft that contradicts what went before or
a belated recognition of loyalties ignored at the time.

Central to Wordsworth’s enterprise is the wresting of the high, inclusive cul-
tural form of epic to the narrative of his own growth, a wresting that involves nar-
rating the French Revolution not as a momentous event in itself, to be grasped
from the perspective of a grand authority (contrast Burke’s “History will
record . . .”), but as it appeared to him. The poem thus insists on the individual
nature of truth: on truth as it is felt by the individual witness. Wordsworth’s experience nonetheless participates in the debate of his generation, and The Prelude should be placed next to the writers in our Perspectives section: his account of events in France with Helen Maria Williams and Arthur Young, his account of the dispiriting effect of pure “Reason” in Book 10 with Godwin, and his restoration through feeling, Nature, and a “beloved Woman” with the Burkean emphasis on domestic affections. The commitment to change and growth as an overarching value—“a something evermore about to be” (6.542)—renders conclusion problematic. Students may be asked whether the sublime vision on Mt. Snowdon, the record of a 1791 excursion that occurred before events narrated in the previous books, seems adequate to them, and to explore the relation between their sense of the poem and Wordsworth’s assertion that the “Song” has “centr[ed] all in love” (13.384). The importance of love and of the friendship with Coleridge signalled at the close can be played against the “Fraternity” celebrated by the Revolution; likewise the degradation of “revolutions in the hopes / And fears of men” to a parenthesis (13.442–450) in comparison to the “lasting inspiration” to be sung by “Prophets of Nature” (13.442–43) can spark a reconsideration of the relationships between “nature” and “history.” One might ask students to ponder throughout the poem how Wordsworth’s emphasis on childhood, intimacy (e.g., the Blessed Babe passage), friendship, nature, and values traditionally associated with the feminine adjusts the traditionally masculine, public form of the epic. Note, for example, 13.204ff.: “he whose soul hath risen / Up to the height of feeling intellect / Shall want no humbler tenderness, his heart / Be tender as a nursing Mother’s heart, / Of female softness shall his life be full. . . .” Such passages, congruent with the emphasis on feeling in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, spring the question whether the Romantic poet colonizes the feminine, displacing women writers from their place by appropriating their materials or risks seeming too feminine, unmanly.

The trajectory of The Prelude enables readers to see that the values of nature that the poem affirms (perhaps especially those applied to Wordsworth’s own growth: “Fair seed-time had my soul” [1.306]; compare Burke’s tropes of nature) always existed against the backdrop of the Revolution, the urban, the disturbing modern. One set of tropes Wordsworth employs is that of the consecrated soul, but another perspective is given by that of the writer seeking to found his authority, his professional position, in a post-revolutionary world without fixed sources of appeal. Wordsworth’s account of London as an unknowable community in Book 7 should be juxtaposed with the representations by Robinson, Blake, and Baillie. Wordsworth’s most profound experiences tend toward solitude, or of such withdrawal from social life that he is virtually solitary. Hence his strategies when confronted by a crowd—compare Burke on the mob—are particularly telling. Lines 593–622 raise important questions about the relationship between identity and recognition by others, and the blind beggar seeking to explain the story of his life furnishes a particularly fraught commentary on Wordsworth’s own autobiographical enterprise. Wordsworth’s anxiety at finding himself “Living amid the same perpetual flow / Of trivial objects, melted and reduced / To one identity, by diff-
ferences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end” (702–05) repeats the stigmatizing of city life in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where it is not inertness but excitement, spectacle, and distraction that dull the mind. *The Prelude* thus makes clear the connection between the threatening urban anonymity and the need to develop the “discriminating powers of the mind” and the self-sustaining powers of inward meditation described above. Students might contrast the isolation and confusion that characterizes London and the treatment of “crowd” and “solitude” in *I wandered lonely as a cloud*.

**Dorothy Wordsworth**

Dorothy Wordsworth’s repeated declarations that she would not consider herself a poet—in her letters, in *Irregular Verses*, in *Lines Intended for my Niece’s Album*—evidently resonate with the expectations for women delineated (and contested) by Mary Wollstonecraft and the writers in “Perspectives: The Wollstonecraft Controversy and the Rights of Women”. With her the gender distinctions can be brought to bear on the vocation of the poet. Wordsworth proclaims that the “appointed close” of *The Prelude* is “the discipline / And consummation of a Poet’s mind” (1850, 14.30–04); in some ways, the poet of *Irregular Verses* unfolds a negative version of this story, that of someone who “might have,” but did not, become a poet. What are the important elements of this anti-history in Dorothy’s account? What sort of imaginative impulses did she display as a girl? What was expected of her as a girl and woman-to-be? How are we to understand her present poem: its motivation, title, and self-representation? These questions point toward a general one about the figure of the poet: is a “poet” someone endowed with a certain sensibility, as the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* puts it, or is the figure of the poet something constructed: public, hence unequally available to men and women in the period? Is to be a poet not simply to write poems, but also to shape a visible self, accumulating over time into a career? One might compare Dorothy’s *Floating Island* with the treatment of things that are no more in her brother’s poetry. Some of his poems even involve “island”-like images: isolated figures, poets on mountain tops (islands in the sky), or the charged “spots” that are everywhere in his poetic landscapes. Students might be asked to consider how Dorothy writes about this image (the island and its disappearance), and the persons who speak of it, against William’s representations. How do they each handle fragments and disappearances? Accounts in Dorothy’s journals of scenes and images that William represents in his poetry form evident points of contrast: students may be asked to compare a few of these, with an eye to similarities and differences in imaginative orientation: what is important for Dorothy? What is the focus of her writing? Where is she as a figure in the scene? Where is he as figure in the scene? Some possibilities: his *I wandered lonely as a cloud* and her account of the daffodils; his encounter with a discharged soldier (*Prelude* 4.400–504) and a blind beggar in London (*Prelude* 7.593–623) and her encounters with beggars in the Lake District.
The difference between private journal and published poem should not be ignored in these comparisons; rather, the influence of gender on the distinction should be weighed. The much-praised realism of Dorothy's observation of the world around her is not inseparable from the historically conditioned self-suppression of the female author, and can be set against the "egotistical sublime" of William's representations. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* William asserted that he had "at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject"; the much greater detail in the observation of the other in Dorothy's accounts suggests that William's subject was his own responsiveness. Likewise, the tangy vernacular she records sets off his claims to the "language really used by men." Her eye and ear for the particular mark Dorothy's distance from the generalized and conventional vocabulary of the picturesque, but in judging that her account of her Scots tour "far transcend[s] Gilpin," De Quincey located the literary tradition that underlay Dorothy's quicksilver response to nature. In light of the comments made above on William's power to suggest that responsiveness to nature was the hallmark of the sensitive soul, Dorothy's realism and spontaneity can be seen as epitomizing the new sensibility: in her what seem to be "merely" description and transcription emerge as radiant values in themselves. Students may be asked to consider how Dorothy's emphasis on the particular contrasts with the "philosophic mind" William claims for himself in the *Intimations Ode*: in what ways is the particular marked as feminine? One might also place William's *Tintern Abbey* next to Dorothy's *Thoughts on my Sick-bed* to ask how Dorothy's poem answers William's prayer for his sister 35 years earlier, and in what ways she may be seen as saying something different.

So too one might ask students to consider the perspectives our readings in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Perspectives: The Wollstonecraft Controversy and the Rights of Women* cast on the descriptions of Dorothy's vivacity, sensitivity, and innocence by Coleridge and De Quincey. One might also consider De Quincey's speculations on professional possibilities for Dorothy in connection with the anxieties of other woman writers in the volume. An instructor might tease out the ways these accounts of the woman play against William's literary representations of his sister: if Coleridge's letter precedes the publication of most of these, De Quincey's memoir echoes *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude* (which he knew well long before its appearance in 1850). The large questions of the situation of any biography between "fiction" and "representation" on the one hand and "actuality" on the other can be raised by asking students to compare De Quincey's *Recollections* with the praise of Dorothy in *Prelude* 10 (1805, 908 ff.). William resented as a violation of his domestic privacy the magazine publication of De Quincey's "scandalous, but painfully interesting" essays, as the frank details of Coleridge's opium-taking and of the marriages, habits, and persons of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle led Crabb Robinson to characterize them. Crabb Robinson reported that "He said with great earnestness: 'I beg that no friend of mine will ever tell me a word of the contents of those papers' & I dare say he was substantially obeyed" (See John E. Jordan, *De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship*, 1963). That such accounts were published and popular attests to the prominence William and Coleridge had acquired, and exemplifies the mechanisms of celebrity that fur-
ther magnified the image of the Romantic author. William’s resentment can thus be understood in part as a desire to control his representation, aggravated by his having withheld publication of The Prelude—his representation of his life, now anticipated by De Quincey—as a legacy to his family, to ensure copyright-protected income after his death.

**Perspectives**

**The Sublime, the Beautiful, and the Picturesque**

The reader of this manual will already have encountered in the section on Literary Ballads two different ways of configuring the Romantic period: through the ballad tradition, or through the prominence given to terms such as imagination, vision and apocalypse. Opening our volume with Anna Barbauld suggests another starting-point: the reconstellation of the period resulting from the restoration of the women writers important in their own day but lost in the modern critical tradition: Barbauld, Smith, Hemans. The clustered terms sublime, beautiful, and picturesque likewise effect a return: to a contemporary critical vocabulary that undoes any absolute distinction between the eighteenth century and the Romantic period. *Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry* is the earliest text (1757) in our volume, yet it remained a touchstone for generations of writers and painters, in Britain and abroad.

The instructor might further compare the two versions of the anecdote in the introduction to draw out the social valence of the terms. The woman’s unpublished journal is filled with detail suppressed in the man’s philosophic *Principles*. Note how Coleridge chooses the more dignified “travelers” over Dorothy’s confessed “tourists,” and eliminates any reference to the particular place that might have revealed the accuracy of the latter designation. “Accidental party” is also interesting: the meeting of the Coleridge-Wordsworth party with the hapless speaker was chance, but their visit to Cora Linn was not random. If Coleridge obscures his motives, his account shows him thoroughly conversant with formal landscape description: note how carefully the “cataract of great height, breadth, and impetuosity” is stationed, its summit blending with the clouds, its lower part hidden by rocks and trees. Height and depth, light and dark make a careful pictorial composition that marks the connoisseur of “sublime object[s],” less “natural” than composed as deliberately as the “bench” and “station” of Dorothy’s account indicate.

These maneuvers, and the joke itself, confirm that by 1814, when *On the Principles of Genial Criticism* was published in Felix Farley’s *Bristol Journal*, the play of terms was of long standing but still charged. Burke’s grounding of the sublime (to follow our excerpts) in *Terror, Obscurity, Power, Privation, Vastness, Infinity,* and *Difficulty* furnishes the code of representation of an event as terrific as the French Revolution—in which under Robespierre and St. Just “terror” was state policy—and, at the other extreme, of Barbauld’s sympathy for the isolated “apathetic” George III, deprived of the capacity for sympathy (On the Death of Princess
Charlotte), or of Wordsworth’s depiction of the protagonist of Old Man Travelling, “insensibly subdued / To settled quiet . . . by nature led / To peace so perfect, that the young behold / With envy, what the old man hardly feels.” Burke’s terms provide the language that shaped both the efforts of authors and the articulated responses of readers. Consider, for example, Coleridge’s description of A slumber did my spirit seal as “a most sublime Epitaph,” where the genre Epitaph crosses the effects of privation, terror at sudden loss, and difficulty—the reader’s difficulty in grasping the potent minimalism of the poem. Burke’s memorable expression “[a] clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea,” is an antecedent of many typical Wordsworthian formulations:

I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which,
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That, whatsoever point they gain, they still
Have something to pursue.

We do not print this passage (1805 Prelude 2.331–41), but an instructor might point to a characteristic moment in Resolution and Independence: “Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.” Here it is worth remarking that beyond the obvious connection between Burke and the countless forbidding mountain landscapes, Welsh, Lake District, and Alpine, of Romantic literature—consider Wordsworth’s climactic laborious ascent of Snowdon, capped with a vision of sea, clouds, and a “deep and gloomy breathing-place thro’ which / Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice” (1805 Prelude 13.57–59)—and despite his materialist emphasis on phenomena as if they automatically caused certain responses (in Part One, Section 19, not printed here, he writes “[a] low, tremulous, intermitting sound . . . is productive of the sublime”—Burke concludes the Enquiry with a Part devoted to Words and Poetry. His singling out of the effect of Milton’s phrase “of Death” (p. 504) marks an attention to linguistic particulars that can fruitfully open up close attention to Wordsworth and other poets. Note in the excerpt from The Prelude, above, Wordsworth’s characteristic double negative (how does “not profitless” differ from profitable?), the unfolding syntax of which Donald Davie has written “[i]t seems to be explaining, while in fact it is meditating, ruminating, at all events experiencing more fully than one does when one explains” (Articulate Energy, published 1955, rpt. 1976), and the repetitions that tug against but found the evolution of the argument. Note too how the line from Resolution and Independence becomes suggestive by refusing specification. Burke’s analysis of the effects of Milton’s description of Sin and Death
(p. 501) resonates for the next half-century and more, as its reappearance in the crucial chapter 13 of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (p. 574), witnesses.

For Wordsworth the picturesque was a suspect mode, but one in which he was steeped. By 1796 he owned both “Gilpin’s tour into Scotland, and his northern tour” and if he later tried to sell them second-hand (Letters of 21 March 1796 and 28 August 1798) that did not preclude his taking Gilpin’s Wye Tour with him when he and Dorothy Wordsworth went on the trip that produced *Tintern Abbey*. In a note appended to an elaborate description of a sunset (ll. 332–47) in his 1793 Descriptive Sketches he wrote: “I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassioned imaginations. The fact is, that controlling influence, which distinguishes the Alps from all other scenery, is derived from images which disdain the pencil.” In *The Prelude* he mounts the same charge against those “disliking here, and there / Liking, by rules of mimick art transferr’d / To things above all art,” and asserts that this “strong infection of the age, / Was never much my habit—giving way / To a comparison of scene with scene, / Bent overmuch on superficial things, / Pampering myself with meagre novelties / Of colour and proportion, to the moods / Of time or season, to the moral power, / The affections, and the spirit of the place / Less sensible” (1805, 11.152–64, not printed here). Two celebrated anecdotes involving his patron Sir George Beaumont illustrate the rules Wordsworth inveighed against: Beaumont kept an old fiddle in his sketching-case to calibrate the shade of brown to give his images, and once, looking at a canvas by John Constable, whose career he supported, demanded “Where’s your brown tree?”

What Wordsworth repudiated he was nonetheless saturated by, and his response points to a deepening rather than a simple rejection. Gilpin and his fellows taught Englishmen how to see landscape, taught them that they should turn to nature, and the picturesque emphasis on variety, irregularity, roughness, and contrast is everywhere in the subsequent literature. Moreover, Gilpin’s insistence that “[w]e are most delighted, when some grand scene . . . rising before the eye, strikes us beyond the power of thought—when . . . every mental operation is suspended,” producing “a deliquium of the soul” (p. 509), points straight to such intense moments of feeling as that in Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey* (ll. 36–50). As Gilpin continues to argue, it is “the imagination, active and alert” in the absence of “all objects of sense” that transforms the scene (p. 510), giving it what he elsewhere calls “the brilliance of a dream.” Gilpin’s distinction between “the original sketch” and the “adorned sketch” already enacts within the medium of art the difference between fidelity to the actual, the matter of fact, and the power of imagination which Wordsworth and Coleridge emphasize (p. 510). But Gilpin claims only “amusement” for the picturesque: for Wordsworth the landscape can disclose a “presence . . . something far more deeply interfused” (*Tintern Abbey*, ll. 95–97); the imagination creates “moral power” (see *The Prelude* excerpt above), and new intensities and compositions of feeling. It is as if Wordsworth and Coleridge had foregrounded
what was merely potential in the Picturesque; compare Gilpin’s absence of objects of sense to the inwardness of poems such as Coleridge’s *Frost at Midnight* (and the discussion in later sections of this manual), or Gilpin’s dependence on landscape and the comparative timidity of his invocation of imagination with Wordsworth’s resistance to “the tyranny of the eye,” to Blake’s contempt for “Natural Objects” and exaltation of the “Poetic Genius,” to Shelley’s austere mental audacity in the aptly named *Mont Blanc*, and Coleridge’s declaration: “I meet, I find the Beautiful—but I give, contribute, or rather attribute the Sublime.”

Keats followed a similar pattern: visiting the Isle of Wight in July 1819, he told Fanny Brawne he planned to “spy at the parties about here who come hunting after the picturesque like beagles”; a month later, from Winchester, where he was soon to write *To Autumn* (which instructors might approach by asking about its difference from the picturesque) he told her that he was “getting a great dislike of the picturesque; and can only relish it over again by seeing you enjoy it,” a phrase that repeats the gendering in the anecdote with which this section begins. The sense of the picturesque as a state to be passed through to a more masculine and strenuous encounter emerges most sharply in Keats’s disappointment in the Isle of Wight: having lost his “cockney maidenhead” to “lake and mountain” on the Scottish walking tour a year previously, he wrote Fanny “I may call myself an old Stager in the picturesque, and unless it be something very large and overpowering I cannot receive any extraordinary relish.” Tellingly, this boast arose from a good-humored competition with Charles Brown to sketch Shanklin Church. (Keats letters of 16 July, 16 August, and 31 July 1819.) Moving in the circle of artists and amateurs such as Benjamin Robert Haydon, Leigh Hunt, and William Hazlitt, Keats became familiar with the painters from whom picturesque taste sprang. In his Epistle To J. H. Reynolds, Esq. (1818, not printed here), he casually observes “You know the Enchanted Castle,” surrounding the reference with details (ll. 20–29) that suggest Claude’s “Landscape with the Father of Psyche sacrificing at the Milesian Temple of Apollo,” exhibited at the British Institution in 1816: “The sacrifice goes on; the pontiff knife / Gleams in the sun, the milk-white heifer lows, / The pipes go shrilly, the libation flows,” a scene that resonates in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. The survey of the “art garniture” in Leigh Hunt’s cottage in Hampstead that closes *Sleep and Poetry* (ll. 354–404) recalls the same Claude, Poussin’s “Bacchus and Ariadne,” and Titian’s “Diana and Actaeon,” singled out in Hazlitt’s “On Gusto” (p. 936). Those interested in pursuing these relations should consult Ian Jack’s *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (1967).

Burke’s discussion of Beauty reveals the interplay of aesthetic categories and female manners, as Wollstonecraft inclusively named the complex of gender stereotypes, the gendered distribution of power, and eros. Burke’s fantasia on the woman’s beautiful throat (p. 503) makes clear as well his investment in the values of sensibility (p. 504) and her commitment to reason. Wollstonecraft’s critique of Burke’s proposition that love “relax[es] the solids of the whole system” should also be compared with the active force of sympathy in Hazlitt and Keats. In Burke, beauty—associated with smallness, smoothness, and weakness—has no capacity to inspire: the values of harmony, proportion, and symmetry, the intellectual achieve-
ments of neo-classicism, have been evacuated. This perspective suggests why Burke could seem as lurid as the French revolutionaries he denounced, and why his prose continued to appeal to his political opposites, such as Hazlitt (see p. 941).

If the language of Burke and Gilpin furnishes the genealogy of British Romantic treatment of nature, the contemporary philosophy of Kant, already making itself felt in Britain by the turn of the century, has been seminal for subsequent discussion of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Kant’s insistence that “the sublime is not to be looked for in things of nature but only in our own ideas” (p. 514) freed discussion of the term from all pettily precise “comparison of scene with scene,” and turned it forcefully to the categories of mental activity. Kant’s identification of the “feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude” (p. 514) economically states the unease attendant on the mind’s attempt to grasp that which exceeds its capacity, and his sketching of the dynamic sequence through which an initial failure or sense of vulnerability—even “humiliation” (p. 516)—is recuperated by the mind’s consciousness of its superiority to “the seeming omnipotence of nature” (p. 515) tracks and conceptualizes the experience narrated in many paradigmatic moments of Romantic poetry. Kant’s vocabulary of “attraction and repulsion,” “vibration,” and “abyss in which [the imagination] fears to lose itself” (p. 515), of “challenge” and final “exaltation” (p. 516), helps unpack Wordsworth’s recounting of his first entry into London:

On the Roof
Of an itinerant Vehicle I sat
With vulgar men about me, vulgar forms
Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things,
Mean shapes on every side: but at the time
When to myself it fairly might be said,
The very moment that I seem’d to know,
The threshold now is overpass’d—Great God!
That aught external to the living mind
Should have such mighty sway! Yet so it was—
A weight of Ages did at once descend
Upon my heart, no thought embodied, no
Distinct remembrances, but weight and power,
Power, growing with the weight: alas! I feel
That I am trifling: ’twas a moment’s pause,
All that took place within me, came and went
As in a moment, and I only now
Remember that it as a thing divine.

We do not print this passage from Book 8 of the The Prelude (1805, 694–710), but it may serve as a template for reading the crossing of the Alps in Book 6 (1805, 488–572). Note how the narrative displaces the expected traveler’s high point—Crossing the Alps!—into a “sadness” (l. 492) and “dull and heavy slackening” (l. 549) that reveal their meaning years later in the act of writing. The “downwards”
course of the traveler springs in reflection the counter-movement of revelation: “Imagination! Lifting up itself / Before the eye and progress of my Song / Like an unfather’d vapour” (ll. 525–27). The “perplex’d” traveler in the conventionally sublime mountainscape of 1790 (l. 514) is repeated in the poet of 1804 “lost” in his own mind, who can “now recognize” in his own bafflement and the extinction of the “light of sense” the “invisible world” of Greatness, destiny, and infinitude, of “hope that can never die, / Effort and expectation, and desire, / And something evermore about to be”: the power of the “Soul” (ll. 529–42). The structure and the potent after-recognition govern also the two “spots of time” in Book 11 (258–389). The first begins with the six-year-old Wordsworth separated from his guide, “stumbling” into a scene of past violence, and confronted by a private “bare Common” and “naked Pool,” and a girl “who . . . with difficult steps . . . force[d] her way / Against the blowing wind.” In the second the teen-age Wordsworth finds himself straining to see the horses that would bring him home, alone amidst “the wind and sleet[ty] rain / And all the business of the elements, / The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,” only to have his anticipated Christmas cheer interrupted by the death of his father. In both these episodes “visionary dreariness” and defeated expectation, violence and death, yield by rebound “renovating Virtue,” the “deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master, and that the outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will.” These are the experiences that undergird the program that Wordsworth invokes for himself and Coleridge to conclude The Prelude:

What we have loved
Others will love: and we may teach them how,
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which ’mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine. (1805, 13.444–52)

From this perspective even the upheavals of the French Revolution dramatically narrated in the previous books become a parenthesis in—but a productive stage of—the “Growth of a Poet’s Mind,” as the sub-title of the 1850 The Prelude has it. Ruskin placed on the title-page of the first volume of Modern Painters an epigraph from Wordsworth’s The Excursion:

Accuse me not
Of arrogance, unknown Wanderer as I am,
If, having walked with Nature three-score years,
And offered, far as frailty would allow,
My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,
I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,
Whom I have served, that their DIVINITY
Revolts, offended at the ways of men
Swayed by such motives, to such ends employed;
Philosophers, who, though the human soul
Be of a thousand faculties composed,
And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
This soul, and the transcendent universe,
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud Self-love her own intelligence. (4.978–92)

Ruskin described Wordsworth as his “guide, in all education,” and quoted The Excursion, little read today, more than any other of his works. This frequency is a salutary reminder that “Wordsworth” in the nineteenth century was far more the observer who invested nature with a passionate “moral power” (see the quotation from Book 11 of The Prelude above) than the poet of ruptures, discontinuities, contradictions, and aporias of our own time. Ruskin’s Calais Church can be placed in several contexts: the elevation of the connection with the past of the Continent against a triumphalist English faith in progress can be set against a traditional contempt for France the Revolution had intensified a generation earlier; the unconscious dignity of the Church points back to Wordsworth’s Old Man Travelling (p. 351) and The Old Cumberland Beggar (1800; unprinted here), in whose title character the villagers who sustain him “Behold a record which together binds / Past deeds and offices of charity, / Else unremembered” (ll. 89–91), as the church stands as an “infinite of symbolism,” the “epitome” of all “which binds the old and the new into harmony”; this figural reading of the concrete can also be juxtaposed with Carlyle’s scorn for the “picturesque Tourist” in Past and Present (1843; pp. 1035 ff.) and insistence on “the eternal inner Facts of the Universe” over the “transient outer Appearances thereof . . . the Outer Sham-true” (Past and Present, Chapter 2, not printed here). The reader who finds the spiritual weight given to a piece of architecture should consider, on the one hand, Coleridge’s definition of the symbol in The Statesman’s Manual (pp. 568–69), and on the other, that it was Ruskin who in Modern Painters, vol. 3, chapter 12, defined the “pathetic fallacy”:

   I want to examine the nature of the other error, that which the mind admits when affected strongly by emotion. Thus, for instance, in Alton Locke,—
   They rowed her in across the rolling foam—
   The cruel, crawling foam.

   The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the “pathetic fallacy.”

   Now we are in the habit of considering this fallacy as eminently a character of poetical description, and the temper of mind in which we allow it as one eminently poetical, because passionate.
Ruskin’s unattributed citation of the epigraph on the Greek philosopher Epictetus (AD 55–135)—“poor, and sick in body, and beloved by the Gods” (p. 519) reminds us too that the values he praises have deep roots in Stoicism.

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

The instructor unafraid of confronting students with a daunting text might begin with “Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin.” Coleridge’s patient sorting through the shades of meaning borne by the key term of opprobrium not only offers a concise synopsis of the issues in “Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy”; it is also a wonderful introduction to Coleridge’s characteristic devotion to the “duty to have clear, correct, and definite conceptions,” no matter how subtle and extended the process of discrimination necessary to achieve clarity. His contempt for the “gallican” style of brief sentences or pointed antitheses as a manner in which it was impossible to do justice to the truth is the corollary of his own recursive prose, which goes over ground ever more finely, turning and turning topics. The consequent elaboration of his sentences, reconditeness of vocabulary (and Coleridge was fertile of neologisms), and almost panoramic allusiveness—a defeated biographer once confessed that if a book, any book, was available in England, it was safe to assume that Coleridge, whose borrowings and annotations were notorious, had read it—should be assessed in the light of the remarks on the politics of style in the manual for that Perspectives section. Comparison of Coleridge’s prose to Paine’s, say, on one side, and Burke’s or Godwin’s on the other, will illuminate the audience at which he aimed. His prose is that of the man of letters: it is neither that of a philosopher—“Once a Jacobin” is topical, and published in a newspaper—nor that of a journalist seeking to attract a transient attention; it models, and thus forms in its readers, a mind engaged with public affairs yet claiming a reflective station above them.

Coleridge’s distinction between the broad sense of Jacobin as one “interested in the cause of general freedom” and one who “in our sense of the term” adheres to the specific tenets of the sovereignty of the people, of the supremacy of individual rights to the preservation of property, and of the equality of each individual, so that representation is made to depend on a kind of evacuated interchangeability of persons without regard to merit, determined solely by voting (“numbered”), with universal suffrage, typifies his search for the fundamental principles in a dispute. His own commitment to the maxim that “that government was the best, in which the power was the most exactly proportioned to the property” reveals his continuity with Burke; at the same time, his scorn for those alarmed that peace with France would revive the dangerous seductiveness of Jacobin ideas—the essay was published during the Peace of Amiens, and the “Mr. W” referred to is William Windham, the Secretary of War in Pitt’s Tory cabinet, who had resigned rather than negotiate a treaty—mounts a Burkean argument for the wisdom of experience, of “our common sense and common feelings,” against the hysterical reaction identified with Burke. This supple middle position, in which Coleridge defends the
possibility of change over time, so that “once a Jacobin” (in the specific political sense he attaches to the term) does not mean “always a Jacobin,” since “the young, and the inexperienced,” in a phrase that Coleridge repeats for emphasis, “grow wiser,” accords with the revisionary autobiography of Biographia Literaria (and The Prelude). Such moves remind us that if Romanticism is commonly associated with the perspective of childhood, a fuller understanding casts the balance toward the ambiguous drama of growth, of gain and loss, of “emotion recollected in tranquility,” of the “philosophic mind” reshaping or imagining an origin from which it is always distant.

Beginning with a piece of political prose will also enable the instructor to open the question of the relationship between Coleridge's sociopolitical position and his literary and aesthetic criticism. What is the relation between “organic form” as Coleridge discusses it in our next selection from the Lectures on Shakespeare, including the tropes of natural growth and the affirmation that “a living body is of necessity an organized one; and what is organization but the connection of parts in and for a whole,” with the function of such language in the Burkean discourse of the organically growing, hierarchically ordered state? Similarly, how is Coleridge's notion of the unity of the aesthetic object, as instanced in his description of the poet as one who “brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity . . . diffus[ing] a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetical and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination” (Biographia Literaria 14), to be situated against the Burkean vision of the nation, neutralizing the real differences in its members by the compelling force of its symbolic attractiveness? Students might be asked to juxtapose the psychology of “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” that Coleridge formulated in defending his contributions to Lyrical Ballads and amplified in his comments on stage illusion from the Lectures on Shakespeare, with Burke’s defense of the monarchy and of “pleasing illusion” (not delusion) as the self-conscious fictions of the civilized, moral imagination. How does Coleridge's image of a hierarchy that preserves differences in “worth and dignity” but “magically” resolves them into harmony play against the eighteenth-century language of the ranks and orders of society, and against the emerging language of division between classes? How does Coleridge's immersion in and dissemination of German philosophical traditions (idealist and Pietist), then largely unknown in Britain, relate to the distaste for things French, particularly French rationalism, brought on by the course of the Revolution and protracted war?

Beginning with “Once a Jacobin” may also prevent Coleridge from being absorbed into discussions of Wordsworth in the classroom, as Wordsworth absorbed Coleridge when he affixed his name alone to Lyrical Ballads in 1800 and afterwards. The Eolian Harp shows Coleridge's achievements before the collaboration. The Eolian Harp, This Lime-Tree Bower, and Frost at Midnight exemplify Coleridge's development of the conversation poem. Out of the eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poem, usually addressed to a place or its resident genius, or to a muse, and usually
long, Coleridge developed a compact meditative form, addressed to wife, child, or friend, domestic in setting, and giving the impression, abetted by low-key blank verse, of intimate conversation. The conversation poems seem devoid of formal constraint, being shaped only by “the drama of reason—and present the thought growing” (as Coleridge described them) rather than being poured into predetermined rhyme or stanza pattern (see his animadversions on “mechanic” form), but are carefully constructed. Coleridge subtitled one work “A Poem which Affects not to be Poetry,” but in them one can detect the back-and-forth movement of the ode, hidden as the spontaneous flow of thought, and an overall roughly circular pattern: a quiet beginning, a rise into a more elevated or even vexed mood, a return to the opening calm, with some new advance in knowledge or self-understanding.

The situation of This Lime-Tree Bower, in which Coleridge imagines the walk with his friends of which injury has deprived him, and through this act of sympathy heals his own regret, epitomizes the social value of imagination the poems celebrate. The image of the Aeolian harp that permits the speculation that “all of animated nature” responds to “one intellectual breeze” (4447) is one of the polar tropes of the Romantic imagination: the figuring of the imagination as “indolent[y] and passive[y]” (41) responsive to a universal spirit is the opposite of the figure of Prometheus, the emblem of the imagination as creative, assertive, even daemonic, that one finds in Byron and Shelley. Coleridge’s affirmation of “the one life within us and abroad” (26) provoked charges of pantheism, embodied in the imagined rebuke from Sarah (49 ff.), but students might be asked to situate this vision of universal harmony against the rhetoric of brotherhood in the Revolution, and to consider Coleridge’s tableau of marital “Innocence and Love” (6) as a rejoinder to the charges of violating sacred bonds levelled by the conservatives against the radicals. To John Thelwall, a radical friend, Coleridge wrote in 1796: “We have an hundred lovely scenes about Bristol, which would make you exclaim—O admirable Nature! and me, O gracious God!” For the mature Coleridge, a Trinitarian, mind or spirit rather than matter was the necessary starting point for all analysis, and students can be asked to consider the differences between the more theological language of his visions of nature with the carefully ambiguous language of “presence,” say, in Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey (95).

Comparisons between Wordsworth and Coleridge in the period of their intense mutual stimulation are inevitable, and to be welcomed, in part as showing that even when Romantic rhetoric invokes the individual genius it does so within the exchanges of a group. If the Pantisocratic project failed, the impulse to build an ideal community, as a miniature of the new society, remained, whether in the proximity of the poets at Nether Stowey and Alfoxden, or in the public image of the life lived by the Wordsworths in Grasmere. Coleridge’s declaration in This Lime-Tree Bower that “Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure” (60) is echoed in Tintern Abbey: “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her” (123–24). The eddying structure and extraordinary fluidity in the representation of time in Frost at Midnight, as for instance in the sequence beginning at line 24, in which the narrating Coleridge remembers his schoolboy self, who (flashback within flashback) had been dreaming of his birthplace, remembering the bells that had fallen on his
ear “like articulate sounds of things to come,” finds its counterpart in the treatment of past, present, future, and present as remembered past in Tintern Abbey. In both poems such representations of mental activity—an observer of the speakers of Frost at Midnight or Tintern Abbey would see no action—create the rich inwardness that is the hallmark of “romantic” poetry. To follow the drama of consciousness requires readers alert to the associative logic that governs the poems: skilled enough, for example, to grasp that what returns Coleridge to his son, sleeping next to him in the present, in Frost at Midnight, is the culmination of his multi-layered retreat into the past: “My playmate when we both were clothed alike!” (43). The turn to the younger figure, and the concluding blessing invoked for his or her future, is parallel in Frost at Midnight and Tintern Abbey, but the instructor, having pointed out the similarities, should be able to ask students to ponder the differences as well. For instance: in the context of the poems of which they form a part, what are the different valences of Coleridge’s “Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure” and Wordsworth’s “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her”?

Commenting on the lines “and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things” in Tintern Abbey (49–50), Coleridge observed: “By deep feeling we make our ideas dim, and this is what we mean by our life, ourselves. I think of the wall—it is before me a distinct image. Here I necessarily think of the idea and the thinking I as two distinct and opposite things. Now let me think of myself, of the thinking being. The idea becomes dim, whatever it be—so dim that I know not what it is; but the feeling is deep and steady, and this I call I—identifying the percipient and the perceived.” The dimming out of the outside world is often a precondition of the liberation of imagination: note the “strange / And extreme silentness” (9–10), and “the numberless goings on of life / Inaudible as dreams” (12–13), at the opening of Frost at Midnight. This sensorily deprived state frees the mind to range, and the sense of the union of percipient and perceived, of subject and object, to swell. (A comparison of Bowles’s To the River Ichin with Coleridge’s Sonnet to the River Otter reveals that Bowles draws the river and the speaker as distinct, but Coleridge parallels the river rising in memory to the bedded sand rising through the river’s “bright transparence” [11]: the same phenomenon spills over the border between subject and object, “fusing” them. See also Coleridge’s elevation of symbol over allegory in the selection from The Statesman’s Manual.) Coleridge’s interest in this state links imagination, dream, and reverie, and provides a link between the conversation poems and the three supernatural poems: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Christabel.

Coleridge’s description of the Rime as a “poem of pure imagination” in his rebuttal of Mrs. Barbauld’s criticism that it had no moral has not stopped critics from reading it as an allegory of sin and redemption as well as a demonstration of the salvific power of the sympathetic imagination: the Mariner is freed from the Albatross around his neck at the moment that he “blesse[s]” (285) the water snakes. In what seems to embody the mysterious workings of grace, the unmotivated shooting of the bird is offset by an equally sudden “spring of love,” a motion of the spirit that occurs “unawares,” beneath the level of conscious choice (284–85). However consoling such a plot, and the final words of the Mariner—“He
prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small; / For the dear God
who loveth us, / He made and loveth all” (614–17)—most readers are more struck
with the nightmarish guilt and isolation of the Mariner’s voyage than with this
comforting moral lesson. A ballad writ large—its self-consciously literary medieval-
ising quality most apparent in the first version—the Rime offers a narrative that pro-
ceeds from the certainties of land, to the uncharted territories of ocean, returning
to land from a quality of experience that exceeds the conventional faith of the
Hermit and even the Mariner’s ability to grasp the meaning of what he has un-
dergone. We include Cowper’s The Castaway as a kindred instance of the conver-
sion of a narrative of adventure into a sudden, shocking glimpse of fearful aban-
donment; the workings of the Rime exemplify the double focus of the terms in the
title of the collection, shifting emphasis from ballad-story to psychological re-
sponse. In that perspective the crucial character of the poem is the Wedding
Guest, the destined but unwilling auditor—“I know the man that must hear me: /
To him my tale I teach” (589–90)—who is blocked from attending a wedding, a funda-
mental ceremony of human communion, by the tale. The Mariner’s experience
does not lead to final absolution—“at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns”
(582–83)—and his sharing of the tale unsetsles as much as it enlightens its hearer;
in the words of the concluding quatrain, “He went like one that hath been
stunned, / And is of sense forlorn: / A sadder and a wiser man, / He rose the mor-
row morn” (622–25). Coleridge’s poem thus offers a vision of literary transmission
as contamination as much as education, repetition compulsion as much as gain in
wisdom, in which the figure of the poet, the Mariner, appears less like the bringer
of relationship and love, in the words of Wordsworth’s Preface, than as the poète
maudit of later tradition. Students should be asked to consider the tensions between
the disruptive operations of the Mariner’s “strange power of speech” (587) and the
affirmations of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and the similarities and dissimilar-
ities between Wordsworth’s manner of revising his reader’s expectations and sensi-
bilities and the image of the relationship between poet and reader implicit in
Coleridge’s pairing of Mariner and Wedding Guest.

The obvious instance of horrific voyages in the period would have been the
Middle Passage of the slave trade, certainly familiar around the port of Bristol, and
to readers generally, as our Perspectives section establishes. The Rime might be seen
as drawing on topical materials, magnifying their import into a seemingly universal
drama of guilt by suppressing a particular referent. In this light, the Rime would ap-
pear as a displacement, or denial: a poem deliberately not about the slave trade, a his-
torically contingent text, willfully unknowing, consciously or unconsciously, a con-
temporary abuse. But the Mariner’s plight resonates more widely: the unmotivated
shooting of the Albatross raises the general question of the origins of violence, a
problem that the age had had to confront. Enlightenment thinkers had attacked the
notion of sacrificial violence as a primitive residue, and extended their critique to the
Christian narrative itself, an intellectual background that may contribute to the way
the Rime echoes (but not quite) Christian symbology. To many Englishmen the
French Jacobin justification of violence as politically necessary had been vitiated by
the excesses of the Terror. The Rime may thus be seen as asking what language, what
explanatory scheme, is adequate to explain violence, and what gain can persuasively be posited as arising from it. Asking, but not answering, Coleridge deepened the interpretive puzzles when he added the marginal glosses. Students should be asked how they handle the glosses as they read: some will follow the narrative, and only occasionally switch to the gloss; those who alternate poem and gloss as they proceed can be asked to describe the effects thus produced. The notion that the glosses are a privileged authorial explanation of the text will give way to recognition that the discrepancy between text and gloss rather complicates than simplifies understanding. (A good instance of the distance between the medievalising ballad and the elaborate, beautiful seventeenth-century prose of the gloss comes at 265.) Within the poem the Wedding Guest is helplessly gripped by the Mariner—“He holds him with his glittering eye—/ The weddingguest stood still, / And listens like a three years’ child: / The Mariner hath his will” (13–16)—but readers of the poem are both gripped by the spell and escape it into reflection as they negotiate the layers of competing interpretation attached to the act at its center.

Coleridge also brilliantly exploited the potentials of editorial apparatus, as it were, in the presentation of Kubla Khan. Poem and prose introduction together enact the quintessential fiction of the so-called fragment. Considering the opposition between the spontaneous composition recorded in the Preface, and its interruption “by a person on business from Porlock,” and its parallel in the poem, that between Kubla Khan, a figure of absolute power whose “decree” [2] immediately produces an Edenic garden (“So twice five miles . . . were girdled round” (6–7), and the speaker who laments the loss of vision, reveals that interruption and loss are the necessary guarantors, by contrast, of ideal vision: the fragment is the form that artfully intimates a whole beyond human potential to achieve. Note that the “I” enters the poem only at 42, concurrent with the admission of a plenitude impossible to “revive”: self-consciousness appears precisely as the loss of vision. Kubla Khan should be read with the description of “the poet, described in ideal perfection” of Biographia Literaria 14, whose imaginative power is demonstrated in “the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (cf. Kubla’s “sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice” [36]) and the contrary images of “turmoil” (17), “war” (30), and barely contained violence that the poem also witnesses. At play is the placing of emphasis in Coleridge’s formulation in Biographia Literaria 13 that the imagination “struggles to idealize and to unify”: emphasis on unity will lead readers to organic form and the internally balanced, coherent aesthetic object; emphasis on struggle will highlight rather the “chasm” (12) of the poem (and the gap between poem and gloss in the Rime), the division between introduction and poem, the division of the poem into two irregular parts, and the fracture of Coleridge himself between the figure in his poem and the several of his introduction, where he describes “the Author” in the third person, quotes his own poem, The Picture, an image of dissolution “without the after restoration,” points to a future that “is yet to come” and substitutes for an unrealized harmonious vision a “dream of pain and disease.” To account for these effects the instructor may ask students to place against the descriptions of the ideal poet from Biographia Literaria the passage from Lectures on Shakespeare: “The grandest efforts of poetry are where
the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected: the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image."

As the *Rime* produces the Mariner and his “glittering eye” (13), so *Kubla Khan* concludes with a vision of the poet as dread, sacred figure: “And all should cry, Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair! / Weave a circle round him thrice, / And close your eyes with holy dread” (49–52). Students may be asked to explore the relationship between these quasi-Gothic images of potency, with the poet at the center of the circle, and the experience of isolation and loss the narratives record, and the figure of the poet as sensitive, socially useful, and professional developed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. The complementary treatment of woman in *Kubla Khan* can also be highlighted: how do the “woman wailing for her demon-lover” and the “Abyssinian maid” (16, 39) figure in relation to the poet?

*Kubla Khan* is a deliberate “fragment”, *Christabel* an incomplete poem, but the interpretive puzzles posed by the romance, with its disturbing overtones of maternal loss, homoerotic seduction, and paternal violence (emphasized in the conclusion to Part 2) are no less deliberate. Coleridge explicitly casts *Christabel* as a story: the tale-teller has a voice that solicits our responses, and the tale has numerous affiliations with already encoded literary conventions and genres. Coleridge may be seen repeatedly to present unresolved moments of reading and interpretation in the poem for the reader of the poem. A sample crux: Bard Bracy reports his dream (523 ff.) in terms quite charged for the reader, not least because he connects the “dove” of his dream to Christabel, invoking Sir Leoline’s own naming of the bird by his daughter’s name. Yet when Sir Leoline listens to his account, he assigns the dove to another referent: Geraldine (569–70). Such a moment not only focuses questions of the relationship of the two women—doubles? split selves? opposites?—but stages the interpretive dilemma of understanding the texture of the poem itself, in toto as well as in its details. As with the *Rime* (and with Wordsworth’s *The Thorn*) we may note how lurid materials are set in a narrative frame that checks absorption in sensationalism by demanding active interpretive engagement from the reader. (But the particular nature of the materials should not be ignored: students can be asked to track the treatment of women in Coleridge’s poems in *Lyrical Ballads* and elsewhere—the wailing woman, the (be)witching Geraldine, the specter *Life-in-Death*—especially in relation to the figure of the poet.)

Sir Walter Scott, hearing the “striking fragment” of *Christabel* recited, was so struck by the “singularly irregular structure of the stanzas, and the liberty which it allowed the author to adapt the sound to the sense,” that in his notes to his *Lay of the Last Minstrel* he admitted himself “bound to make the acknowledgment due from the pupil to his master.” The accentual meter that works by stress rather than syllable to which Coleridge calls attention in his preface anticipates what Gerard Manley Hopkins was later to call “sprung rhythm,” and it had the same startling effect on Byron. This piece of literary history suggests that what distinguished the poem was not so much its words as its rhythm, underlying or prior to any meaning: as with the “meandering with a mazy motion” of *Kubla Khan* (25), Coleridge pro-
duced his effect by a characteristic sound pattern. Though Coleridge ascribes the unpublished status of 
*Christabel* to his moral failure—"I have only my own indolence to blame"—the instructor may consider the ways in which the delays in publishing both *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel* operated to keep the poems out of the market-place and attached to the voice of the poet himself (cf. the figure of the poet at the end of *Kubla Khan*). As the denunciation of "the trade of authorship" in Chapter 11 of *Biographia Literaria* makes clear, Coleridge resisted (even as his employment as journalist and book-maker exemplified) the growing commercialization of literature. Not to publish may be seen as a strategic decision to avoid the stigma of seeming a mere "composer," Coleridge thereby ensuring his status as man of integrity (not profit) and genius, the begetter of works unsoiled by market concerns, works which magically, as it were, produced effects on major poets even before they were completed or existent themselves, and whose status grew in exact proportion to their invisibility to readers at large. Coleridge's creation of such cultural capital by these means can usefully be juxtaposed with Blake's restricted production.

Students may be asked to think critically about all of Coleridge's self-representations. The title *Dejection: An Ode*, for example, points to both a personal psychological crisis and a literary construction. The succession of addressees of the poem as it evolved from a verse-letter to "Sara" to the *Ode of Sybilline Leaves* (1817) suggest the dangers of trying to read back too directly from the poems to the life: "Wordsworth" and "William" in a version of the poem Coleridge sent to a friend (July 1802), "Edmund" in the *Morning Post* (October 1802), "William" in another letter (August 1803), "Edmund" (a transcript of 1804–05), "Lady" (published texts of 1814 and 1817). "Dejection" is the necessary stage for the growth of self-consciousness in the pattern repeatedly traced by the literature of the period. Coleridge's account of his passage from joy and hope to affliction, and particularly the opposition formulated in "by abstruse research to steal / From my own nature all the natural man" (89–90), epitomizes a widespread vision of the life-cycle: "We Poets in our youth begin in gladness, / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness" (Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*, 48–49); "who would not give, / If so he might, to duty and to truth / The eagerness of infantine desire" (Wordsworth's *Prelude*, 2.24–26); "No more—no more—Oh!! never more, my heart, / Canst thou be my sole world, my universe! / . . . / The illusion's gone for ever, and thou art / Insensible, I trust, but none the worse, / And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment / Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgement" (Byron's *Don Juan*, 1. 215). Rather than accept this pattern as a natural truth of human nature, we might study it as a construction, subsequently naturalized by our psychologies of maturation, and interrogate it historically. (Blake's insistence on desire is a forceful counter-example.) What is the relation between this plotting of the individual life and the experience of the period, excited and then disillusioned by the French Revolution? As always, the identification of similarities permits the instructor to ask about differences: what is the relation between Coleridge's emphasis in *Dejection* on the "shaping spirit of Imagination" (86) and his declaration that "we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live" (47–48) to the artfully equivocal representation of the exchange of mind and nature in *Tintern Abbey*?
The interplay of texts should remind us that even the most seemingly introspective poems enter into and emerge from a dialogue that the instructor will find it easy to explore. Coleridge heard the first four stanzas of *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* before writing *Dejection: An Ode*; *Resolution and Independence* plays against *Dejection: An Ode*; *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* sets the stoic "philosophic mind" (189) and its "thoughts too deep for tears" (206), self-composed, without an addressee, against the “joy” Coleridge continues to wish for the “friend devourest of my choice” (138). (Compare these conclusions with those of *Tintern Abbey* and *Frost at Midnight*.) As our introductory note suggests, the climax of the mutual and anxiety-laden self-definitions of Wordsworth and Coleridge occurs in *Biographia Literaria*, which may be seen in part as Coleridge’s reaffirmation of his position in their relationship after the publication of Wordsworth’s *Excursion* (1814) and *Poems*, with a substantial new theoretical essay (1815). Throughout discussion of the book one may ask students to consider how Coleridge’s discussion of Wordsworth reveals Coleridge himself. The instructor will not need prompting to consider the relationship between, for example, Wordsworth’s discussion of language in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, suggesting that language is “derived” from “objects,” and Coleridge’s insistence, in Chapter 17 of the *Biographia*, that the “best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts.” Questions may also be raised about the differences of class involved in the two discussions of language, and what they imply about the composition and sympathies of the audience for poetry. It may be worthwhile to suggest that the contrast can be developed by consideration of the treatment of things, of objects represented as outside and independent of consciousness, in the two poets: could one imagine Coleridge as the author of “It was, in truth, / An ordinary sight; but I should need / Colours and words that are unknown to man / To paint the visionary dreariness / Which, while I look’d all round for my lost Guide, / Did at that time invest the naked Pool” (*Prelude*, 11.308–13) or of “the wind and sleety rain / And all the busi-ness of the elements, / The single sheep, and the one blasted tree, and the bleak music of that old stone wall” (*Prelude*, 11.376–80)? If not, why not? This line of inquiry can be connected to Coleridge’s remarks on the dimming of the idea of objects, quoted above, and his account in Chapter 14 of the design of *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he was to concentrate on “persons and characters supernatural” and Wordsworth to “give the charm of novelty to things of every day.”

The definitions of imagination and fancy in Chapter 13 have proved a cornerstone of modern criticism, but by printing them in context we enable instructors to consider how their luminously declarative character when read by themselves—as usually anthologized—forms part of a familiar Coleridgean drama. Embedded in a sequence in which Coleridge interrupts himself by a letter from himself, masked as a friend, rife with allusions to the Gothic, to his own *Christabel*, to the Miltonic sublime, to his own past words on Wordsworth and allusions to Bishop Berkeley, with a (self-vaunting) glance at the commercial futility of his enterprise, in short, a sequence that is anything but an instance of imaginative unity, the famous distinction emerges not simply as the proclamation of indubitable aesthetic truths, but as
a fiat made necessary by the impossibility of persuasive argument. If this ruse is a comic confession of Coleridge's having "been obliged to omit so many links" in his demonstration, it is by the same token a critique of the actual book-buying "PUBLIC" incapable of following philosophical argument, and an enactment of the tenet that the truths of imagination can be reached only by intuition, not by sequential thought. Ending by deferring explanation to a never-published essay, Coleridge slyly exploits—within a two-volume work of discursive prose, at a moment of intense philosophical definition—the suggestive power of the fragment.

Lectures on Shakespeare

To the notes on our selections and the headnote to "Coleridge's Lectures in Context" one might merely add that attention should be given to the phenomenon of the public lecture itself. The rise of the lecture, whether literary as here or scientific, practical, or philosophic, attests to the public hunger for education, and the existence of an audience, or more properly, diverse audiences according to the subject, sharing common interests. Students may need to be reminded that education past the age of eight was an uncommon opportunity for boys, and an even rarer opportunity for girls (unless home tutoring was provided). English literature, students should also be reminded, whether Shakespeare or the contemporary writers on whom Coleridge and Hazlitt also lectured, did not form part of the university curriculum, nor were the restricted enrollments and objectives of Cambridge and Oxford capable of satisfying the numbers of new, non-university trained readers, chiefly but not exclusively middle class. Conversely, one might argue that the process by which lecture-going became fashionable created the audience it seemed to satisfy. However one balances cause and effect, the lectures were potentially lucrative and added to the celebrity of the lecturer, who for the mediation of print substituted the sense of presence. The lecturer was a contemporary version of the old oral poet, immediate rather than manufactured, performing directly for his hearers, and thus a component of the image of the author as the source of ideas, opinions, authority, perhaps even genius. In this formation Shakespeare was prominent, as a national poet whose genius was to be defended against the (French-influenced) neo-classicists, as it had been in the eighteenth century, but also as the central figure around whom the mission of civilizing those new readers ignorant of Latin and Greek, and hence barred from all the influence the classics were still held to exert in shaping the military hero, the civil servant, and the gentleman, could coalesce. As our headnote suggests, this project was not without its embarrassments, but pronouncing on Shakespeare was a particular form of the effort to instruct and to mold their audiences to which the Romantics and their successors were committed.

In so doing they created a "Shakespeare" who mirrored their own concerns and exemplified many of their most cherished aspirations. One might compare the paean to Shakespeare of De Quincey—a written essay, not a public lecture—beginning "Oh! mighty poet!" to other representations of genius in the period, and to its artful maskings of form and distrust of artifice in representative works: for ex-
ample, the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Chapters 13 and 14 of *Biographia Literaria*, the figure of the poet in Coleridge’s poetry, *Tintern Abbey* and the conversation poems. Historical (and generic) difference is elided in such panegyrics, as will be revealed by posing Coleridge’s praise of natural “organic form” against the conventionality of the Elizabethan stage. As Shakespeare is reworked into a psychological poet, emphasis on him as a practicing playwright, shareholder in an acting company, proportionately recedes. Although reading this criticism only in excerpts should make judgment cautious, the instructor might still ask students to consider how much attention Coleridge actually gives to form, understood as the shape of a whole work, and how much to soliloquy, local insight, and character analysis. The emphasis on character, reversing the Aristotelian primacy of plot, issues in such exclamations as Lamb’s “we see not Lear, but we are Lear” and Hazlitt’s “It is we who are Hamlet.” Hazlitt makes Shakespeare the epitome of sympathetic imagination—“He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, and with all the circumstances belonging to it”—and so makes viewing/reading the capacity to repeat the same power of sympathetic identification, thereby demonstrating one’s own sensitivity. If Hamlet, the speaker of more and longer soliloquies than any other character in Shakespeare, is the privileged instance of psychological depth—and as the son seeking to find his place in a world out of joint, the one closest to the anxieties of the male poets of the era—the fascination with unusual mental states expands to take in the villains too, whether it is Coleridge on Iago, or De Quincey on Macbeth. In the latter the emphasis on the moment of suspension, which is also the suspension between the aesthetic and the ethical, has widespread affiliations that the instructor may wish to explore: forward to the timeless moment in Keats’s odes and the Keatsian complexity of emotion, backward toward the questions of the representation of violence in Burke, or to comparison with the sanity of “feeling” in Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. What happens when the value given to emotion modulates into “intensity”?

**George Gordon, Lord Byron**

The critiques of Wilson and Scott highlight the novelty of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: the sense of an author “speaking in his own person” (in Sir Walter Scott’s phrase), revealing emotions disturbing as well as sublime, the more fascinating because the reputation of the man fed the poems and the poems fed the reputation of the man across the unstable border between them, making Byron himself into a myth, a star. The gloominess of the “Childe” owed much to the Gothic tradition, but also to Burke’s glorification of chivalry, an idealization that the disillusioning course of the French Revolution and decades of conflict had rendered hollow to many. That Harold was not all of Byron the first letter, to Moore, makes clear, but as a melodramatic exaggeration of parts of Byron’s character he spoke to a wearied generation. Students can be directed to instances of Byron’s self-dramatization: the identification with the storm in our first excerpt, and the centrality of the meditating and declaiming “I” in canto 4, where Byron’s affinity to
the oratorical, including his exploitation of the commonplace, understood as a rhetorical trope already shared by poet and audience, can be contrasted to the domestic and self-effacing rhetoric of Coleridge and Wordsworth. In an episode such as that of the dying gladiator (4.139-45) Byron stands as our guide, animating for us a piece of classical sculpture, enacting a response on which we can model our own. One might further contrast Byron’s apostrophe to his daughter (3.111–18) to similar gestures in Frost at Midnight and Tintern Abbey, drawing attention to the Coriolanian frame that dominates his passage and the fact that the turn to the younger other does not here close the poem. Byron instead concludes with an apostrophe to the vastness of the ocean. Childe Harold 4 becomes the Longinian “echo of a great soul” and a schooling in a cultural heritage: Murray quickly exploited excerpts from his most celebrated author in the guidebooks he published in the 1830s. In Byron (and after cantos 1–2 Harold and Byron converge) readers encountered both a melancholy sense of human limitation and the renewed hope of personal grandeur on the broad stage of history. The instructor might ask students to draw out the full range of implications of Byron’s jibe at Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey in the Dedication to Don Juan: “You—Gentlemen! . . . / through still continued fusion / Of one another’s minds, at last have grown / To deem as a most logical conclusion / That Poesy has wreaths for you alone: / There is a narrowness in such a notion, / Which makes me wish you’d change your lakes for ocean” (5). Byron’s cosmopolitanism can be contrasted to the domesticity and localism celebrated in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

The description of Lord Byron by former lover Caroline Lamb as “mad, bad, and dangerous to know” encapsulates the celebrity as well as the transgressive thrill of the character type that Byron embodied and bequeathed, “the Byronic Hero.” By the time Manfred was published, in 1817, this type had been tainted by the scandalous “Separation” of Lord and Lady Byron in the spring of 1816: the causes were mysterious and overdetermined, but among the rumors was Lord Byron’s incestuous liaison with his half sister Augusta. That Byron was willing to tease this rumor in Manfred, in the hero’s tormented memories of some unnamable past sin involving his intimate Astarte, suggests the commercial potency that even this level of Titanic transgression could anticipate. Not only its eponymous protagonist, as self-tortured as any, but the closet drama Manfred itself figures a kind of Byronic Hero, a secretly motivated, sin-flaunting, self-consciously extreme, and extremely self-indulgent work. Students’ reactions may vary as much as critical reactions and assessments. Some may love its modern existential heroics, its deepening of mental anguish into metaphysical angst, refusing all accommodation to the solaces of nature, of religion, of family, and inspiring modern antiheroes such as Brontë’s Heathcliff, Melville’s Ahab, and the alienated souls of film noir. Others may see these dynamics complicit with disease, pathology, and narcissism (a critique voiced within Manfred, too). And still others may giggle at the nearly self-parodic excess, reacting to Manfred as a kind of gothic comedy, a mannerist, over-the-top exhaustion of the character type. It is possible that Byron deliberately pushed this formation to such extremes in order to kill it off and liberate himself for the altogether different, steadily ironized heroics of Don Juan, the serial epic he had started
to imagine and begun to compose the very next year, in 1818, in which the old-
style Byronic Hero survives only in parody.

But the durability of the type survived even Byron’s own execution, suggesting
the deep attraction of its constituent elements and tantalizing composition. Part
of this appeal is the way this character type drew on, but refused to moralize, a ge-
nealogy of darkly attractive self-torturers, allowing their own remorse to preempt
any necessity for a reader’s moral judgment. Part of the imaginative power of this
character type draws on the way Byron did not so much invent it as crystallize it
for his modern moment. Its lineage includes Shakespeare’s tragic heroes (Hamlet,
Macbeth, Othello, Edmund [in King Lear]), especially the voices of their tormented
soliloquies, Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus and Goethe’s recent reprisal (its first part pub-
lished in 1808), Milton’s Satan (considered as a psychological and existential,
rather than theological figure), and such contemporaries as the writer of self-tor-
turing passion Jean-Jacques Rousseau and vanquished world-conqueror Napoleon,
a “spirit antithetically mixt” to an “extreme in all things.” All these figures defy
tidy, coherent moral evaluation, their dramatic appeal and psychological fascina-
tion prevailing over easy judgments, but it is important to note that readers such
as Coleridge took a more critical view, especially in reference to actions in the
world. Coleridge’s moral judgments (equating Napoleon and Satan and leaving
Byron out of it) set the stage for Poet Laureate Southey’s attack on the Byronic
hero and his contemporary fraternity as the population of a “Satanic School” of
literature. Even P. B. Shelley’s Preface to Prometheus Unbound is sensitive to the ig-
noble aspects of Satanic lineage, differentiating the heroics of his god-tormented
and heroically defiant Prometheus from the Satanic taints that Byron is happy to
weave into the delineation of his heroes. A retreat to a mythological idiom that is
historically antecedent to Milton’s Biblically based drama assists Shelley in this dif-
fferential refinement.

Our unit opens with Byron, who launched this modern hero with the
overnight success of “Childe Harold” (the mysterious sinning, passionately tor-
mented protagonist of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, 1812). Tracking the career of this
figure, students might be asked to note how The Giaour presents this hero in a the-
ater of “the Mind”—a psychology that refigures the damnation of Milton’s Hell,
where “hell” is ultimately, and permanently, within, and where the torture is self-
inflicted. In The Corsair the hero is shaped by disappointments in the world, but is
tormented by his need to maintain and prosecute his opposition rather than seek
a separate peace. The poem’s neatly antithetical heroic couplets, far from effecting
what Coleridge would call a reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities, be-
comes the pattern of a relentless antagonism: almost every sentence involves a
pivot on “but.” Having read two of these selections, students will begin see the de-
lineation of a character type, one whose name and circumstances may vary, but
whose construction is basically the same. When they turn to Lara, they will see the
degree to which Byron’s delineations are now “by the book,” indeed explicitly tex-
tualized: Lara is a figure of “lines” to be read, of feelings to be traced, and so forth—
not necessarily into clear understanding, but into a familiar tale of advertised
depths and secret passions. Byron’s Prometheus not only shares an intertextual net-
work with the Shelleys (Mary Shelley’s subtitle for *Frankenstein* was *The Modern Prometheus*; Percy Shelley’s political-metaphysical drama of 1819 is titled *Prometheus Unbound*), but is also contextualized in Byronism (*Prometheus* is a Titanic version of Byron’s own torments) and Napoleonism, all enhanced with a sympathetically rendered Satanic defiance.

That the form of the Byronic hero that does survive in *Don Juan* is the tormented heroine (Donna Julia in her life-sentencing to a convent; Haidée gone mad with passion) suggests why women writers were fascinated by this character, too. Caroline Lamb’s *roman a clef* produced her own, critically inflected version of the Byronic Hero, emphasizing his madness and destructiveness. Mary Shelley parses the Byronic Hero into two, ever more Satanically inwrought figures in *Frankenstein*, the transgressive, overreaching creator, Victor Frankenstein and his miserable, then vengeful Creature. The first excerpt from the novel shares with Coleridge a reading of Promethean defiance as colossal self-idolatry, even as Victor Frankenstein’s narration of his enthusiasms and success may sweep the reader up in its passions. Students may note the way this self-involved, self-infatuated record still manages to expose some critical lineations, especially in marks of self-wasting pride. The Creature, by contrast, grasps his own fraught relation to Milton’s Satan, like him, irrevocably damned to alienation, but unlike him, guiltless of original sin. Students may already be familiar with the novel or the fable; if so, they can be asked about how their sense of its two key figures is affected by a review in this discursive context. Shelley and Lamb, though writing as women, define this character type in male form. Hemans, using the octosyllabic couplets that shaped Byron’s first romance of this hero (*The Giaour*) tries it out in a qualified female form, a vengeful heroine disguised (as some of Byron’s heroines are) as a page, and displaying, indeed advertising, the iconography of the Byronic hero. Students can be invited to see how the wealth of obvious verbal echoes almost constitute an allusion to Byron’s several texts.

Southey memorably set himself up for ridicule when he used his preface to his brief epic, on the ascension of George III to heaven, to damn the modern vogue of Byronic heroics. In an era when unexpurgated Shakespeare was being eclipsed by Reverend Bowdler’s edition of *The Family Shakespeare* (which no less a Byron enthusiast than Francis Jeffrey said should prevail over the profane and bawdy original), Southey’s policing seems less a cranky piece of hysteria than it might seem today. He claims, in his capacity as the kingdom’s chief poet, to worry that the panache of Byronism is being used by all sorts of young men to justify reprehensible behavior. However this may be, it is important to remember that Southey, a Tory, was also exercising political differences with liberals Byron and Shelley and calling for censorship of their work on “moral” grounds. Byron retaliates by putting the patron saint of the Byronic hero, Satan himself, in his satire of Southey, where the devil appears as no archfiend but as a courtly ironist who stands for Byron himself. The difference between the regent of Heaven, St. Michael, and the viceroy of Hell, Satan, is staged as a difference of fashion rather than morals, an encounter between “his Darkness and his Brightness,” with Satan showing a little aristocratic disdain at the more recently elevated Michael. That
Byron could spoof the whole discourse of the Byronic hero suggests both his ironic regard of his success as well as his enduring affection for the figure that continued to define it.

*Don Juan*, too, emphasizes the comic over the sublime, but there are notable continuities with the earlier poetry. The Dedication, though unpublished in his lifetime, marks his unrepentant politics, while canto 1, in refracting his autobiography, even more thoroughly makes his personal experience the point of reference—though demonstrating that “experience” is not a simple given, but a complex category built up from the narrator’s reflections on history, literature, religion, genre, and contemporary society. The flaunted artifice of *Don Juan*, from its ottava rima stanza, outrageous rhymes, authorial interventions, mixture of satire and epic, and fictionalized self-representation, can be compared to the blank-verse “poem to Coleridge,” Wordsworth’s intimate revision of epic. Nothing more quickly underscores Byron’s habitual resort to the theatrical multiplication of aspects of his character than the contrast between Wordsworth’s arduous effort to integrate his “two consciousnesses” in *The Prelude* and Byron’s splitting of his experience into Juan and the narrator, whose different perspectives he plays against one another. Wordsworth, who declared that “*Don Juan* will do more harm to the English character than anything of our time,” in his bitterness located two features of the poem that instructors may wish to explore: its perspective on what it means to be English, and its attitude toward character, toward that goal of growth toward, and consolidation of, moral personality that Wordsworth’s works exemplify (a contrast that made him Poet Laureate, and Byron a scandal).

Contemporary readers so drawn in by the love story of Juan and Julia that they overlooked the adulterous frame on which Byron insists were shocked by the naturalistic violence of the shipwreck scenes in canto 2. Our sequence from Cantos 2 and 3 shows Byron again following sentimental indulgence with debunking worldliness; to many readers the sequence seemed a brutal trifling with emotions, and its possible motives—defensive, self-correcting—can be fruitfully explored. “Sequence” points to a cardinal quality of Byron’s verse; as W. H. Auden observed, “What Byron means by life—which explains why he could never appreciate Wordsworth or Keats—is the motion of life, the passage of events and thoughts. His visual descriptions of scenery or architecture are not particularly vivid, nor are his portrayals of states of mind particularly profound, but at the description of things in motion or the way in which the mind wanders from one thought to another he is a great master.” Such strengths require space for their realization, as Auden recognizes: Byron’s verse, compared to a lyric such as *A slumber did my spirit seal* or the concentration of Keats’s odes, can seem relaxed. To appreciate Byron’s effects, students can profitably be asked to look closely at any sequence of ten or so stanzas in *Don Juan* that appeals to them, and then to consider the different understanding of temporality in Byron, in Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in Keats. The commitment to passage and motion in Byron can be set against the practice of “emotion recollected in tranquillity” in Wordsworth and the older poet’s subordination of action to reflection, or the circling around a central symbol in Keats. Though the “mind wander(ing) from one thought to another” describes *Tintern Abbey* and
Frost at Midnight as well as Don Juan, students will quickly see that Byron’s wandering is along the surface—of cognition, intellectual reflection, “pro-ing and con-ing,” to use a phrase of Keats—and hence seems immediate and realistic—rather than towards mysterious inwardness, the quality identified by the “unawares” of the Rime, and the subtle freedom from linearity. Don Juan proliferates a metonymic chain rather than the metaphoric and symbolic unity lauded by Coleridge. The instructor might ask students to consider Don Juan in terms of the distinction between fancy and imagination in Chapter 13 of Biographia Literaria: it is the great work of the aggregate and the “counter.” Auden’s observation on style may also start an interesting discussion: “What had been Byron’s defect as a serious poet, his lack of reverence for words, was a virtue for the comic poet. Serious poetry requires that the poet treat words as if they were persons, but comic poetry demands that he treat them as things and few, if any, English poets have rivaled Byron’s ability to put words through hoops.” Byron’s acceptance of the social continuities of language can be juxtaposed with the discussion of language in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

Byron’s letters on Don Juan reveal his deliberate insistence on the many-sidedness of experience (this too may be compared with Wordsworth’s “egotistical sublime,” or as Shelley put it, Wordsworth’s concentration on always grounding “contemplation” at the point at which he stood). Of the first two cantos he insisted: “I maintain that it is the most moral of poems—but if people won’t discover the moral that is their fault not mine”; three years later he declared: “Don Juan will be known by and bye for what it is intended a satire on abuses of the present states of Society—and not an eulogy of vice;—it may be now and then voluptuous—I can’t help that—Ariosto is worse—Smollett (see Lord Strutwell in vol 2d of R[oderick] R[andom]) ten times worse—and Fielding no better.” Students may be asked to test this claim against the anarchic or comic impulses of the poem; more subtly, to ponder what Byron might mean by “moral.” To what degree is the term restricted to the notion of a moral, and to what degree does “morality” for Byron require the power of extended discrimination among a variety of perspectives, a refusal to be taken in by cant (including one’s own smugly self-serving fictions) or to settle for premature judgment? The complex array of perspectives in the episode of the trimmer poet (3.78–8) offers a rich instance of Byron’s ironic intelligence, at once an affirmation of values, a satire on opportunistic authors, and an oblique self-portrait, since Byron himself, in love with Teresa Guiccioli, was not untouched by feelings of having abandoned ideals for pleasure.

The sudden switches of tone that offended many readers—perhaps even more than the charges of “voluptuous[ness]”—are inseparable from issues of gender. Students will have seen Byron’s ambivalent attitude to women from the beginning. “Alas! the love of women! It is known / To be a lovely and a fearful thing” (2.199), laments the narrator, and this double aspect of Byron’s representation of women, from the portraits of Inez, Julia, and Haidée, down to the level of rhyme—“ladies intellectual” / “henpecked you all” (1.22)—should provoke lively discussion. (The attitude is articulated in Juan’s later immersion in the “gynocracy” of English society, rhymed with “hypocrisy” in 12.66 and 16.52.) The letter of 26 October 1818
[1819], like the defense that “No Girl will ever be seduced by reading D[on] J[uan]” quoted above, points to the gendering of audience that Byron’s poetry illuminates: the letter of 6 April 1819 discloses Byron’s uneasy awareness that his magnetism had made the “ladies” a substantial part of his audience, and hence of his commercial success; the charges of indecency his poetry now generated closed Don Juan to women in a world much more concerned with gender propriety than the aristocratic Regency circles in which Byron had flourished; students may consider how much Byron courted outrage, as a mark of his freedom from the audience of women that was increasingly the audience of poetry. Class too enters into the picture: Childe Harold, sublime, poignant, a cultural monument, was the image of Byron that held middle- and upper-class readers of Byron throughout the nineteenth century; Don Juan, radical, satirical, and published in cheap editions, had a wide readership among lower classes. The social critique of the English cantos, admired even by T. S. Eliot, shows that Byron remained an English poet—but from the perspective of an expatriate aristocrat, at once inside and outside the world he anatomizes. The importance of his aristocratic status should be drawn out: that Byron was Lord Byron matters in several ways—to readers seeking to live vicariously, or to acquire cachet by imitating; or as an emblem of transgressive power; or of freedom from bourgeois values. In what ways, students reading Wilson’s critique might be asked to consider, is Byron the antithesis of bourgeois experience, and in what ways the very model for the isolated, alienated reader? How do we understand the fact that romance became the best-selling genre of the book trade, the very symbol of the conditions that brought the world of romance to an end? How do we understand the Europe-wide phenomenon of the aristocratic author, after Burke had declared that the age of chivalry was dead?

The paradoxes that underlie Byron’s force were capped by his death while aiding the Greek revolution, the refuge for all the hopes ended by the metamorphosis of the French Revolution into Napoleonic empire, followed by the fall of Napoleon and restoration of the conservative monarchies. Coming after the critique of military glory in cantos 7 and 8 of Don Juan, Byron’s fate can be seen as either a final instance of theatrical self-delusion or as an admirable constancy to principle. The two late lyrics we print demonstrate his ability to maintain an ironic play of viewpoints even on enterprises for which he was willing to give his life. “On This Day,” widely reprinted in the newspapers after his death, was influential in shaping the final image of Byron.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

An older literary history grouped Blake (born 1757), Wordsworth (born 1770), and Coleridge (born 1772) as the first generation of Romantic poets; Byron (born 1788), Shelley (born 1792), and Keats (born 1795) as the second. One aim of this anthology is to challenge such categorizations (see the remarks on “the difficulty of specifying the term ‘Romantic’” in our introduction to the period), and students might be asked to reflect how adequately a natural term—“generation”—describes a process
of canon formation—while at the same time recognizing that the conventional re-
sort to it is itself evidence of the prevalence of Romantic thought and its typical rep-
resentation of cultural practice as natural phenomenon. The chronological division
does serve to distinguish those writers formed by the swell and ebb of enthusiasm
for the French Revolution and those who came to notice well afterwards, in the
post-war reaction and economic downturn. To these distinctions one might add
others, asking students to consider the explanatory weight to be ascribed to them:
the varied but modest origins of Blake (hosier’s son), Wordsworth (steward’s son),
and Coleridge (vicar’s son, charity-boy school), as opposed to the aristocratic status
of Shelley (son of a Member of Parliament, later Baronet) and Byron (inheritor of
a title, a Baron); Blake and Keats apprenticed, the others studied at the ancient uni-
versities, with all that implies about status and connection; Wordsworth and
Coleridge identified with the north, an area where traditional ways survived; Byron
and Shelley with the south, in Italy, a land that to English eyes had always seemed
dangerously seductive and morally lax (“An Englishman Italianate is the Devil in-
carnate,” ran a Renaissance tag), in the Mediterranean, which in the 1820s still fer-
mented with revolution. And where fit Keats, tarred as a “Cockney” of the Hunt
loterie and in straitened circumstances, but drawn to Italy for his health, invited by
Shelley? When Byron, Shelley, and Hunt collaborated on The Liberal, the title spoke
to a new term in a political terrain previously divided into Tory and Whig, radical,
democrat, Jacobin, and conservative.

Overlapping publication dates further complicate any simple alignment of “gen-
erations”: Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 1–2 (1812), Shelley’s Queen Mab (1813),
Wordsworth’s Excursion (1814), Wordsworth’s Poems (1815), Shelley’s Alastor (1816),
Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 3 (1816), Coleridge’s Sibylline Leaves and Biographia
Literaria (1817), Keats’s Endymion (1818), Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 4 (1818),
Coleridge’s The Friend (1818), Byron’s Don Juan 1–2 (1819), Wordsworth’s Peter Bell
and The Wagogue (1819), Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound (1820), Keats’s Lamia,
Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems (1820), Shelley’s Adonais (1821),
Wordsworth’s Ecclesiastical Sketches and Memorial of a Tour on the Continent, 1820
(1822), Coleridge’s On the Constitution of Church and State (1830), and—well after the
deaths of all the other poets—Wordsworth’s Yarrow Revisited (1835).

This interweaving alerts us to a complexity of feelings in the relations of Byron
and Shelley to the older poets. In one sense Coleridge and Wordsworth were al-
ready established precursors, figures whose achievements one could learn from, as
poets have always learned from tradition, defining themselves by the gestures of ac-
nowledgment and rejection through which they shape their own writing. Coleridge and
Wordsworth were not comfortably removed, however, and hallowed by the authority of time that (to choose a salient instance for all these writers) ren-
dered Milton an imposing mark of excellence for which to strive, but preserved
one from daily rivalry. They were contemporary writers with whom one had to com-
pete for attention and praise, whose press of ongoing publications could not be ig-
nored. Hence we begin our selection from Shelley with “To Wordsworth” and in our
notes underline the recurrent play of allusion and echo. Instructors will hear oth-
ers, and can make of them entries into comparative analysis: consider, for exam-
ple, “Reality’s dark dream” in Coleridge’s Dejection (95) and Shelley’s “lest the grave should be,/ Like life and fear, a dark reality” in his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty (47–48), as focusing the differences in the narratives of life in time that the two poems sketch. Underscoring the echoes should trigger provocative questions: what do they suggest about the role of emulation, and how does emulation accord with a poetics of inspiration? What do they suggest about tradition, revision, and self-definition? What anxieties—literary, personal?—might they disclose?

The charged observations ran in both directions across the generation gap. Two years before To Wordsworth Mary Shelley noted in her journal: “Shelley . . . brings home Wordsworth’s Excursion, of which we read a part, much disappointed. He is a slave” (14 September 1814). The savage conclusion of the sonnet—“to grieve,/ Thus, having been, that thou shouldst cease to be” (13-14)—warrants unpacking in class: in what sense did Wordsworth, who lived for another 34 years, outliving Shelley by 28, “cease to be”? Would the denunciation be as sharp if Shelley did not feel Wordsworth’s continued presence? How should one understand the connection between the death sentence and the way Shelley builds his poem by taking over Wordsworth’s own language throughout (two instances: that of Ode: Intimations of Immortality in the quatrain, of Peele Castle at 9–10)?

Wordsworth, for his part, was recorded long after Shelley’s death as believing that “Shelley had the greatest native powers in poetry of all the men of this age” but “Saw in Shelley the lowest form of irreligion.... Named the discrepancy between his creed and his imagination as the marring idea of his works.” Shelley’s philosophic radicalism, including his violent anti-clericalism, is evidently in the line of Enlightenment rationalism, and instructors may find it helpful to return to our selections from his father-in-law Godwin. The continuities raise questions about the relationship between debate among intellectuals and working-class organization, between the genteel reformers and the new force of the people in the 1820s, that bear on The Mask of Anarchy. Instructors may want to ask students to address the widespread admiration for the poem’s protest against tyranny, in the “masque”-like parade of its agents and in its phantasmatic internal oration, which takes up the last three-fifths of the poem, in relation to some contrary elements: that Shelley remained in Italy, sending the poem to Leigh Hunt, who would have borne all the risks of charges of sedition had he published it; that the dreaming poet of the opening stanzas never wakes up, but merges into the fantasy oration; the peculiar mystery by which Anarchy dies and the visionary Shape arises; the efficacy of non-violent resistance, and whether the concluding exhortation “Rise like lions after slumber” (372 ff.) is or is not non-violent.

Put bluntly, one might ask whether Shelley’s radicalism constitutes fidelity to the principles of the Revolution (and students might ponder the revision of the Christian “Faith, Hope, and Charity” into “Love, Hope, and Self-esteem” in Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, 37), undimmed by the reaction that marks Wordsworth and Coleridge, or the radical chic of an aristocrat safely living on his inheritance in Italy? Whether his politics constitute a holdover of an earlier radical discourse rendered irrelevant by the shifting locus of actual political power since 1790, or a pre-scient forecast of the Chartists and the Marxists, both of whom found his writings
inspirational? A thoughtful response to this avowedly irritating antithesis might begin by noting that it assumes exactly the historical linearity that Shelley challenges. The first chorus from *Hellas* is exemplary: “Worlds on worlds are rolling ever / From creation to decay,” but against this image of ceaseless mutability Shelley posits that “they are still immortal / Who through birth’s orient portal / And death’s dark chasm hurrying to and fro, / Clothe their unceasing flight / In the brief dust and light / Gathered around their chariots as they go” (197–98; 201–06). Beneath the flux of forms the ideas endure: “New shapes . . . / New gods, new laws” are but the temporary embodiments of uncontingent truths. As the final chorus, “The world’s great age begins anew,” proclaims: “Another Athens shall arise, / And to remoter time / Bequeath, like sunset to the skies, / The splendour of its prime” (1084–87). Instructors may want to compare the commitments to the Greek Revolution of Byron, who fought and died for it, and of Shelley, who never set foot in Greece; but distinguishing them is more fruitful than using one to depreciate the other. “I do think the preference of writers to agents,” wrote Byron in an early journal (24 November 1813), “the mighty stir made about scribbling and scribes, by themselves and others—a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness. Who would write, who had anything better to do? ’Action—action—action’—said Demosthenes: ‘Actions—actions,’ I say, and not writing,—least of all, rhyme.” The distinction appears to focus the difference between Byron’s involvement in immediate circumstance, and Shelley’s rhetorically persuasive celebration of ideals, but a more capacious understanding of the relationship between writing and agency will suggest that Shelley’s writings might too have their effect.

The importance for Shelley, however, is that the validity of an ideal does not depend on its outcome. In the final words of *Prometheus Unbound*, unprinted here: “To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite; / To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night; / To defy Power which seems Omnipotent; / To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates; / Neither to change nor falter nor repent; / This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be / Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free; / This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.” Ideals thus stand as a perpetual potential, self-renewing from their own defeat as the world goes “rolling ever.” Shelleyan time is apart from the determinism that came to dominate much nineteenth-century thought about history. Its determining feature is a refusal to be wholly of the time, wholly timely. In its elegiac mode it sounds much like Wordsworth, a resonance instructors will want to explore: “We look before and after, / And pine for what is not” (*To a Sky-Lark*, 86–87). In its prophetic mode it epitomizes Romanticism as an anachronistic disruptive power, too late or too soon (Godwin or Marx?), a rejuvenating excess that refuses to be contained by any teleological scheme, whether of historical progress or individual growth. (Compare how Wordsworth assimilates “something evermore about to be” [6.542] to the narrative line of *The Prelude*—or does he?)

As these instances suggest, the rude question just put to Shelley is met—not answered, but enacted—in his poetry. The sonnets furnish a compact site in which to study the inseparability of questions of Shelley’s politics from his formal agility (as well as providing comparisons between his handling of the form with Wordsworth’s
Lift not the painted veil offers a compressed version of the metaphysics that animate Mont Blanc, Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Adonais and numerous other Shelley poems strung across a dualism of the physical, temporal world, and the mysterious spirit world of eternity. Given Shelley's sense that the temporal world is composed of deceptively unreal images, students may not register the "not" in line 1—the injunction not to trespass into the beyond. The risks become apparent at the volta, or turn, which Shelley places at the start of line 6, thus inverting the usual 8/6 organization of the Petrarchan sonnet. Ozymandias neatly nests historical existence and representational modes, subtly culminating with the power of poetry: Ozymandias's rule, Ozymandias's boast, the representation of Ozymandias, in sculpture and the text on the pedestal, the fragmentation of the sculpture, the communication of the text (now ironic) by a traveller's anecdote, and then the poet's sonnet. The date of composition and the journal of publication suggest multiple ramifications in post-Napoleonic Europe: Napoleon, who had invaded Egypt, had been defeated, but was still a hero to many, while his fall had revived the conservative monarchs Shelley and Hunt deplored.

In 1819 Shelley defies the formal patterns of both the Italian and Shakespearean sonnet, increasing the syntactic pressure of his list of ills toward the predicate, finally appearing in the blunt statement "Are graves" (13). Even here the postponed declarative syntax does not close, but initiates a couplet that drives past the rhyme toward Burst (14). In this climactically enjambed "may / Burst," Shelley allows two incompatible senses of may: if it implies "perhaps," it is tentative, whether with cautious optimism or sad skepticism; if it means "is enabled to," it is energized as a promise of inevitable emergence. Students may be asked to consider whether the "may" yields to the explosion of "burst," or whether the emphasis placed by the rhyme on "may" exposes a hesitation, the weakness of a politics of miraculous agency, or whether it marks a tough-minded assessment that in the current conditions redemption is unlikely. The divergent readings show that the question is one Shelley's form produces as unresolvable. A letter to Hunt pivots interestingly on the point: "I do not expect you to publish it, but you may show it to whom you please," he wrote of the sonnet. Publication would provoke two audiences, the oppressed for whom the sonnet articulates political grievances and the oppressors for whom it articulates a political threat. The compromise of giving the poem to Hunt with no demands, but with yet another calculated overload on may, places the agency on him: either with Shelley's permission, or from his own judgment, he "may" show the poem to readers in England in 1819.

This gesture confronts readers with the question of audience. England in 1819 was not published until 1839, Lift not the painted veil until 1824, The Mask of Anarchy until 1832, Adonais was printed in Pisa and sold so poorly in England that Shelley's publisher merely disposed of the copies he had received (1821); A Defence of Poetry appeared for the first time in 1840. In some instances failure to publish was prudent, as we have just seen, and in other instances merely unfortunate, but compared both with Wordsworth's initial confidence that poetry written in "the real language of men" could be widely accessible and with Byron's best-sellerdom. Shelley's relation with his audience(s), like Blake's, should be explored. The Mask
of Anarchy, a topical poem targeted for the Examiner, drew forth a simpler style than, for example, Adonais, but was too inflammatory to publish; the poet who, in the Preface to Prometheus Unbound, declared that his “purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence” (1820) evidently conceived of his task, and his readership, quite differently from the Wordsworth who defined the poet as “man speaking to men.” The difficulty that students often feel when confronted by Shelley should not be explained away, but seized as the portal to twin questions: why is it difficult? and what does it mean to intend difficulty?

With Mont Blanc it often helps to suggest that Shelley has organized his language in part to frustrate understanding, as if to mime his own overwhelming by the spectacle of Mont Blanc, the glacier, the ravine, and the river Arve. Notice, for instance, the tumult of nearly anagrammatic words that spills over the blank verse of stanza 1 and the top of 2—ever/river/raves/Ravine/Arve/cavern—a linguistic transformation that reflects the dynamic power of the scene. Even the rhymes of the first stanza—things/springs/brings—are enjambcd, so that form is visible, but not strongly. The letters twisting into new words and the tension between the rhymes and the enjambments convey a sense of language at the limits of its power to represent the object of its attention. Crucial to Shelley’s aim is a double critique, of the seemingly solid “universe of things” (1) and of the capacity of language to represent it. The river is not a material entity, but rather “Power in likeness of the Arve” (16), itself a kind of figure for, or the temporary likeness assumed by, “Power”; seeking to represent the “clear universe of things” with which it is in “unremitting interchange” (39–40), the mind does not enjoy a language derived from objects (as the Preface to Lyrical Ballads put it), but turns inwards, where in “the still cave of the witch Poesy” (44) it finds only the figures of language: “seeking among the shadows that pass by, / Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee, / Some phantom, some faint image” (45–47).

Shelley’s lyric thus forces the reader to examine questions both of “Power” and of representation. Does the sensation of power stirred by Mont Blanc confirm the existence of “Power” apart from and transcending human consciousness? (A question the more loaded historically, insofar as the sublimity of the Alps was conventionally taken to demonstrate the existence of God.) How does such power manifest itself to consciousness, and with what sort of intelligibility, information, consequences, or mystery? What power might the human mind have in its naming of this power in the first place, even if the effect is to diminish, or annihilate, the importance of any one mind? The questions climax in Part 5, a description in which the repeated deictic “there” is both the home of power and frighteningly privative: still, calm, dark, moonless, lone, silent, voiceless, where “none beholds.” The question that closes the poem (“And what were thou . . .”) is often read as a rhetorical question, in the cliché usage of the term, as if it implied that without a human mind to project and confer value, Mont Blanc would be merely a “vacancy” (144)—punningly, a blank—rather than a symbol of a powerfully mysterious silence and solitude. But Shelley’s conjunction And (instead of, say, Yet, which would assist this implication) lets the question seem apposite, rather than contrary, to the preceding statement—namely, that there is something outside of thought which governs thought.
Shelley, in the registers of the hotels at which he stayed on the tour during which he saw Mont Blanc, declared his occupation (in Greek) as “Democrat, Philanthropist, and Atheist” and his destination as “L’Enfer.” Whether he was maddened by stock piety or tourist gush, the bravado was risky; Byron, coming upon one of the entries, crossed it out to protect his friend, but the others remained, reprinted in guidebooks, feeding the demonic image of himself Shelley no doubt courted. Shelley’s gesture is theatrical but uncomplicated; the rhetoric of his poem, suspending closure on a question, between “the secret strength of things” and “the mind’s imaginings,” between “silence and solitude” as plenitude or as “vacancy,” operates a powerfully suggestive doubt.

Instructors may want to ask students to compare Shelley’s treatment of this landscape with Byron’s Alpine vistas (in Manfred and Childe Harold III); with Wordsworth’s report of his first view of Mont Blanc in Book 6 of The Prelude or his account of the mind’s transactions with nature at the top of Mount Snowdon in Book 13 (neither of which the Shelleys would have known), or his treatment of mind and nature in Tintern Abbey.

Shelley was imbued with the classics, and our notes signal some of the influence of Plato, whom he translated. The Platonic insistence on the deceptiveness of appearance produces a structure consonant with that of eighteenth-century skepticism, a tradition, as we have seen, in which Shelley was also well read. In either case essential reality remains unknowable to man’s limited perceptions, though the balance shifts across the spectrum from affirmation of transcendence to doubt of its existence—exactly the drama of Mont Blanc. To illustrate further the consequences of this philosophical position for Shelley’s language it may help to concentrate on “To a Sky-Lark.” The critical element of the bird is that it should be invisible (compare the “viewless gales” of Mont Blanc [59], the “unseen Power” of Intellectual Beauty [1], and the “unseen presence” of West Wind [2]), known only by its song. Thus absent though producing an effect, the bird stimulates the mind. Shelley responds to what may be seen as a specimen case of his epistemology with a series of similes. “What thou art we know not” confesses the speaker, but proceeds: “What is most like thee?” (31–32). What follows is a series of approximations, or rather, figures, for what cannot be stated directly: “Like a Poet hidden . . . Like a high-born maiden / In a palace tower . . . Like a glow-worm golden / In a dell of dew, / Scattering un beholden / Its aerial hue . . . Like a rose embowered” (36–52). Serial simile rather than metaphorical compression is the hallmark of the verse; as the mind rushes to comprehend an elusive reality, figures will accumulate, generate each other, dissolve and give way to the next, as they do when Shelley apostrophizes the “wild West Wind” (Ode to the West Wind [1]). Mental action, not mimesis of an external world is the aim. Instructors may ask students to compare this process to Byron’s “passage,” to use Auden’s term, and to consider the relationship between metonymic style and philosophic skepticism; on the other hand, one might compare Shelley’s mode to Coleridge’s poetics of symbol and the privilege granted poetic unity in Biographia Literaria, or, contrastingly, to the description of imagination as a “strong working of the mind” from the Lectures on Shakespeare.
For a display of Shelley at his most typically and technically accomplished, one might carefully examine the *Ode to the West Wind*, tracking the terza-rima sonnet stanzas (four tercets and a couplet) and their interlocking rhymes, the energetic enjambments that evoke the force that Shelley evokes, the rush of assonance and alliteration, the repetitions. The first three stanzas convey the force of the wind on the earth; in the fourth stanza, the poet seeks participation in this energy and realizes his exclusion; in the fifth he imagines, and prays for inspiration, to make his poetry a force aligned with the prophetic, life-bearing wind, bringing spiritual and possibly political rejuvenation. Like *Mont Blanc*, the ode ends on a question: “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” (70). This has been called the most famous rhetorical question in English poetry. Yet given that the first draft was a statement (“When Winter comes Spring lags not far behind”), Shelley’s revision to interrogative syntax may pose a genuine question about the symbolic parallel—can the logic of seasonal renewal in the natural world be extended to spiritual renewal in human existence?—and its suspense acts powerfully on the reader. The ode invites comparison to other poems that invoke natural forces and human circumstances (Baillie’s *Thunder*, Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*, the thunderstorm in canto 3 of Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*), with Keats’s *To Autumn*, and with other poems that invoke the wind as an agent of transformation, such as the opening of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* or Coleridge’s *Dejection*. More generally, one might ask students to compare the means through which Shelley impedes his reader’s comprehension, forcing a heightened attention, and the means Wordsworth employs to the same end. Some telling discussion of the differences between difficulty produced by minimalism, as in *A slumber did my spirit seal* (syntactic simplicity, unremarkable vocabulary, cryptic reduction), and that produced by virtuoso interweaving and elaboration should emerge.

Shelley’s virtuosic remaking of tradition is most evident in *Adonais*. The sense of composing out of a high literary heritage is evident from the very beginning, in the epigraphs from Plato and Moschus’s *Elegy on the Death of Bion*. Students might be asked the effect of introducing a poem with bits of untranslated Greek: as they mark a tradition, as they define an elite audience. Among models closer in time is Milton’s pastoral elegy, *Lycidas* (printed in volume 1 of the anthology). If the instructor has organized the course chronologically, *Adonais* may be the occasion to look back on the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, asking students to measure the distance between Wordsworth’s repudiation of poetic artifice and Shelley’s embrace of it: the literariness of *Adonais* (in contrast, too, to Coleridge’s poems which “affect not to be poetry”) shows a conception of genius as difference-within-a-tradition, as opposed to (the fiction of) spontaneous originality. The earliness of the reference to Milton (stanza 4) confirms that Shelley wanted the comparison to *Lycidas* to be made by the reader. Note that Milton is described as “the Sire of an immortal strain” but also placed in opposition to “The priest, the slave, and the liberticide”: it is Milton as republican hero, as well as Milton the epic poet, whom Shelley summons. To draw out the political implications of this stanza the instructor may ad-duce stanza 10 of the Dedication to *Don Juan*, where Byron makes Milton the moral antipodes of the despised Castlereagh. Modern readers may also need to be re-
minded that for Shelley to place Keats together with Milton and the other “sons of light” (presumably Homer and Dante) was an affront to conservative critics. To Byron he confessed: “I need not be told that I have been carried too far by the enthusiasm of the moment; by my piety, and my indignation, in panegyric. But if I have erred, I console myself with reflecting that it is in defence of the weak—not in conjunction with the powerful.” Shelley’s elegy is oppositional, not merely monumental; “I have dipped my pen in consuming fire to chastise [Keats’s] destroyers,” he wrote to friends; “otherwise the tone of the poem is solemn and exalted.” Students might be asked how Shelley handles this complexity of emotion in the poem, or to consider Adonais as a group manifesto: in what ways does Shelley use the death of Keats to establish a counter-orthodox lineage and solidarity among Milton, Keats, Byron (stanzas 27 and 30; not the Byron of Don Juan), the much-scorned Leigh Hunt (stanza 35), and most of all himself (stanzas 31–34)?

The images of the poet in Adonais may also be juxtaposed with those noticed in writers discussed above. Keats is both “made one with Nature” (stanza 42) and so “a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely” (stanza 43) and elevated into one of the “splendours of the firmament of time” (stanza 44), seemingly both returned to earth, his individual identity reabsorbed into nature, and immortalized as a great poet. Shelley’s conceptions of the relation of language and the world, and of the one and the many, cast light on this doubleness. To state that “There is heard / His voice in all her music” (stanza 42) is to point to the poet’s power to transform our apprehension of reality: the world is different to us (note the agentless passive of “there is heard”) because of Keats. And by extension, Keats “doth bear / His part, while the one Spirit’s plastic stress / Sweeps through the dull dense world; compelling there / All new successions to the forms they wear” (stanza 43), because the world is built up by the collective, cumulative, co-operative efforts of those who have imagined it, who together form “one Spirit.” The remarks on the choruses from Hellas, above, and on A Defence of Poetry, below, amplify this argument. Shelley may thus be seen to offer a particular reconciliation of the poet as Aeolian harp and the poet as Prometheus described in the section on Coleridge. A more engrossing comparison is supplied by The Rime: students might be asked to consider the relation between the final vision of Shelley himself (stanzas 53–55) and the Ancient Mariner (and also the poet-figure of Kubla Khan). As our headnote suggests, Adonais seems to subvert the customary function of elegy to provide consolation; at the very least it sails right past “t is Death is dead, not he; / Mourn not for Adonais” (stanza 41) to the drama of the speaker’s own end, fearful and desiring. The question whether the conclusion constitutes apotheosis, suicidal self-destruction, or romantic fulfillment through death ought to provoke lively discussion. The challenge of Shelley’s charged indeterminateness may be revealed by comparing this figure of dissolution with the consolidation of identity at the close of Wordsworth’s Ode: Intimations of Immortality.

Other exercises will have suggested themselves. One might cast discussion forward, by asking students to consider how Keats would have reacted to being memorialized in this fashion. One might also compare Adonais with Childe Harold 4, with which it shares the Spenserian stanza form and in which Rome plays a significant part.
After the urgencies of Shelley’s earlier poems, the lyrics “To Jane” produced in the last year of his life (there are two others: To Jane: The Invitation and To Jane: The Recollection) show a new calm. Shelley found in Shakespeare’s Miranda, Ferdinand, and Ariel a script through which to figure in With a Guitar, to Jane his infatuation with Jane Williams. “I think,” he wrote in 1822, “one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal” (Letter of 18 June). Students might be asked to consider the various purposes served by representing through The Tempest what in another perspective was a married man’s love for another man’s (common-law) wife. Casting himself as the spirit Ariel who both submissively “serve[s]” (l. 34) and actively “guides” (l. 29) Jane/Miranda, Shelley desexualizes the relationship, but at the cost of acknowledging himself outside the “humbler happier lot” (l. 35) of Jane and Edward/Ferdinand. If the drama thus re-enacts the split between the spirit/ideal and physical/material/historical worlds that energizes Shelley’s great poems (and his poem on love, unprinted here, Epipsychidion, the 1821 work to which the letter just quoted refers as “an idealised history of my life and feelings”), it also offers middle terms. Ariel provides Shelley with a part, distanced and not overwhelmed by his feelings (or disillusionment, when the mortal proves mortal after all, as happened repeatedly in Shelley’s life), and the guitar, the “slave of Music” (l. 2) is a material body that will speak to those who “question well / The spirit that inhabits it” (ll. 80–81), and reveal its “highest holiest tone / For our belovèd Jane alone” (ll. 89–90). As the next poem gracefully puts the compliment, Jane’s voice reveals the “world far from ours, / Where music and moonlight and feeling / Are one” (ll. 22–24), an emblem of artistic success unimagined for a human in the more intractable oppositions of, say, To a Skylark, Lift not the painted veil, or Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. Students might be asked to consider the contrast also between the guitar, traditional instrument of the love serenade, and the Aeolian harp of Coleridge’s poem. (See Jerome McGann, “The Scerets of an Elder Day: Shelley after Hellas,” Keats-Shelley Journal, 1966).

Discussion of A Defence of Poetry gains by being joined to reconsideration of Wordsworth’s Preface to Lyrical Ballads and Coleridge’s various reflections on language and poetry. Particular points of comparison include: the role of pleasure; the poet as “a man speaking to men” and the poet as a “nightingale, who sits in darkness to cheer its own solitude”; and the role of will in composition. The famous last sentence of the Defence—“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”—stakes a high polemic claim against the denigration of poetry in the essay by Peacock that provoked it, but students might be asked to consider how “legislator” functions in Shelley’s text. Undoubtedly Shelley is throwing the mantle of the lawgiver around the poet, but a thoughtful reading of Shelley thus far will also suggest that he is employing legislate in a special sense: poets are the legislators of the world not because they make law, but because it is their imaginings of it which shape our perceptions of the world itself. This is both the highest possible status, and a far cry from the civil power “legislator” connotes in political discourse. As always, Shelley is provocatively ambiguous: the poet is more exalted than civil law-
makers, but also removed from their world. As the final paragraph develops the argument, poets are both the Promethean shapers and the “astonished” vessels of “the spirit of the age,” speakers of “words which express what they understand not.” Figurative gain is finely balanced against the potential loss of role in the public sphere. Shelley’s rhetoric does not answer Peacock’s charge that in an age of “mathematicians ... historians, politicians, and political economists” poets have lost the pre-eminence they once had, when bards and epic poets were a culture’s source of wisdom. Rather, Shelley shifts the grounds of the argument, and thus brings to clarity the issue of shifting the configuration of poetry and its antagonists that runs through our selections, from *Literary Ballads* through Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to Coleridge on the reviewers and literature as a trade to Shelley on the reviewers in *Adonais*.

Most interesting perhaps, as Shelley is compelled by the increasing pressures of utilitarian, practical, scientific thought, on the one hand, and a narrow moralism on the other, to defend poetry as the potent power of figure (extending it, but perhaps also diluting it, from literature per se to all forms of thought), is an echo in his declaration that “We have more moral, political and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice. . . . The poetry in these systems of thought is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. . . . We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life; our calculations have outrun conception. . . .” In this compelling peroration one unmistakably hears Burke’s famous lament from his *Reflections*: “But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded: and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex....” As the plea for a world of imagination and generosity rather than calculation, and for a world conceived symbolically rather than literally and instrumentally, swings from an avowed conservative to an avowed radical, the instructor will be able to bring students to recognize the need to think to those terms historically, and to use them discriminately.

**Felicia Hemans**

First among the issues raised by Jeffrey’s review of Hemans (1829)—which Jeffrey reprinted in his selected *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* (1843), thus ensuring its continued dissemination—is the elaborate differentiation between genders. Students might be asked to consider how much Jeffrey ascribes the difference between “the rougher and more ambitious sex” and the “delicacy” of women to innate characteristics and how much to upbringing. Is women’s “substantial and incurable ignorance of business” an essentialist statement or a recognition of social exclusion: “[t]his, however, we are persuaded, arises entirely from their being seldom set on such tedious tasks.” Whatever the cause, in Jeffrey’s world women are excluded from “the great theatre of the world”: “their proper and natural business is the practical regulation of private life.” Instructors may wish to juxtapose
Jeffrey’s certitudes—and the unsigned articles of the Edinburgh Review spoke as with the voice of authority—with earlier readings from Mary Wollstonecraft and in Perspectives: The Wollstonecraft Controversy and the Rights of Women. Jeffrey’s literary history involves a certain suppression; it may be true that “it has been . . . little the fashion . . . to encourage women to write for publication”—think of Richard Polwhele—but as our selections from Anna Letitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, and Hannah More demonstrate, the immediately precedent period was distinguished by a number of eminently successful women writers. Casting these authors into the shade, Jeffrey also obscures the kind of poetry that they did write: Barbauld, for example, appears as the author of “Hymns and Early Lessons,” not of the extended and political Eighteen Hundred and Eleven. Students might be asked to weigh Jeffrey’s review against their own readings—and against the claims of Wollstonecraft that intellectual strength knows no gender. The exercise suggests that the separation of spheres became more rigid as the century advanced.

Jeffrey’s contrast between masculine ambition and feminine “perception of character and manners,” masculine “commanding genius” and feminine “elegance and neatness . . . exactness of judgment,” conventionally conceding to women keenness in the analysis of “manners,” unfolds within the well-developed opposition of the sublime and the beautiful. The superimposition of gender distinctions on aesthetic categories, familiar at least since Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (see the unit above), raises questions more suggestive than Jeffrey’s schematism first promises. One might note the contrast between the various strategies taken by the male poets to roughen their work, to make comprehension more difficult, as noted in previous sections of this manual, with the qualities Jeffrey praises in Hemans’s verse: “regulated and harmonized by the most beautiful taste . . . finished throughout with an exquisite delicacy, and even serenity of execution.” Instructors might first ask students to contemplate to what degree Hemans’s eclipse, after a century’s popularity, stemmed from the triumph of critical standards that subordinated “finish”—whether to the provocative fragment, read as the sign of an unattainable wholeness (Coleridge); to the cryptic text, built on gaps (A slumber did my spirit seal, Strange fits of passion, Lucy Gray); to flow, as a sign of passionate immediacy (Childe Harold or Don Juan) or meditative intimacy (Tintern Abbey); to simplicity and even awkwardness, as power (Simon Lee, The Thorn); to difficulty as well as elusiveness (Mont Blanc). One might then ask to what degree this cultural preference for the unfinished and for the striving it betokens in both poet and reader, insofar as it defines Romanticism, is not gender-neutral, but marks Romanticism as a masculine project. Any such line of argument would immediately encounter complicating evidence—such as Wordsworth’s emphasis on emotion in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads and the union of “Tenderness and Imagination” of which he boasted to Charles Lamb (see Lyrical Ballads: Companion Reading)—which in turn would lead the class into the complexities of an issue too often treated rigidly. Second, the instructor might ask students to sketch a shift in critical approach that would enable Hemans’s strengths to emerge. Note that in his mapping of his age Jeffrey forecasts
that Samuel Rogers and Thomas Campbell will outlive Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Byron because of their “fine taste and consummate elegance,” thus aligning them with Hemans. Their absence from our current configuration of the age, even as Hemans has been revived, throws light on the notion of a period as something retrospectively constructed by a network of current interests. Is it Hemans’s “execution” that has restored her, or her subject matter or her presence in the age? Without Rogers and Campbell in the anthology one cannot ask students whether they too merit restoration, but one can ask students self-consciously to test Jeffrey’s account of Hemans against their experience of her poetry, and, if they find him inadequate, to work out the grounds of their judgment.

Wordsworth’s commentary may also be used to sharpen discussion of the category of “Female Poetry,” as Jeffrey puts it. Wordsworth observed in 1829 that he had once thought of writing “an Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain—with an Estimate of their Works—but upon mature Reflection I cannot persuade myself that it is sufficiently interesting for a separate subject.” He nonetheless remained “of opinion that something is wanted upon the subject—neither Dr Johnson, nor Dr Anderson, nor Chalmers, nor the Editor I believe of any other Corpus of English Poetry takes the least notice of female Writers—this, to say nothing harsher, is very ungallant. The best way of giving a comprehensive interest to the subject,” he continued, “would be to begin with Sappho and proceed downwards.” In the same year he congratulated Alexander Dyce on his Specimens of British Poetesses (1825)—suggestively misremembering the title as Selections from the Poetry of English Ladies—telling Dyce that were there to be a second edition he wished to be consulted about the work of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea. The mixture of interest and condescension in this “gallant[ry]” is worth exploring, since at issue is the question of the “separate subject”: not just the relation of English women writers to women writers generally, but of whether there is: a) only poetry, inclusively, or b) poetry, and “Female Poetry,” a condition in which true poetry is men’s, the more thoroughly because unmarked as such, and women’s thus inevitably secondary. Wordsworth’s commentary appears to inhabit (b). Students might be asked about the existence of a possible third category (c), in which men’s and women’s poetry are distinct, but equal. (And also whether Jeffrey’s elevation of the “fine” Rogers and Campbell over poets of “fiery passion, and disdainful vehemence”—Byron is undoubtedly meant—designates a poetry that rises above the usual gender antitheses, or whether he too inhabits [b].) Instructors may also want to consider the degree to which Wordsworth’s remarks are informed by anxiety that he and Hemans occupied not “separate” spheres but overlapping ones. As noted above, Wordsworth was identified as a poet of domesticity, an identification that his life at Rydal Mount visibly enacted. When, in To the Poet Wordsworth (1826), Hemans hailed him as a “True bard and holy!” whose “calm” poems should be heard “by some hearth where happy faces meet, / . . . / While, in pleased murmurs, woman’s lip might move, / And the raised eye of childhood shine in love,” she specified a prominent and much cherished component of his reputation. Denying that Hemans could manage either the spear of Minerva or her needle, Wordsworth denies Hemans competence in either the public or the
domestic realm, and we may wonder whether the need to mark his superiority even in the realm to which women had been relegated not only acknowledges rivalry but also betrays a worry that in an age of "mathematicians . . . historians, politicians, and political economists," as Peacock had characterized it (quoted in the headnote to Shelley's Defence of Poetry), all poetry risked being stigmatized as feminine. (Compare Lockhart's disdain of Keats as a boy, a "bantling" and a "stripling," and Matthew Arnold's retailing of the image of Shelley as a "luminous and ineffectual angel.")

The readings from Jeffrey and Wordsworth amplify questions that a reading of Hemans's poetry will have already suggested. One might ask students to compare the construction and valuation of the domestic in the male writers (for example, in Coleridge's Eolian Harp and Frost at Midnight, Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey or The Prelude, Byron's evocation of his daughter in Childe Harold 3) with its treatment by Hemans. Remember that Wordsworth placed some of his most celebrated works in the classification Poems Founded on the Affections: Strange fits, She dwelt among th' untrodden ways, and Michael. Similarly, one might ask how her representations of history and glory, the fields traditionally assigned to men, stand against her contemporaries, particularly Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. The discussion can be pointed by drawing attention to the interplay between Hemans's epigraphs from men's writings and her own narratives: Byron's anti-heroic heroic drama Sardanapalus for The Bride of the Greek Isle, Scott's chivalric romance Marmion for The Homes of England, Plutarch, the epitome of humanist history, for The Last Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra. More broadly: what happens when a woman writer wields the pen? how does Hemans represent men, women, and their social relations and expectations? what values does she define as "masculine" and "feminine"? how do Hemans’s representation of women willing to die for their passions compare with what leads men to death? More formally: what is the relation between Hemans's “historical scenes in verse” and the contemporary understanding of Shakespeare's plays witnessed in our section "Lectures on Shakespeare / Coleridge's Lectures in Context"? Casabianca, The Homes of England, and The Graves of a Household might lead one to ask how Hemans's handling of the ballad-stanza and ballad-like material compares with Literary Ballads and Lyrical Ballads. The juxtaposition of Graves with Wordsworth's We Are Seven will highlight the difference between Hemans’s “finish” and Wordsworth's drama of stubborn cross-purposes, not least by bringing into focus the question of what effect the poems seem intended to have on the reader. A kindred debate has recently been aroused by The Homes of England: is Hemans's blend of domesticity and nationalism a pious restatement of the themes and tropes of Burke's Reflections, a work of art whose ideological work is precisely to erase class differences in a vision of a united "England," or does it rather demonstrate by the very conventionality of its gestures that the symbols of cultural continuity to which it appeals are always only conventional? A prime display of stock responses, or a sophisticated, as it were second-order, performance of them? Looking forward as well as back, the instructor might want to place The Homes of England into dialogue with Tennyson's Mariana, and Hemans's portrait of the woman artist with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh.
John Clare

Discussion of Clare might begin by asking students to consider the tensions in the term “peasant poet” that was both Clare’s entrée into the literary marketplace and his straitjacket. Clare was actually an agricultural laborer, and the experiences he voices, and the voice in which he speaks, offer a counterpoint to the representation of rural life in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and throughout Wordsworth’s work, to Coleridge’s critique in *Biographia Literaria* of that aspect of Wordsworth’s theory of language, and to Hemans’s view of the “cottage homes of England.” But insofar as Clare was a poet, he was also a reader who worked in poetic traditions: the contrast is less between an unlettered man and literature than it is between those who by training and social position feel confident of their relation to tradition, even when they may choose to flout it, and someone who stands outside the works he nonetheless knows. *Written in November*, for example, does not announce itself as a sonnet, but it plays against the form: its odd force arises partly from the tension between its vernacular lexicon and unpunctuated structure and the intricate form that stands behind it, half-acknowledged and half-denied. The unusual rhyme pattern, neither Shakespearean nor Petrarchan, and the unexpected syntactic division (5-5-4)—even as cleaned up by Clare’s publisher—might be viewed as a deliberate take on sonnet form, a free variation that rejects the conscious literariness of, for example, Wordsworth’s *Nuns fret not* or *Scorn not the sonnet*. The couplets that compose *The Mouse’s Nest*, including the reversed repetition of the “hay / away” rhyme, reaching, after the sudden actions of the first twelve lines, the spacious stability of the image in the concluding line, also surprise.

Instructors will easily find pairings to highlight Clare’s innovations—appearing—as ignorance: *Written in November* might be matched with Wordsworth’s *Surprized by joy*, or Coleridge’s *Sonnet to the River Otter*, or any of Keats’s sonnets. Clare summons up a world of “songs eternity,” natural melodies that he represents as outlasting and transcending the world of “books” that he wanted to enter, but the pressure of books is everywhere evident in our selections: “Clock a Clay,” beginning with an echo of *The Tempest*, is as much an imitation of Shakespeare as proof of Clare’s attentiveness to unregarded nature. The Romantic sympathetic imagination, the desire to think one’s way into the other, can have had fewer more striking outcomes than Clare’s personification of Swordy Well, which startles by delivering a social history as an individual’s speech. The discourse of property and “nature” begun in “Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy” resonates through the poem, and the instructor might well place Clare’s vivid ventriloquizing of exploited nature against the vision of property in Wordsworth’s *Michael*. Michael’s vision of Luke’s possession of the land “free as is the wind / That passes over it” (256–57), and Wordsworth’s argument for the importance of their land to the north-country small-holders, can be set in contrast to Clare’s bitter and elegiac account of the fate of the land when it falls to the parish. *I am* asks to be set next to other Romantic poems of troubled adulthood, such as Coleridge’s *Dejection Ode* and his late *Work Without Hope*. Clare’s poem, like Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey* in the words of Keats quoted below, “explot[es] . . . the
dark Passages [in which] We feel the ‘burden of the Mystery’” (letter of 3 May 1818, rearranged) and gains in force from its uncanny echoing of its precursors. *Childe Harold* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* lurk behind the second and third stanzas, and behind them the half-heard reverberations of Elizabethan plaints and the formulaic adjective + noun pattern of much eighteenth-century verse (“stifled throes,” “waking dreams,” “vast shipwreck,” “vaulted sky”). The six-line stanza is common from the Elizabethan period onward, but Clare’s use is irregular: the first stanza lacks the closing couplet of the last two, and enjamb into the second. The uncertain introduction of the rhyme scheme and the floating of bits of poetic dictation and abstractions (“oblivion’s host,” “life’s esteems”) adjacent to prosier lines (“even the dearest, that I love the best / Are strange”) produce an instability that seems to enact the disorientation and final dissolution of the declarative “I am” that opens the poem.

*The Mores* is dominated by the historical fact of the enclosure of Helpston between 1809 and 1820, which converted the open-field landscape of Clare’s youth into the rectangular, discrete plots of the new agriculture. The poem exploits the former openness both as exemption from restriction (in politically charged language): “Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene / Nor fence of ownership crept in between” (ll. 7–8) and as intimating infinity: “One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree / Spread its faint shadow of immensity / And lost itself which seemed to eke its bounds / In the blue mist the orison’s edge surrounds” (ll. 11–14). On this last effect one might direct students to Burke’s remarks on *Vastness* and *Sublimity* as characteristics of the sublime (p. 502), while at the same time emphasizing how thoroughly Clare avoids the conventional attributes of the picturesque, insisting that the old landscape was a “mighty flat” (is this Burke’s *Privation*?), but filling it with everyday agricultural activity: free-ranging sheep and cows, swains and shepherds, corn fields, mulberry bushes where a boy (Clare’s younger self) “would run / To fill his hands with fruit” (ll. 41–42). The vision of lost freedom and of the sharp division between a rich past and a constricted present, relayed in couplets, suggests a rewarding comparison to Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*, where the scene provokes a sinuous blank verse that interweaves past, present, and future. In Clare “Fence now meets fence in owners little bounds” (l. 47); in Wordsworth property markers are carefully softened: “hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild” (ll. 17–17). For Clare loss is absolute—“Moors loosing from the sight . . . / Are vanished now with commons wild and gay / As poets visions of lifes early day” (ll. 37–40)—whereas Wordsworth seeks “abundant recompense” (l. 89), inspired by “pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years” (ll. 64–66). Clare’s identification of his “boyish hours” (l. 15) with the landscape leaves him vulnerable; Wordsworth’s developing inwardness, though mournful, is compensatory. The difference is in part one of status: Wordsworth is a tourist in the Wye landscape, Clare is one of the “poor” (l. 20)—occluded by Wordsworth’s exclusion of any description of Tintern Abbey itself—and questions of “labours rights” (l. 20) are crucial for him as they are not for Wordsworth. The terms of the 1790s resonate in *The Mores*—“freedom,” “bondage,” “hope,” “tyrant,” “lawless laws”—and asking students to
compare the terms here with their use in Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy will be productive. Tintern Abbey concludes by affirming human bonds, The Mores with the grim revelation that no one benefitted from enclosure. As John Barrell explains: “The financial crisis of the period after 1815, and the notorious failure of the country banks, made it extremely difficult for farmers to obtain credit, and as a new enclosure demanded an immediate and fairly extensive outlay of capital to be properly successful, the enclosure of Helpston, first conceived at a time of high wartime prices, but paid for at a time of poor credit facilities and low prices, must have made large inroads into the capital of the Helpston landowners” (The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, p. 208). Tintern Abbey has seemed to many readers to record the birth of a remarkably layered inner life, but Clare’s “flat” despair is lit by memories of his, nature’s, and the villagers’ freedom, vivid details, such as the sweeping “plover in its pleasure free” (l. 38), and as vivid, precise renderings of current oppression: “A board sticks up its notice ‘no road here’” (l. 70). The Mores is not merely specific detail: it surprisingly trembles on the verge of myth (“these are all destroyed / And sky bound mores in mangled garbs are left / Like mighty giants of their limbs bereft” [ll. 44–47]) and powerful personification (“This with the poor scared freedom bade good bye” [l. 75]). Here as elsewhere Clare’s irregular syntax and non-standard spelling and pointing poignantly intensify the sense of a mind and way of life under siege.

John Keats

To the extensive notes in the body of our text a few general considerations may be added here. Instructors might dwell on the emblematic significance of On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer. Wordsworth attended a grammar school famous for instruction in the classics, and later translated portions of the Aeneid; Coleridge and Shelley were adept in Greek; Byron translated a portion of Aeschylus’s Prometheus Bound as a school exercise, and as the allusions incessantly and casually scattered across his writings attest, had more than a gentleman’s familiarity with Greek and Latin literature. That Keats’s career should begin with an excited response to a translation of Homer signals a difference in position in regard to the tradition, for Keats and his audience. Students overwhelmed by Keats’s mythological references might have their dismay alleviated by being asked to consider the richness as an extravagant display designed to establish the high cultural credentials of someone who (feared that he) didn’t possess them. Lockhart’s attack on Hunt’s suburban muse, stripped of its contempt, can be taken as a provocative analysis of Keats’s situation. “As a vulgar man is perpetually labouring to be genteeel,” pronounces Lockhart, “in like manner, the poetry of this man is always on the stretch to be grand.” The attitude, which survives in Yeats’s image of Keats as a boy with his nose pressed against a sweet-shop window, may be unpacked in a number of ways. For Lockhart (and for Yeats), Keats’s infatuation with literature (with mythology, with Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton) betrays his exclusion from a world that others already enjoy. On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer
records the discovery as “new” wealth of the old “realms of gold” (Homer)—a discovery that remains mediated through the voice of another (Chapman), and a “wild surmise” (13) of a territory ahead, not (one might implicitly fill in) the secure knowledge of those who know Homer in the original. For the aristocracy culture is an inheritance—aristocrats, it has been wittily remarked, are born old—upstarts must acquire it. Keats’s substitution of Cortez for Balboa (the first European to see the Pacific from Darien in 1513) may be a “mistake” or may be allegorically fitting: the seeker for culture discovers for himself the paths blazed by others. Lockhart seeks to dismiss Keats by fixing him in two congruent contexts: personally, he is young—a boy, not a man; culturally, he is lower middle class, and his attempts at “honorable elevation” only manifest his ignorance. Hunt’s addressing Lord Byron as “My dear Byron” is insufferably presumptuous, and Keats’s juxtaposition of Hunt, “the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters,” with Wordsworth, “the most classical of English living poets,” exposes a failure to distinguish, a failure that broadcasts Keats’s lack of the distinction by which he would seek, in his ostentatious display of the trappings of culture, to establish his title.

Lockhart’s attack, if patiently explored and not merely dismissed as a conservative’s failure to recognize genius, may have the reverse effect of making Keats more sympathetic to students by leading straight to several of the chief preoccupations of the poetry. Most users of this Anthology will be in positions analogous to Keats’s: young college students with nothing like the familiarity with the classics assumed by Lockhart (or Byron, or Shelley, or Coleridge, or Wordsworth). The instructor may wish to contextualize Keats’s relation to tradition by returning to Burke’s discussion of inheritance, or to contrast Keats’s approach to it with that of Clare, also outside, or of Blake, another apprentice, who counters classical tradition by drawing on the Bible and Christian tradition, and inventing his own mythology or with women poets, whose learning was similarly scattershot and eclectic. The literariness of Keats’s imagined worlds forcefully contrasts with the terrain of Lyrical Ballads, and students should be asked to consider the implications of Keats’s embrace of the artifices of language that Wordsworth rejected. Wordsworth sought to naturalize the imagination by locating its “birth-right” in the sensibility of the child (Prelude, 1.286), and to employ (a “purified” version of) “the language really used by men”; Keats returns to mythology and Elizabethan richness, the formal repositories of “fine fbling” (see the introduction to our section “Literary Ballads”) in elaborately worked language and forms. His advice to Percy Shelley to “load every rift of your subject with ore” (16 August 1820) is the hallmark of his own richest practice. One may set Coleridge’s goal of “A Poem which Affects not to be Poetry,” and the works of his and of Wordsworth that it describes, against the virtuosic layering of season, day, and life on which Keats built To Autumn. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth argues that there can be no essential difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose; for him the poet is “a man speaking to men.” Students might be asked to consider how Keats’s “realms of gold” alter the continuity between literature and other forms of writing evident in the earlier sections of the Anthology: Barbauld’s Eighteen Hundred and Eleven is a political intervention, Don Juan is topical and engaged, Shelley’s Ode to the West Wind
glances at revolution, and *Hellas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* confront it directly. Overt politics are less telling, however, than the conviction (sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker) of all these writers that poetry can contribute to matters of national moment. With Keats poetry moves closer to the poetic, a separate sphere, that of the seemingly autonomous aesthetic object and *belles-lettres*. One might ask students to weigh the connections between an age of “mathematicians . . . historians, politicians, and political economists,” as Peacock defined it (quoted in the headnote to Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*, and discussed in the Shelley section of this manual), and the rise of the specialized domain of art. Presented as monument, Keats’s poetry may seem daunting; presented as the exuberant product of a young man uncertain of his class status, eager to display the badges of learning and genius, the characteristic too-muchness becomes immensely appealing.

Lockhart’s critique can thus be read against the grain to found a contextual understanding of Keats’s enterprise. Note, for instance, the characterization of Wordsworth as “the most classical of living poets,” a characterization that will surprise those students who remember the denunciation by the *Anti-Jacobin* and Francis Jeffrey of the “childish” simplicity, which they read as radicalism, of the Lake Poets. Lockhart touches not only on the understatement of Wordsworth’s ballad style and the stoicism of his elevated one, but also on his attachment to the land, a political position in which peasant and aristocrat meet, joined by a common opposition to the world of “getting and spending,” the urban world of new wealth and commercial activity Wordsworth excoriated in his sonnets of 1802, his portrait of London in *Prelude* 7, and the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. One might ask students to consider to what degree the contempt expressed by Lockhart, educated at Balliol College, Oxford, for the “Cockney” and the “Plebeian” and the “vulgar,” usefully marks an expanding middle-class audience, untrained in but aspiring to the classics, whose taste Keats would have to win if he were to earn a living by poetry, so that the very removal of his style from the colloquial and his matter from the everyday would be the sign of his response to current conditions. Instructors may set the manifestly literary ballad *La Belle Dame*, with its deliberate archaism ("wretched wight") and a stanza form metrically sophisticated by an abbreviated last line, against those in our “Literary Ballads” section (*Lord Randal*, *Sir Patrick Spens*, the work of Burns) or *Lyrical Ballads* to underscore Keats’s particularly self-conscious, perhaps even coterie, use of the form.

Lockhart’s scorn for Keats as a “boy” likewise disengages a central theme. In the Preface to *Endymion* Keats wrote: “The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of ["men who are competent to look, and who do look with a zealous eye, to the honour of English literature"] must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.” Keats here thematizes adolescence: awkwardness is not his failing, it is his subject. The instructor may compare this formulation with the poems of his contemporaries on the stages of life: for example, Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey* and *Prelude*, Coleridge’s *Dejection Ode*. To do so is to
recognize that a heightened awareness of the “space of life between” characterizes
the period. Looking back in 1874 on this “burst of creative activity in our litera-
ture,” Matthew Arnold decided that it “had about it, in fact, something prematu-
re.” He summed up: “the English poetry of the first quarter of this century, with
plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough” (The Function of
Criticism). Accepting the description but reversing the evaluation, one can argue
that the character of the era, coming after the Revolution had destroyed the old
certainties but left uncertainty in its wake, and before the evolution of a new order
(after Waterloo, after the 1832 and 1867 Reform Bills), was precisely its unsettled-
ness. The age saw itself, in the phrase of John Stuart Mill, as an age of transition.

One might therefore note the congruency between “transition” (in sociocul-
tural terms), “space of life between” (in individual psychological terms), and the
kinds of narrative suspension devised by the Romantics. The fragment (Kubla
Khan), the dialogue of poem and gloss (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner), and the
self-interrupting letter (Biographia Literaria 13) are among Coleridge’s modes of
leaving the imagination hovering, converting the lack of “not know[ing] enough”
into a provocative staving-off of the finality of closure; Byron’s proliferating “pas-
sage” in Don Juan converts epistemological uncertainty into exfoliating specula-
tion—seventeen cantos on, the poem continues in a perpetual middle; Shelley’s
chains of similes raise from the failure of language ever to reach reality a strenuous
intellectual energy. That Keats shared with his contemporaries the sense of human
life as growth is shown by his analogy of human life to a series “of Many
Apartments” that the awakening of the “thinking principle” impels us successively
to explore (3 March 1818), and by his spring 1819 letter to George and Georgiana
Keats on “Soul-making,” perhaps its fullest articulation: “I will call the world a
School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the
human heart the horn Book used in that School—and I will call the Child able to read,
the Soul made from that school and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a
World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?” In
this letter Keats observes that “[t]hough a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be
hated, the energies displayed in it are fine,” surprisingly linking this instinctive “an-
imal eagerness” to poetry: “our reasoning may take the same tone—though erro-
neous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so
it is not so fine a thing as philosophy.” The ranking of philosophy over poetry co-
dinates with the drive toward the development of identity elsewhere in the let-
ters, but more characteristic is Keats’s suspension of closure in order to “widen
speculation” (3 May 1818; see also the “speculative Mind” of spring 1819) in “the
space of life between.” This drama is acted through Keats’s close reading of
Wordsworth, the epitome of the “egotistical sublime” to which Keats opposes his
own kind of “poetical Character”: the “camelion poet” who “has no Identity—he is
continually in for[ming?]—and filling some other Body” (27 October 1818). (The
contrast might be amplified by recurring to the “Lectures on Shakespeare.”) From
the extended comparison of Milton and Wordsworth that Keats conducts by means
of his analogy of “Many Apartments” he recovers a Wordsworth to admire: “many
doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the bal-
lance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—We are now in that state—We feel the ‘burden of the Mystery.’ To this point was Wordsworth come when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’ and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages.” Keats’s definition of “Negative Capability” encapsulates the transformation of the confession of the Preface to Endymion into a virtue: “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge” (December 1818).

Keats repeatedly bends traditional forms toward the self-questioning these quotations suggest. The Eve of St. Agnes, for example, is a chivalric romance of the kind popular ever since the series of Scott’s narratives beginning with The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) and Marmion (1808); Wordsworth’s The White Doe of Rylstone (1815) and Coleridge’s Christabel (published 1816) were more recent instances of the genre. But The Eve of St. Agnes is more like an episode from a romance than a complete romance action, and its abrupt ending, with the surprising shift in tenses that sidesteps the question of the future happiness of the lovers by remanding them to the distant, completed past, caps the series of oppositions and puzzles that surround the story: the white of virginity linked with the ice of death versus the purple and red of erotic passion with the violence of conflict, Porphyro as satanic seducer versus agent of growth. The story, recounted by a narrator who can see his heroine as both “thoughtful” and the dupe of a “whim” (55), “Hoodwinked with fairy fancy” (70), offers intense wish-fulfillment and chastens wishing in its conclusion, leaving readers to ponder their own investments in romance. Of the odes we may note here their interrogative conclusions: the question at the end of Ode to A Nightingale (“Do I wake or sleep?”), the enigmatic distich at the end of Ode on a Grecian Urn (“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”), the reversal at the end of Ode on Melancholy that makes the energetic pursuer of Melancholy her victim (“His soul shall taste the sadness of her might, / And be among her cloudy trophies hung”). To borrow a phrase from the Ode on a Grecian Urn, these poems “tease us out of thought” (44) rather than offer firm resolutions, and the instructor may wish to compare them with the kindred works enumerated in the paragraph above, or contrast them with the closure on the “philosophic mind” in Wordsworth’s Ode: Intimations of Immortality or the consolatory pronouncement that resolves his Peele Castle (“Not without hope we suffer and we mourn”). The tension between narrative movement and speculation, action and meditation, that Keats shares with his contemporaries (consider the exhortations of the narrator of Simon Lee to “silent thought” or the presentation of the story of the Ancient Mariner as the drama of its telling and reception in Lyrical Ballads, a title that itself poses contraries) can be illustrated by two repeated words. “Generation” occurs in both the Ode to a Nightingale (62) and Ode on a Grecian Urn (46), “cease” in both the Ode to a Nightingale (56) and To Autumn (10): in the latter poem the tension between the ongoing flow of life and the arrest that enables contemplation is ratcheted to its highest in the poising of autumn between maximum fullness and impending death.
To return to the exclusion from tradition enforced by Lockhart’s review: if to Lockhart the tradition brands Keats as a vulgar upstart, permanently crippled by ignorance, to Keats the tradition provokes emulation, and the opportunity for enlargement. “I was never afraid of failure,” Keats told his publisher after *Endymion*, “for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest” (8 October 1818). A week later, still absorbing the harsh reviews his ambitious poem had aroused, he declared to George and Georgiana: “This is a mere matter of the moment—I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death” (14 October 1818). The past, a massive obstacle, may also serve as inspiring model. The very last paragraph of the Preface to *Endymion* runs: “I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try it once more, before I bid it farewell.” In this confession Keats acknowledges his distance from the world of antiquity, an acknowledgment dramatized in his ode to Psyche, the “latest born and loveliest vision far / Of all Olympus’ faded hierarchy! / . . . too late for antique vows, / Too, too late for the fond believing lyre” (24–25; 36–37). Instructors will have noticed that in Keats distance from the cultural past largely occupies the role of distance from their own past in Wordsworth and Coleridge: in Keats memory is not personal but cultural, and the fate of mythology is a more explicit subject than the mind of the boy. It is worth therefore emphasizing that if Keats was not university educated, he lived in a circle of art and artists, a phenomenon that should then be studied. William Hazlitt, whose “depth of Taste” Keats declared one of the “three things to rejoice at in this Age” (10 January 1818), was both a painter and an art critic; Leigh Hunt, in whose *Indicator* Keats published *La Belle Dame*, was an enthusiastic guide to old work as well as a genial sponsor of new; and the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (whose pictures constituted a second in Keats’s trio) was a principal in *Annals of the Fine Arts*, the first quarterly devoted to the fine arts in England, in which both *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* first appeared.

The separation of Hunt’s aesthetic *Indicator* from his political *Examiner* foretells the modulation of middle-class radicalism into depoliticized general culture in his later periodicals. As our note to Keats’s *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles* conveys, Haydon championed the purchase of the Elgin Marbles against establishment connoisseurs in a dispute that eventually led to a government committee having to determine the sum to be paid Elgin, a fascinating instance of the conundrum of the relationship between aesthetic value and market price. Keats’s *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles* seems to explode the confines of sonnet form by making it the vehicle of “dim-conceived glories of the brain” (9), a phrase that signals the sublime. The paratactic structure and fragmentary abstract images of the last two lines (“Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main / A sun—a shadow of a magnitude”) mime the dissolution of formal “Grecian grandeur” (12) in the immediacy of an experience too powerful to organize syntactically. Instructors may wish to point out that the natural images are evoked by statues, and ask students to weigh the difference between the sublimity of nature (and the mind’s response to nature) and the agency of art in Keats: the marbles, the representation of the gods in the two *Hyperions* that they underlie, and the Grecian urn. Keats’s romanticism is romantic classi-
icism, and parallels the rise of the museum. Keats’s pictorialism may be contrasted with Wordsworth’s resistance to the tyranny of the eye, exemplified by his disappointment at first seeing Mont Blanc: he “grieved / To have a soulless image on
the eye / Which had usurp’d upon a living thought / That never more could be” (Prelude 6.453–56). Wordsworth’s characteristic bare “visionary dreariness” (Prelude, 11.311) could not be more different from the visuality of Keats, steeped in Nicolas Poussin (1593/94–1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600–1682); it was dissatisfaction with a painting, Benjamin West’s Death on a Pale Horse, that provoked Keats to formulate “negative capability.” The Pre-Raphaelites seized on the sensuousness of surface and display of objects in Keats, repeatedly illustrating his poems. The instructor can usefully highlight this quality by bringing into class reproductions of John Everett Millais’s Lorenzo and Isabella (1849) and Eve of St. Agnes (1865), Holman Hunt’s Eve of St. Agnes (1848) and Isabella and the Pot of Basil (1867), and Frank Dicksee’s La Belle Dame Sans Merci (circa 1902)—and then asking students to consider what aspects of Keats’s self-questioning and intense appeals to other senses painting inevitably scants. (A specimen: “Then will I pass the countries that I see / In long perspective, and continually / Taste their pure fountains,” Sleep and Poetry, 99–101; “Oh, for a draught of vintage . . . / . . . / Tasting of Flora and the country green,” Ode to a Nightingale, 11–13; “Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue/ Can burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine; / His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,” Ode on Melancholy, 27–29; and—synaesthetically—“Oh, turn thee to the very tale, / And taste the music of that vision pale,” Isabella, 391–92.)

When Keats declared of the mythology of Greece that he “wish[ed] to try once more, before I bid it farewell” he specified a gesture of assumption followed by rejection that he would rehearse again and again. Sleep and Poetry inaugurates the rhythm: “First the realm I’ll pass / Of Flora and old Pan. . . . / And can I ever bid these joys farewell? / Yes I must pass them for a nobler life, / Where I may find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts” (101–02; 122–25). In Keats’s short life the movement from pastoral to tragedy was never quite completed, and instructors may ask students to reflect on whether the cause lies in the accident of Keats’s early death or is not fundamental to the Romantic inhabiting of “the space of life between.” Repeatedly Keats seeks escape in bowers (Endymion), in imaginative leaps to the idealized world of the unseen nightingale (“I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy,” 31–33), or the perfection of the Grecian urn, its figures “All breathing human passion far above” (28). Repeatedly the ideal world discloses a lack, and Keats returns to a reality that is virtually defined by its capacity to say “farewell” to the temptations of the ideal. The nightingale is dismissed, with a telling use of the lesser of Coleridge’s terms in the hierarchy Imagination/Fancy: “Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf” (73–74). The Grecian urn reveals itself as a “Cold Pastoral” (45). The consummation of Porphyro and Madeline is immediately followed by, or by the logic of poetic sequence, seems to produce, a storm: “Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows / Like Love’s alarum, pattering the sharp sleet / Against the window-panes: St. Agnes’ moon hath set” (stanza 36). The in-
structor may wish to juxtapose these texts with earlier ones: the Ode to a Nightingale with Shelley’s To a Skylark, Keats’s treatment of Madeline and Porphryro with Byron’s of Juan and Haidee. More generally, one might ask about the relations between skepticism and idealism in Shelley, Byron, and Keats.

In sending his analysis of Wordsworth to Reynolds, Keats comments that it is “to show you how tall I stand by the giant” (3 May 1818). His wrestlings with his eminent older contemporary in turn involved a still weightier precursor: “My Branchings out therefrom have been numerous: one of them is the consideration of Wordsworth’s genius and as a help, in the manner of gold being the meridian Line of of worldly wealth,—how he differs from Milton.” (See the remarks on generational rivalry in the section of this manual on Shelley.) Keats’s early sonnet “To one who has been long in city pent” purchases a famous epic simile in Paradise Lost (Satan’s temporary delight in Eden) to describe a holiday of reading and relaxing in the country. Part of this holiday is a knowing suspension of Milton’s epic import and metaphysical urgency. Keats’s two Hyperions represent his most sustained effort to conquer poetic tradition on its highest ground, the epic. To our headnote we may just add here that Paradise Lost unfolds in a three-leveled symbolic space: Hell, Eden, and Heaven. Keats’s narrative in its first form recounted the humanizing of the Titans by their fall, and the rapid education of Apollo, his rise from pastoral innocence toward humanity. Milton’s scheme, which Keats follows in Books 1 and 2, thus collapsed toward the middle level of human experience. Recasting the poem as The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream, Keats refocused the narrative (at least as far as he managed to take it) on his own agonized poetic initiation, exchanging Miltonic epic for Dantean spiritual drama. (But which, one may note, edged Keats away from the Shakespearean poet without identity and toward the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth—and Milton.) Perhaps no work better illustrates the pattern of the period by which objective forms turned inward, and action bent into signifying stasis, narrative into lyric responsiveness: note that the poet gains illumination by looking on the epic action before him (372 ff.), which recedes before the drama of his capacity to bear “The load of this eternal quietude” (390). The revision thereby sharpened the questions of the role of the poet and of the meaning of suffering rather than alleviating them, and Keats could not complete it. In setting the Hyperion project against the two other Romantic revisions of epic in the anthology, Wordsworth’s Prelude and Byron’s Don Juan, the instructor may wish to situate the discussion at the level of style. What style was appropriate for representing the drama of a mind that does not “see the balance of good and evil,” for uncovering the “dark Passages” in which Keats found Wordsworth superior to Milton and to which he too committed himself: “Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them”? In Hyperion, Byron commented, Keats had “contrived to talk about the gods of late, / Much as they might have been supposed to speak” (Don Juan 11.59, quoted in the companion reading to Adonais), but the question was whether a style apposite for gods, even fallen, was sufficiently supple to talk about human questions, about the painful education of a soul into an intelligence. Even in its revised form as The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream, Keats’s poem remained elevated, its very stylistic brilliance, testimony to Keats’s de-
termination to enter the tradition, a stumbling block. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth crossed epic with epistle, gaining the stylistic flexibility to write about childhood and domestic intimacy as well as the Revolution; repudiating Murray’s desire that he write “a great work” an Epic poem I suppose or some such pyramid” Byron demanded “you have so many ‘divine’ poems, is it nothing to have written a Human one? without any of your worn out machinery” (6 April 1819). Liberated from the aspiration that hobbled even as it inspired Keats, Byron found in ottava rima a middle style whose “pedestrian Muses” (Dedication, 8) enable him successfully to mutate epic, narrating the ordinary that Keats indicates only as the gap between the taking up of a style and its abandonment. One might consider the distance between the style of Keats’s poems and the staccato immediacy of his letters, and the closing in *Don Juan* of the similar gap between *Childe Harold* and Byron’s letters. To contrast Keats’s artifice (for example, the evolution of the stanza forms of the odes from his experiments in the sonnet) with the theory of language embodied in *Lyrical Ballads* and its preface should throw light on the latter not available earlier in the semester.

Questions of gender are inseparable from questions of imagination in Keats. What happens, the instructor might ask, when the aesthetic category of the “imagination” converges with the condition of a man who confesses that he has “not a right attitude towards Women”? (18 July 1818). The sequence of erotic fulfillment and immediate chastening in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the triumph of Melancholy, and Autumn, carrying the scythe that associates her with death, have already been noted, and students might be asked also to consider Keats’s gendering of literary “Romance” as a dangerous temptress to the masculine poet, and (as with Byron) the pressures of a readership of women on his sense of independence. How too shall we understand the threatening figure of Moneta? No simple answers will, or should, emerge from “a gordanic complication of feelings,” but they point towards the issues that drive the poems: is La Belle Dame the merciless figure the title suggests, or is the knight’s despair a product of his own blinded and willful interpretations of her, perhaps even a self-fulfilling fantasy of betrayal that leads to solidarity with other self-pitying men? Or one might suggest a thematic issue: compare Keats on fame (in the letters, in *Hyperion*, in *When I have fears*) to Hemans’s assessments of “Women and Fame” and famous women.

**Perspectives**

**Popular Prose and the Problems of Authorship**

Here is the conclusion of Thomas Love Peacock’s *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), cited in part in the headnote to Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* and commented upon in the Shelley section of the manual. Peacock proclaims the imminent death of poetry:

and this not from any decrease either of intellectual power, or intellectual acquisition, but because intellectual power and intellectual acquisition
have turned themselves into other and better channels, and have aban-
donned the cultivation and the fate of poetry to the degenerate fry of mod-
ern rhymesters, and their olympic judges, the magazine critics, who con-
tinue to debate and promulgate oracles about poetry, as if it were still what
it was in the Homeric age, the all-in-all of intellectual progression, and as if
there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers,
chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians, and political
economists, who have built into the upper air of intelligence a pyramid,
from the summit of which they see the modern Parnassus far beneath
them, and knowing how small a place it occupies in the comprehensiveness
of their prospect, smile at the little ambition and the circumscribed per-
ceptions with which the drivellers and mountebanks upon it are contend-
ing for the poetical palm and the critical chair.

A tour de force of exaggeration, surely, for Peacock combined working for the East
India Company under the quintessential Utilitarian James Mill with the authorship
of satirical novels and mythological poetry, and his complimentary citation of polit-
ecal economists here did not stop him from lampooning them in The Paper Money
Lyrics (1837). But Peacock’s jest is just as surely an index to a shift in the ordering of
knowledge, or at least to the emergence of newly professionalizing fields with which
poetry had to compete for authority and prestige. By the 1820s the costly quartos in
which Scott’s The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) and his subsequent chivalric ro-
mances, Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812–1818), and Wordsworth’s Excursion
(1814) were published had become a thing of the past, and a crash in the world of
publishing in 1826 tightened market conditions still further. By 1830 most major
publishers were declining to publish new poetry. Concomitantly, as P. G. Patmore,
a friend of Lamb and Hazlitt and a fellow contributor to the London Magazine, noted,
magazines “have changed their place in the system of literature” and risen “aloft into
higher spheres,” publishers having discovered it was worth their while handsomely
to remunerate writers who attracted readers. Coleridge, responding to the criticism
of Barbauld, spoke of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as “a work of pure imagina-
tion” (see Coleridge companion reading); the essayists in the magazines aimed at no
such goal. In the deliberately informal sketch they depicted city life, or gave rein to
an idiosyncratic persona; even more elaborate forms fit into the mixture of serious
reviewing, political opinion, and current news or scandal that in varying proportion
made up the appeal of the magazines to their different readerships. Looking back in
1855 on “The First Edinburgh Reviewers,” Walter Bagehot, editor of The Economist,
author of The English Constitution (1867) and other still valuable works of social
analysis, declared with his characteristic flickering irony: “The Edinburgh Review . . .
may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable
views for sensible persons.” The magazines did not seek the authority of the quar-
terlies, but they helped to form another cultural image: the reader they project is
abreast of current affairs, and equally au courant in art and literature, a man (other
periodicals aimed at women) of taste rather than a scholar (scholarship could look
too much like pedantry), whose wit tended more to genial enthusiasm than to sharp
satire. As we note in our introduction to the section, personality, as conveyed in style, was the key. The essay was an elastic genre, in style and subject, accommodating both reportage and reflection, and in it one can recognize the ancestor of today’s columnists, personal journalism, and creative non-fiction.

In the selections in this section the instructor will find many of the themes and techniques already commented on in the manual. The sequence of narrators in the Introduction to Tales of My Landlord (obviously not a magazine piece), for example, can be connected to all the devices by which the Romantic poets complicate the notion that a story has a single authoritative origin, and convert straightforward narrative into a Chinese-box structure of tale-telling and tale-hearing. Scott embeds his stories in a differentiated social world, and turns to comedy the debate (see “Literary Ballads”) between those who seek “authentic” folk material and those who condescend to, or refine, or sentimentally idealize it. Intensely nationalist, pedantically learned (note the Latin tags), Jedediah richly dramatizes the traffic between Scots local color and British readers, an unfamiliar, vivid tradition and the current book market. Scott’s allegory of cultural transmission can be set against Blake’s in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell; Jedediah’s quarrels with Peter Pattieson over style offer a miniature of the wrestlings with their heritage of Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats. Looking forward, the Introduction can be set against Carlyle’s narrative use of an editor in his Sartor Resartus. Lamb’s Oxford in the Vacation even in its title indicates the condition of suspension the Romantics sought in order to free the imagination: the university vacation “falls in so pat” with Elia’s respite from business that he can try on identities: “play the gentleman, enact the student,” recover if only briefly (but therefore more sweetly) the freedom he knew “as long back as I was at school at Christ’s.” Lamb’s style, allusive, irregular, colloquial and archaic both, is just such a freedom from the business-like prose of the clerk. Wordsworth narrates his own childhood in The Prelude; Lamb turns to a persona, Elia, and simultaneously concedes, as it were, Peacock’s charge that literary studies had become irrelevant to contemporary reality and defends the “liberal pursuits” by embodying them in the figure of G———, whose absent-mindedness is a sign of the freedom of imagination from constraint: “For with G.D., to be absent from the body is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord.” Low-key, ironic, moving in the realm of fancy rather than imagination, Lamb wields a style that brilliantly reconciles artifice and the everyday. Dream Children plays on the Romantic themes of childhood, memory, and imagination, and its darkening of tone at the conclusion, when the prior fantasy, teetering on the edge of the sentimental, is revealed as preparation for the announcement of a real loss, that of the death of Lamb’s brother, and so becomes yet more painful, may be set against the kinds of closure commented on before in these pages. Old China likewise resumes several themes: art and artifice (compare Keats’s Ode on a Grecian Urn), the relations of brother and sister (compare Tintern Abbey), gender construction, and domesticity generally, the relation of past and present, youth and age, and the fluid operations of memory figured by the lack of perspective on the china (Tintern Abbey again). Lamb offers a diminuendo replay of the concerns of the poets, their emotional intensity held within the scale typified by the old china. In Lamb the Romantic passes
from unique experience to cultural pattern, available even to the unremarkable Elia and Bridget at home. But the modesty of the form is deceptive: teaching the essay, one should not underplay its canny awareness of the passions of memory, or the way in which Lamb brackets (with the kind of irony Byronists recognize) the powerful recovery of the past accomplished in the breathless rush of the last paragraph by the steady introduction—“It is true we were happier when we were poorer, but we were also younger, my cousin”—and the light self-mocking conclusion: “And now do just look at that merry little Chinese waiter. . . .”

“It is not easy to write a familiar style,” Hazlitt observed. “Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected slipshod allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes” (On Familiar Style, 1821). The instructor may set this ideal against Lamb’s, and also carry the works of this section back to “Perspectives: The Rights of Man and the Revolution Controversy” and ask students to consider the contrast in prose styles between Hazlitt and, for example, Burke, Paine, or Wollstonecraft. The writers of the 1820s evolved prose styles responsive to a new audience, less formal and hortatory, more flexible and conversational, more individual than those of their predecessors; to borrow Wordsworth’s phrase in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, such prose as Hazlitt’s is an instrument deft enough to follow “the fluxes and refluxes of the mind.”

Hazlitt’s On Gusto identifies a key term in the aesthetics of the period. Neoclassicism had valued order, harmony, decorum, proportion; the immediately preceding aesthetic vocabulary had been the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful. These are categories of the object, or of nature perceived within artistic categories. “Gusto” is rather an alacrity and intensity of responsiveness than a formal property, a quality that an artwork intimates about its creator. Note that Hazlitt does not argue from general propositions, but accretively builds up his definition by particular instances, moving from the concrete instance to his recreation of it for his reader. Gusto is shown to be both a quality of Titian and Michelangelo, and of Hazlitt, who proves his own gusto by his enthusiasm for that of others. The essay is a list of examples crossing genres—painting, poetry, opera—from which the reader must induce the general term, or rather, we will understand “this delicate subject” if we are capable of it. Like many another work in the period, the essay covertly challenges the reader to rise to the state of the author. Hazlitt’s impact on Keats can be seen by juxtaposing this essay with Keats’s pronouncements that “the excellence of every Art is its intensity” (December 1818) and that “every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from
the ardour of the pursuer” (3 February 1818), and with Keats’s poems (particularly useful is the Ode on Melancholy).

My First Acquaintance with Poets exemplifies Hazlitt’s precepts. Irresistible as it is to read the essay as a source of biographical information about Wordsworth and Coleridge, instructors should show students that the essay performs, unobtrusively, what it recounts. A recollective essay, written when Wordsworth and Coleridge had both, from Hazlitt’s point of view, turned regrettably conservative, the essay summons up a golden and long since departed past. Ideas condense into telling physical details, as in Hazlitt’s notice of Coleridge’s manner of walking: “I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the foot-path to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principles, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line.” By the time the essay concludes, the reader knows as much about Hazlitt (and Hazlitt’s father and childhood) as about his nominal subjects, but one should point out to students how such essays contributed to the image of the poets. In his middle years Wordsworth declared that “I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing”; teachers need pupils if they are to succeed; Hazlitt’s memoir is the evidence that already in 1798 Coleridge and Wordsworth had captured the next generation. No longer simply the (invisible) authors of works, they come before the public as vividly colored presences; the essay witnesses their already established celebrity and spreads it further—carrying Hazlitt, in all his gusto, along with them.

De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium-Eater best illustrates the perpetuation and modulation of romanticism in the magazines. Students will recognize familiar topics, transposed into the setting of a rapidly expanding and labyrinthine London: a suffering child; a redemptive mother, here the child-prostitute Anne, lost in “Oxford-street, stony-hearted step-mother”; the fracturing of identity, played through De Quincey’s transactions with the Malay, in the infinite recessiveness of the Piranesi plates, and in the return of the other, in this instance the Asian as private nightmare; the recursive interpretive process that turns the “Pleasures of Opium” into the “Pains of Opium”; the darkening of Coleridge’s definition of the ideal poet as one who “balance[s] or reconcil[es] . . . opposite or discordant qualities” (Biographia Literaria 14) into De Quincey’s sensational “I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed.” The Confessions evidently ask to be read with Wordsworth’s (then unpublished) Prelude, Coleridge’s Rime, and, say, Keats’s Ode on Melancholy: all explore autobiography, guilt, imagination turned perverse, and gusto as self-tormenting intensity. Compare for example, the inseparability of pleasure and sorrow produced in Keats’s Ode by the very fervor of the speaker’s perception of joy, and in Moneta’s charge against the narrator of Hyperion—“Every sole man hath days of joy and pain, / Whether his labors be sublime or low—/ The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct: / Only the dreamer venoms all his days” (1.172–75)—to De Quincey’s “involute” of emotion, to use his term: “wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other. On these
accounts it is that I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am walking alone in the endless days of summer."

The episode of the Piranesi plates, a close look reveals, has a suggestively multiple origin. De Quincey records himself as looking only at Piranesi’s *Antiquities of Rome*; the reading of the *Carceri* that follows is introduced by the parenthetical confession “I describe only from memory of Mr. Coleridge’s account.” While we supply a sample of what Coleridge means, the students’ visual encounter should not eclipse their attention to the way, by a series of intense addresses and imperatives, the reader is urged to enter into the world of the plate: “you perceived . . . follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive . . . whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose. . . . But raise your eyes. . . . Again elevate your eye . . . until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.” But just as Piranesi disappears into his plate, so the plate itself loses reality. Where is it, and who is talking? Is this Coleridge’s accurate description of Piranesi’s self-portrayal? (In fact it corresponds to no specific plate in the *Carceri*, conveniently available in paperback to show students.) Is De Quincey retailing Coleridge’s fantasy? Is this De Quincey’s own fantasy? De Quincey has never seen the plate, and we cannot tell, cannot separate one voice from another. “With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams,” continues De Quincey, but this instance suggests that the unconscious is not the place of an authentic self, but a network built up from myriad other figures and texts. De Quincey’s dreams enact the transmission of culture as a repetition without a causal origin. Or, to put that another way, effect is all.

This episode can be fruitfully juxtaposed with the Arab dream in *Prelude 5* (49–165), a dream of which Wordsworth too obscures the origin, ascribing it in 1805 to “a Friend,” but claiming it as his own in 1830, though in either case, as our footnote indicates, it echoes a dream of René Descartes centuries earlier. It is worth developing the continuities and differences between the handling of dreams, visions, and terrors in De Quincey and Wordsworth. Immediately after the Piranesi episode De Quincey quotes 18 lines from Wordsworth’s *Excursion* (1814), introducing them with the comment: “From a great modern poet I cite part of a passage which describes, as an appearance actually beheld in the clouds, what in many of its circumstances I saw frequently in my sleep.” One might note the many functions of this seemingly innocuous comment. It is, first, significant as a document in the history of Wordsworth’s reception. *The Excursion* had been savagely reviewed, and, an expensive quarto, had sold poorly; the second, cheaper but still small, edition had appeared only in 1820, the year before the *Confessions*. Wordsworth’s other recent publications, from the two-volume *Poems* of 1815 through *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* (both 1819), and *The River Duddon* (1820), had received at best mixed notices; Coleridge’s extensive discussion in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) attested to his importance, but Coleridge’s criticisms and declarations of disagreement had been sharp, and by 1817 Coleridge himself was suspect in many quarters. Of the readers who undertook *Biographia* many shared Byron’s exasperation: “And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing, / But like a hawk encumber’d with his hood,—/ Explaining meta-
physics to the nation—/ I wish he would explain his Explanation" (Don Juan, dedication, 2). To Wordsworth’s chagrin, the poems of Byron, Scott, and others had certainly elbowed his aside in the marketplace: as noted in the period introduction, the 3,000 guineas his publisher paid Moore for Lalla Rookh (1817) represented a sum of which he could scarcely dream. In ordaining Wordsworth a “great modern poet” in a publication of much wider circulation than Wordsworth’s own editions attained—and attaching his praise to one of his most maligned works—De Quincey was not so much repeating received opinion as assisting Wordsworth’s canonization. In doing so he also advanced his own claims: quoting throughout his works from the still-unpublished Prelude, De Quincey both built up Wordsworth’s reputation and advertised his own intimacy with the “great modern poet,” a double process on which he explicitly capitalized with the publication in Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine of his Recollections of the Lake Poets (1834–40). Moving into Dove Cottage after the Wordsworths had relocated—it is the setting for “A Picture of the Opium-Eater”—De Quincey marked himself as the secondary figure who establishes the primacy of his predecessor.

But a close look at the introduction of the lines from The Excursion reveals, as does the relation to Coleridge in the Piranesi episode, an obscuring of the hierarchy of primary and secondary. The Excursion had been published seven years before, but do De Quincey’s dreams anticipate or follow the poem? The paragraph immediately following the quotation reverses the elevation De Quincey has given Wordsworth: “The sublime circumstance—‘battlements that on their restless fronts bore stars,’—might have been copied from my architectural dreams, for it often occurred.” The “great modern poet” is now no more than a copier of De Quincey’s independent imagination. Suppose, however, that the reverse is the case, and that, as we have repeatedly seen in the manual, Romanticism is a mode in which cultural transmission is rewritten as original experience. As Wordsworth transforms the picturesque into a psychological account of his childhood, so De Quincey then presents Wordsworth’s prior, written sublime text as a description of, rather than the inspiration for, his own dreams.

In The Prelude Wordsworth exclaims: “Ah me! that all / The terrors, all the early miseries, / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all / The thoughts and feelings which have been infus’d / Into my mind should ever have made up / The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself. Praise to the end!” (1.356–62). Wordsworth’s goal is “the end,” the composed self who will have become The Poet. Though readers may most prize Wordsworth’s accounts of his childhood experience, Wordsworth’s project is integrative. “There is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements,” he affirms in the lines just before these, “and makes them move in one society” (11.353–56). In one sense the workmanship is not invisible at all: it is the task of growing up, as Wordsworth understands it, and therefore the work of interpretation the poem performs, to achieve “harmony” (1.353). Wordsworth desires to become “worthy of [him]self,” to demonstrate that he is “in manhood now mature” (1.653) and capable of undertaking the great work to which he is dedicated—by writing it. Though he did not name it, The Prelude is a faithful title for a poem Wordsworth conceived of to himself as preparatory (cf. 1.158–59).
With De Quincey the visions have become sufficient for themselves. Confessions of an English Opium-Eater: Being an Extract from The Life of A Scholar signals De Quincey’s text as a fragment; moreover, its success fixed De Quincey ever afterwards as “the Opium-Eater.” Though it may seem that De Quincey anticipated Freud in his archaeology of the layers of the mind, an instructor might wish to propose a counter-model: that in De Quincey the “unconscious” matters less than the canny discovery that the intense psychological exploration that Wordsworth pioneered could be exaggerated, “dark”ened, and worked up into salable articles (to pun intentionally), divorced from any model of growth. Students who incline to attribute De Quincey’s visions to opium should be reminded of his initial caveat that “If a man ‘whose talk is of oxen’ should become an opium-eater, the probability is that (if he is not too dull to dream at all) he will dream about oxen,” and the proposition can be developed. As De Quincey’s ease of obtaining the drug shows, there was no difficulty of access: laudanum was uncriminalized and the most widely used sedative in Britain. Rather than presenting opium as the sufficient cause of De Quincey’s visions, one might argue that it is rather a literalization of imagination: De Quincey was not in fact transgressing in purchasing opium, he was creating in his writing (with more than a little pride and pretense to professionalism) the type of the imaginative writer as a transgressive, suffering figure. Instructors will have seen for themselves the line of descent in which De Quincey stands: Keats’s Ode on Melancholy and citation of “Bacchus and his pards” in Ode to a Nightingale (32), Coleridge’s Rime, Kubla Khan, and Dejection: An Ode. The materializing of imagination corresponds to its commercial success: the Opium-Eater is, fittingly, both an addict and a scholar with a particular expertise in political economy, who earns his living by prolifically manufacturing out of his ununified knowledge a prodigious number of essays for the periodicals. (One might compare Coleridge on “literature as a trade” and his alarm at the risk of turning into a mere compositor in Biographia Literaria 11, and consider how De Quincey blazons his imagination and integrity by his invalid incapacity for regular employment; or consider De Quincey the scholar/periodical writer as a figure who mediates Peacock’s opposition of real knowledge and outdated poetry.)

“Imagination” in the Confessions thus disguises the economic exigencies of the author: De Quincey had “created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed,” as Coleridge (and Wordsworth) declared that every great writer must do: he had secured his market niche. To pose the two languages—of imagination and economics—thus polemically is not to devalue the former, but to turn attention from De Quincey’s lurid confessions to the art of the Confessions. “Paint me, then,” begins “A Picture of the Opium-Eater,” and students should be asked to consider the careful construction of De Quincey’s writing, from a tableau such as this one down to the shape of his paragraphs and the rhythm of his sentences. (De Quincey was interested in the repetitions and elaborations of musical fugues). In Selections Grave and Gay, the collected edition of his writings (1853–60) begun under his supervision at the end of his life, De Quincey commented on those passages where “amusement passes into an impassioned interest” and alerted readers to their craftsmanship: “Two remarks only I shall address to the equity of my reader. First,
I desire to remind him of the perilous difficulty besieging all attempts to clothe in
words the visionary scenes derived from the world of dreams, where a single false
note, a single word in a wrong key, ruins the whole music; and, secondly, I desire
him to consider the utter sterility of universal literature in this one department of
impassioned prose." An instructor might easily set this ideal, and the "impassioned
prose" it inspired, against Hazlitt’s "familiar style."

It would be hard to pick styles more divergent than Austen’s measured under-
statement and Cobbett’s tirade of invective. Except to epitomize the range of writing
that flourished in the "Romantic" period, the instructor ought to resist any at-
ttempt to force the two together. It nonetheless may be worth noting that Austen’s
style is premised on the virtual unavoidability of miscommunication: the comedy
of the social interactions she minutely tracks depends on the repeated failure of
her characters quite to understand the nuances of the world in which they must
function. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth had insisted that “the
human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and vio-
 lent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity
who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is ele-
vated above another in proportion as he possesses this capability.” The more pel-
lucid the style, the more attentive readers must be so as not to miss its acute but
delicate discriminations; readers who mistake Austen’s clarity for transparency will
blunder badly. Irony separates the sheep from the goats, within and outside her
texts; like Wordsworth, her simplicity is a challenge to the capacity of readers.

Students might be asked to triangulate Wordsworth (the preface to and poems in
Lyrical Ballads), De Quincey (“gross and violent stimulants” personified, and
baroque style), and the tactics of “the most unlearned and uninformed female who
ever dared to be an authoress,” as Austen described herself in asserting her inde-
pendence against the Prince Regent’s chaplain and librarian (11 December 1815).

On the other hand, Cobbett, who drives his points home relentlessly, in our
passage self-consciously and slyly concentrates on a Semaphore, that is, a device for
signalling. Cobbett constructs a symbol, reversing the function its builders in-
tended: for the government the semaphore had been part of a necessary defense
against a French invasion, for Cobbett it is the sign of corrupt policies far more
dangerous to English liberty than the French. “And to that place a story apper-
tains,” wrote Wordsworth in Michael of the “straggling heap of unhewn stones”
that when attended to by the sympathetic imagination—first the poet’s, then of the
tourist/traveller who enters Greenhead Ghyll, then of the reader he figures—re-
leases the tragic story of the shepherd (18; 17). For Cobbett as well the landscape
discloses a story of human action to the keen eye: his “nature” is man-made, and
the story it tells is of economic and political injustice. Students might be asked to
recall various aspects of Lyrical Ballads and its Preface: to compare Wordsworth’s
“real language of men” to Cobbett’s vernacular, Wordsworth’s vision of “low and
rustic life” to Cobbett’s experience, Wordsworth’s characteristic displacement into
the past or into the sensitivity of the respondent to Cobbett’s immediacy and
anger, and Cobbett’s observation—“the soil is a beautiful loam upon a bed of
sand”—to Wordsworth’s “matter-of-factness,” as Coleridge criticized it in Biographia
Literaria 22 (a passage not printed here). Clare will provide a useful third term. Considering the differences between “pastoral” (the generic subtitle of Michael) and political rhetoric should deepen appreciation of both, for Cobbett’s is an imaginative style too, one that can be measured against Hazlitt’s and De Quincey’s, as suggested above. “The principal object” proposed by Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth wrote in the preface, “was to choose incidents and situations from common life . . . and . . . to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way.” The semaphore, and nature generally, will never look the same to one who has learned from Cobbett to read from their appearance the social structure that has shaped them. Cobbett’s indignation may return students to Blake’s London.

Readers may be puzzled by the geography of Mary Shelley’s The Swiss Peasant. The title locates the story in Switzerland, and the description of Fanny as “one of those lovely children only to be seen in Switzerland” (p. 995) reinforces the setting. But Soubiaco, where the narrator encounters her, is in Italy (see fn. 4) on “the river Anio” (p. 995), near Rome. The same uncertainty recurs at the close of the story, when Fanny takes up residence at Soubiaco, which Louis “passe[s] through . . . in his way” “into Italy” (p. 1006). One explanation suggested for this discrepancy is that because the stories in The Keepsake were often commissioned to accompany the illustrations, Shelley may have assumed an Italian setting from the dress in the painting by Henry Howard (1769–1847), engraved by Charles Heath, the proprietor of the annual, with which the story was published, and imperfectly adjusted her text. The editors welcome any light that users of this anthology can shed on the problem.

The representation of Switzerland in The Swiss Peasant is anomalous in another way as well. In the poem based on his tour of Switzerland, Descriptive Sketches (1793), Wordsworth had adopted the standard view that the Swiss mountaineers represented primeval man, free and independent. Napoleon’s invasion of Switzerland in 1798 particularly affected the English, as may be seen in Wordsworth’s Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland, the twelfth of the “Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty” in Poems, in Two Volumes (1807):

Two Voices are there; one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains; each a mighty Voice:
In both from age to age Thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen Music, Liberty!
There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought’st against Him; but hast vainly striven;
Thou from thy Alpine Holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.

Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft:
Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left!
For, high-soul’d Maid, what sorrow would it be
That mountain Floods should thunder as before,
And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
And neither awful Voice be heard by thee!
Byron’s *Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), cited by the narrator, is introduced by a sonnet apostrophizing Liberty—”Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!”—and the Chamois Hunter of *Manfred* sets “the free fame of / Of William Tell” (2.1.39–40) against Manfred’s gloomy hauteur. Closer in time to Shelley’s tale, Wordsworth filled his *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*, with praises of Aloys Reding, “Captain-General of the Swiss forces, which . . . opposed the flagitious and too successful attempt of Buonaparte to subjugate their country,” of William Tell, and of “the genuine features of the golden mean; / Equality by Prudence governèd,” liberty and serenity, to be found in Berne, the canton of Fanny’s birth (p. 996).

In contrast to these idealizing images of Switzerland, Shelley’s narrator observes that “those of the Swiss who are most deeply planted among the rocky wilds are often stultified and sullen” (p. 996), an opinion that may mirror that held by the readers of *The Keepsake* attribute to the target audience of the annual (see p. 22). Monsieur de Marville, presented as a bigoted aristocrat (p. 996), and his impetuous and condescending son Henry, behave like figures from ancien régime France rather than stereotypically republican Switzerland, and Madame de Marville, though benevolent, is relentlessly class-conscious and afraid of a misalliance: she offers Fanny “a bourgeois education, which would raise her from the hardships of a peasant’s life, and yet not elevate her above her natural position in society” (p. 996). Students might be asked to ponder the phrase “natural position,” especially in opposition to Switzerland as the land of equality and natural grandeur and the nature invoked decades earlier by, for example, Wordsworth or Paine or Burke. The plot bears out Madame de Marville’s “project,” joining the intrepid and self-sacrificing Fanny to the chastened and devoted Louis. Instructors may wish to compare the way in which Louis’s former radicalism is presented as a matter of “guilt” to be “expiated” by “his return to [domestic] virtue” (p. 1006) with the radicalism of the 1790s and of the young Percy Shelley, and with the philosophically radical but anti-violent Godwin. The wager of “a louis” that introduces Fanny (p. 995) turns in part on the character of Louis.