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Romantic Relays:
The Epistolary Condition of Imagination in Coleridge, Byron, and Poe

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Lauren Neefe

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Lauren Neefe

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel, Associate Professor, English
Dissertation Advisor

Peter J. Manning, Professor, English
Dissertation Advisor

Eric Haralson, Associate Professor, English
Chairperson of Defense

Kevis Goodman, Associate Professor, English, University of California, Berkeley

Meredith McGill, Associate Professor, English, Rutgers University

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

Romantic Relays:
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The dissertation follows the survival of letters in literature in the early nineteenth century, after the popularity of overtly epistolary genres dramatically declined. It posits an "epistolary condition," referring to the combination of tradition (rhetorical, literary) and practice (material, structural) that shapes the Romantic text and the author's emergence in print. A historically specific tension between the letter, a genre defined by formal characteristics, and letters, a proto-medium of communication, the epistolary condition points to an underdeveloped counternarrative to that of Romantic genius and authorship. Each of three chapters analyzes a genre-defining work of Romanticism for the varied presentation of the self as the text serializes over time. Coleridge's conversation lyrics, Byron's first verse romance, and Poe's ratiocinative tales about C. Auguste Dupin each advance the epistolary tradition in the interplay of print and manuscript, while the writer's correspondence mediates the production of each text and its author. The "apostrophic relay" of address in Coleridge's series of poems introduces the idiom of the epistolary condition in the context of a historically shifting sense of communication. The chapter on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* reframes Byron's notorious "egotism" as a heroic relay of intersubjective encounters. Poe's Dupin tales are shown to play out a discursive relay of authorial and editorial modes under the constraints of American reprint culture. In addition to developing original interpretations of high canonical works, the dissertation advances a number of active conversations in the discipline. It shifts the ground of scholarly engagement with the epistolary from the discourses of genre and the archive to that of media and mediation. In so doing, it joins other attempts to nuance the prevailing treatment of print culture as the determining medium of the early nineteenth century. Finally, it models a practice of "surface reading," one recent answer to symptomatic reading, and prioritizes the significance of the epistolary condition to the groundbreaking theory of "lyric reading."

For my parents, every one

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Introduction

Hidden in Plain Sight:
Relay and the Epistolary Condition of Romantic Imagination

Foucault begins "What Is an Author?" by declaring the arrival of the author to be "the privileged

moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the

sciences" (101). In English literary history, a crucial moment in this process of individualization

is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's concise definition of the imagination, written in 1815 to conclude

chapter 13 of the *Biographia Literaria* and published in 1817 to close the *Biographia*'s first

volume:

> The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or
> secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living
> Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a
> repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the
> infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former,
> co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the
> primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree,* and
> in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in
> order to re-create; where this process is rendered impossible, yet
> still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify."

A year later, Coleridge returns to this concept of creative agency in the passage on "Life" he

contributed to an essay his friend James Gillman, a physician, planned to submit to the Royal

College of Surgeons. The passage clarifies the relevance of the imagination, as "living Power,"

to the individualization Foucault aligns with the discursive formation of the author: "I define life

as *the principle of individuation,* or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is

presupposed by all its parts." The "unity in *multëity*" that is life, Coleridge writes, is "produced

ab intra," from within, "but *eminently*" (*Shorter Works* I:500). This dissertation describes the pressure that letters, as a material condition of textual iteration, place on the "kind" of agency Coleridge identifies with the imagination, which I take to be the individualized agency Foucault problematizes by positing the "author function." Trafficking in the discourses of genre and mediation, letters ensure the nonintegration of the Romantic work. In so doing, they trace the variability of identity the self attempts to integrate, or individualize, as a text is created.

A "very judicious letter" in fact occasions this defining moment in English literary history, now the locus classicus of Romantic imagination. Interpolated halfway through chapter 13, the letter from a "friend, whose practical judgement [Coleridge had] had ample reason to estimate and revere" interrupts what it renders the last gasp of an eight-chapter philosophical digression from the author's reflections on his life (*BL* I:300). Coleridge cites the letter both to defend the interruption of his discourse and to display the advice it dispenses, which is to keep the chapter's subject in view and save the rest of the digression's inquiry for the "great book on the CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY, which [he has] promised and announced." In this way Coleridge can avoid disappointing his readers, who have justifiably expected the "literary life and opinions" he promises in the title as an introduction to a selection of his poems. The effect of the letter, Coleridge declares immediately upon its closing, is the "complete conviction on [his] mind" to "content [himself] for the present with stating the main result of the Chapter" (304). That result is three succinct paragraphs on the imagination, fancy, and an essay he never wrote. The letter thus decisively marks the importance of the definitions that follow, while it bridges the discursive extremes represented by the discussion of Kant's physics and the distillation of the imagination that immediately follows.

The formal intervention mimes as it masks the material one, moreover, for Coleridge

wrote the letter to himself in what I think was an inspired act of self-preservation, undertaken in

eleventh-hour desperation in September 1815, weeks after the manuscript was due to the

publisher.[1] Not finished and needing an intervention to goad himself to his point (i.e., defining

the imagination), Coleridge makes a fact of epistolary fiction's disruptive technique. He uses the

letter to interrupt his mind's self-defeating narrative and redirect his attention to its desired, now

necessary end. The effect is not unlike that of the "person from Porlock" who, as he tells it in the

head note to "Kubla Khan," written contemporaneously with the letter of chapter 13, interrupted

Coleridge from his transcription of the few hundred lines he had composed in his opium sleep.

The imaginary correspondent deflects the superego in order to allow the ego its due; in

Coleridge's terms, it suspends the infinite productivity of the Primary Imagination in order to

tolerate the finitude of the Secondary. In plainest terms, the letter allows the man to get to his

point and deliver it.

It is here, where the demands of text and psyche meet, that I depart from the insight of

"The Letter as Cutting Edge," Gayatri Spivak's important assessment of this textual crux,

originally published in 1977 for the special issue of *Yale French Studies* on literature and

psychoanalysis. "Why," Spivak asked, "should a *false* disowning (since the letter is by Coleridge

after all) of the name of the self as author, a *false* declaration of the power of another, inhabit the

place of the greatest celebration of the self?" (212). In answer, she offers two Lacanian

interpretations of the fact, as she too recognizes it, that "Coleridge's desire for unitary coherence

seems constantly to be betrayed by a discourse of division" (215). First, the letter is a stop-gap

for the "centerless cycle of equal—infinitely substitutable—truths, each signifying the next and

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[1] An old schoolmate, John Mathew Gutch, had agreed to finance Coleridge during the preparation of the *Biographia Literaria* and take charge of its printing (*BL* xlix).

vice versa"; second, it is "the eruption of the Other onto the text of the subject" (216, 218). She then concludes, true to her deconstructive commitments, that the letter is an agent of deferral and postponement: it "halts the fulfillment of the author's apparent desire to present the complete development of his theory of the Imagination, even as it encourages and promises further writing and reading" (220). This double operation is its "cutting edge," what makes it an instrument of castration, "both a lack and an enabling," as Lacan defines it, and therefore the origin of the desire that shapes the boundaries of the self. It is evident already that, short of embracing the castration metaphor, I subscribe to Spivak's interpretations of the letter's productive disruption of the writer's textual and psychic effort; I too prioritize its purpose in enabling Coleridge to go on. The letter allows the man to make his point, as I stated above. And while I accept the letter as a deferral insofar as it "urges [Coleridge] to withdraw the Chapter from the present work, and to reserve it for [his] announced treatises on the Logos or communicative intellect in Man and Deity," I see no lack here (Coleridge *BL* I: 302). The letter is not a textual excision; there is no "suppressed," "missing," or "original chapter Thirteen" whose absence the letter delimits to render conspicuous (Spivak 211, 220). The chapter "on the imagination, or esemplastic power" has only ever existed with the letter that authorizes the summary conclusion.

I therefore find nothing "false" about Coleridge's epistolary fiction; it is not "disowning," dissemblance, insincerity, or inauthenticity. Rather, it is redirection, or, more properly, "relay." Only by posing as a friend to himself could Coleridge admit self-love with any relish: "The effect [of the Chapter] on my feelings," the "friend" states, "I cannot better represent, than by supposing myself to have known only our light airy modern chapels of ease, and then for the first time to have been placed, and left alone, in one of our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn" (*BL* I: 301). And by posing as a trusted projection of himself, he

could afford the insight to ironize the self-distortions that made his process interminable: the friend recommends deferring the chapter "because imperfectly as I understand the present Chapter, I see clearly that you have done too much, and yet not enough. You have been obliged to omit so many links, from the necessity of compression, that what remains, looks…like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower" (302–3). Therefore I neither accept Spivak's description of the letter writer, the "author's friend," as "the self split and disguised as the Other" (218). Numerous, yes, but the self cannot split if its unity was only ever imaginary. The letter marks out a space for the author to partition aspects of himself and relay through them to closure. It supplies the channel, or tributary, whereby the variegation of desire finds expression. Thus I deem Coleridge's "ruse" a tactical rather than symptomatic mechanism of self-regard, its insinuation emblematic of the epistolary condition of Romantic imagination.[2]

The Epistolary Condition

Let me clarify what I mean by the "epistolary condition." The epistolary condition of Romantic imagination is the combination of tradition (rhetorical, literary) and practice (material, structural) that shapes the Romantic text. It recognizes the presence of letters at the representational and material surface of the text as that which necessitates the "struggle," as Coleridge puts it, "to idealize and to unify" discrete perceptions into a whole, autonomous creation. At the level of representation, the purview of epistolary tradition, letters interrupt the textual surface by

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[2] Here I use *tactical* with reference to Michel de Certeau's definition of a "tactic," as opposed to a "strategy," in *The Practice of Everyday Life:* "I call a 'tactic,' on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.…The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.'" (xix). The epistolary, which is always aware of its dependence on time, is in the Romantic period exemplary of de Certeau's "tactic," and we shall see that his expression "on the wing" has an uncanny relevance to the flying rook in "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison," which provides the conclusion of chapter one, on Coleridge's Conversation Poems.

redirecting the plot or chain of thought at a given moment in the diegesis, or "story."[3] Examples abound in the novel and are especially easy to spot after the inception of free indirect discourse: Take Mr. Darcy's epistolary confession to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), set off by quotation marks as though the narrator were citing a prior text.[4] "'Be not alarmed, Madam, on receiving this letter,'" it begins, the anticipation of alarm signaling the intervention the letter performs. At the level of production, letters administer the text's composition (here in the narrow sense of arrangement and assemblage), which includes the interaction of manuscript and print as the text accumulates and iterates over time.[5] Draft verses, for example, are copied into letters, but letters also erupt in printed verse, perceptibly at its margins and more subtly through modes of address. A study like Leon Jackson's recent book clarifies the degree to which letters are meanwhile integral to the "authorial economies" of the early nineteenth century, a point to which Byron's correspondence with his publisher, John Murray, speaks as well.[6] Similarly, the role of the post office in defining and regulating national and imperial expansion from both sides of the Atlantic—and back and forth across it—bears on the period's epistolary condition. Thus, in keeping with Jerome McGann's "textual condition," the epistolary condition assumes the social and institutional specificity of a given piece of writing. It is, in short, the silent partner of the textual condition: hidden, as the saying goes, in plain sight.

The epistolary condition is, moreover, especially relevant to McGann's stated "corollary" of his theory, "that a 'text' is not a 'material thing' but a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced"

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[3] I refer here to Victor Shklovsky's classic distinction between story and plot (55–7).
[4] I should point out as well that *Pride and Prejudice* was drafted in the late 1790s as an epistolary novel, titled *First Impressions*.
[5] See Susan Stewart's discussion of *composition*'s range of meanings in "What Praise Poems Are For." Her discussion arises with specific reference to Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," a lyric I consider at length in the first chapter.
[6] See Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (2007).

(21). Chief among said practices of "communicative interchange" for the lyrics, narrative verse, and prose tales under consideration here is letter writing. Before turning to the questions of media raised by McGann's reference to communication, I want to call attention to the plural buried in his definition of the "text," because letter writing generates *letters,* which may very well be understood as a "material…set of events." As individual letters accumulate in and around a text in the course of its composition, they mark out the changing situations that contextualize the varying aspects of the author's self. Charting this set, or sequence, of self-contextualizing events, letters are an unrecognized "multeity" of the Romantic text.[7] I will be calling the cumulative effect of letters' multeity a "disjunctive integrity," as distinct from the self-conscious instability, fragmentation, and open-endedness by which the field generally recognizes its objects of study.[8] The term applies in turn to the author as a projection of the Romantic imagination, since text and author increasingly align through the period's adoption of autobiography for its privileged mode of sincerity and authenticity.

  I am, in short, proposing a heuristic significance to the distinction between a letter, in the singular, and letters, in the plural. The distinction serves to differentiate between the functions of genre and medium, that is, between the patterns that form and invite expectation and the practice that articulates the spaces of communication.[9] At the risk of being overly schematic, I propose, in

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[7] This claim accepts the "textual pluralism" Jack Stillinger advocates in *Coleridge and Textual Instability,* which recognizes a distinct authorial intention in each version of a literary work as it iterates in manuscript and print over time (119).

[8] See, for example, Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (1981); Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem* (1986); and Alexander Regier, *Fracture and Fragmentation in British Romanticism* (2010). Regarding the aesthetics of fragmentation with specific reference to Coleridge, see Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (1999), and David Fairer, *Organizing Poetry* (2009). Carmen Faye Mathes is developing an original approach to the problem of rupture by describing an "aesthetics of disappointment" in the caesurae of Romantic poetry ("Romantic Descent: Poetry and the Aesthetics of Disappointment, 1790–1820").

[9] Spivak uses *articulate* in precisely the way I too intend it to summarize the critical consensus on Coleridge's fictional letter, though, as I state above, I understand its operations differently: "The letter, by denying the full elaboration of a slippery argument, has successfully articulated the grand conclusion of Chapter Thirteen with what came before" (221). I want further to register the ideological implications of *articulation* as an act of assemblage and to historically situate it. It is, for example, a keyword for Stuart Hall, who, in reflecting on what he has learned about

other words, that *letter* refer to a genre, while *letters* designate a medium; that together they are the epistolary condition, working across manuscript and print in the production of Romantic writing. The distinction is useful because, first of all, it challenges the generic circumscription of the epistolary by neoclassical poetics and sentimental fiction and, second of all, it calls attention to unresolved contradictions in the value of the epistolary to those disciplines that negotiate between fact and fiction in the interest of interpretation and argument. Granted a documentary status, the individual letter testifies to authorial intention and historical or biographical fact. On the other hand inextricable from the origin of the novel, letters express the limit of the author as "oracle."[10] The dialogic accretion of intentions through multiple points of view, as in epistolary narrative, renders the blindnesses of the author, as historical being, as social and institutional subject: a warrant, certainly, for a hermeneutics of suspicion. At the same time, that accretion registers the shifting perspectives or positions of the writer, as a human being inscribed in a social and institutional, not to mention textual history. Encompassing both the rhetorical, representational demands of the letter and the intermediary effects of letters, the epistolary condition uncouples change and inconsistency from contradiction, duplicity, irony. Ultimately, I will argue, the distinction it holds in tension allows for an alternative to the symptomatic reading

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difference from Althusser's Marxism in "Signification, Representation, Ideology," identifies *articulation* as a needed concept for understanding social formations. "We have to think about the articulation between different [social] contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the different modalities through which they function" (92–3). Romantic letters, as they point to the transformation of the post office, as well as its mapping of the nation and empire through delivery networks, are, I think, a powerful site for examining the articulation Hall describes. Moreover, they work alongside and in cooperation with newsprint and its delivery, the effects of which were debated precisely in terms of their articulating effect (as articles). In *Georgic Modernity,* Kevis Goodman cites as emblematic George Crabbe's dismay at "that variety of dissociating articles which are huddled together in our Daily Papers," expressed in the preface to his poem "The Newspaper" (74). See also "The 'Task' of Conversation: Articulating the News" (78–88).

[10] "Oracle" is W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's epithet for the author at the conclusion of "The Intentional Fallacy": "Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (18).

that has implicated the epistolary since Lacan and Derrida debated the structural dynamics of "The Purloined Letter" as an allegory of intersubjective play.[11]

Lacan, as translated, uses the other keyword of this dissertation, *relay,* to describe at the outset of his famous seminar on Poe's story the movement of the signifier among the three positions in the analytical scene: "What interests us today is the manner in which the subjects relay each other in their displacement during the intersubjective repetition" (*Purloined Poe* 32). Here "relay" approximates the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s third definition of the word: "A group of people, esp. workers, appointed to relieve others or to operate in sequence." When I say that the epistolary condition extricates inconsistency from irony, it is to say, *pace* Lacan, that there can be relay, or sequence—and within a single identity—without displacement, or substitution. My use of relay is therefore more in line with the *OED*'s fourth set of definitions, which cluster around uses pertaining to what we now think of as media: in electronics, a switch "actuated by a signal in one circuit to open or close another circuit," the first use of which dates to 1838, historically coincident with the trilogy of tales "The Purloined Letter" concludes; in telecommunications, "an installation, device, or satellite which receives, amplifies, and retransmits radio signals so that they can be received over a larger area."[12] Switch or transmittor, these uses convey the intermediary function I wish to emphasize in the simultaneous operations of letter and letters: the articulation of the "in-between thing or area," that is, as Kevis Goodman recalls in her critical etymology of the term, Aristotle's expression in *De Anima* for what the Scholastics later translated as medium, with a "two-fold spatial reference—midpoint and intermediary agent" (18). Like anatomical joints, the relays produced by the epistolary condition

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[11] For the story and the debate and its brilliant mediation by Barbara Johnson, see Muller and Richardson, *The Purloined Poe.*
[12] Accessed December 2, 2013.

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are at once spaces of articulation and an articulated space: a disjunctive integrity. They translate

energy in the one case, context in the other.

In her landmark study of the epistolary novel, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form,* Janet

Gurkin Altman refers to the "space of structured interplay…between letters" as the "joint work"

of the "epistolary mosaic as art" (183). This space—at once, I posit, defined by a single letter and

concatenated by the sequence of letters—is for Altman the location of the text's "most

compelling voice," where "the creator…who disclaims authorship reclaims it." Neither that

"voice" nor any singular "authorship" may be reclaimed for a unified subjectivity, however,

despite the declared ambitions of Romantic imagination. As the apostrophic moments in

Coleridge's Conversation Poems demonstrate, the voice of the relay sounds an intersubjective

excess; or, as German media theorist Bernhard Siegert defines our common term in *Relays:*

Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System, it sounds the "site where the people became

entangled in the discourse" (9). Among the people entangled at these sites is the author himself,

who, Siegert later explains, wields the discursive power:

> The Romantic author, like the subject of the postal service in
> general, was therefore a relay. He existed only as the holder of the
> postal horses, as the authority of a transition. Crossed by a postal
> unconscious, the subject could establish itself as a speaker only by
> interpreting. Because it always had to be supposed that Truth
> existed at the site of the Other if it was to become speakable,
> interpretation was the discursive mode that allowed for the
> production of Truth. Discursive power did not mean asserting
> one's self at the site of Truth, but rather at the site of its relay. (80–
> 81)

If one forgives the extravagance of his rhetorical figuration, one might recognize in Siegert's

characterization of the Romantic author the analytical genius of Poe's proto-detective, C.

Auguste Dupin, the hero of the tale that held so much significance for Lacan and Derrida. As

vulnerable as Poe himself, negotiating the constraints of the transatlantic print economy of the

early nineteenth century, Dupin is not finally the author of the story he always seems to write the end of. In the tale which introduces his audience to Dupin, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe offers the card game whist, a cousin of bridge, as a figure for the analyst's, or Romantic author's, entanglement in the relays of intersubjective play. Turning away from the intersubjective circuit of the game in order to master the play, the analytical genius masters the game but is still subject to its play. My dissertation questions whether that turning—the imaginative turn dictated by the epistolary condition of the text—is any kind of mastery at all.

Letter Is to Letters…

Whether the critical investment is aesthetic, literary historical, or historicist, analyses of the epistolary take it for granted that the letter is a genre. This is firm ground. The letter qualifies as a genre because, simply put, it is a type: a type of writing and a type of object. It is defined by features that are portable across formats; one recognizes a letter as a letter, as one recognizes a poem, a novel, a play, etc., whether it is handwritten, printed, digitized, or read aloud (the common practice at the turn of the nineteenth century). Reduced to the essentials, a letter's defining features are its superscription and subscription, or address and signature, with a little latitude its greeting and valediction, respectively. Almost anything now separates the two, though the *ars dictaminis,* an adaptation of classical rhetoric to the administrative needs of medieval bureaucracies, formalized the body of the letter by reducing Cicero's seven-part rhetorical model to four: *exordium, narratio, argumentatio,* and *conclusio* (Perelman 97–104). From this model evolved the letter-writing manuals, or secretaries, that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century and proliferated in the eighteenth. In *Empire of Letters,* Eve Tabor Bannet notes the domestication of this bureaucracy—an important aspect of what Jürgen Habermas

influentially described as the "structural transformation of the public sphere"—in the proliferation of letter-writing manuals (226–7). "Universal letter writers," as they were also called, were collections of letters modeling the written conduct proper to an evolving array of representative social transactions. Proper conduct in each scenario was determined by the relative social rank and location of sender and recipient and by the nature of the business between them. The manuals share an understanding of the genre's moralizing discipline with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, whose incorporation of cited letters to the editor in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* was part of the same social transformation. Where family was a matter of business, not affect, a letter conducting business was a family affair, rendering the familiar letter, the sibling subgenre of the official letter, less private and more formalized than it might give us to think.

Already a curious feature of the epistolary genre presents itself: the individual letter hardly ever stands alone in public. Indeed so strictly does the genre adhere to this principle that one might consider for a moment the possibility that a single letter makes sense in theory only. In practice, one letter always implicates others, whether it is the editor's response to a reader's letter, the scenarios collected in a manual, the sequence that generates a narrative, or the archived correspondence of a historical figure. If ever there were a single letter, it would seem to be the closed circuit of Coleridge's letter to himself in chapter thirteen of the *Biographia Literaria,* and yet we know that letter to be a fiction because Coleridge wrote as much a year and a half later in an actual posted letter to Thomas Curtis: a perfect demonstration of the exception that proves the rule (*CL* IV: 728).[13] The letter's resistance to the material boundaries of its form is precisely why criticism of the genre in most cases treats the epistolary as supplementary to another genre.

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[13] In another echo of the head note to "Kubla Khan," Coleridge claims in the letter to Curtis that the letter was "written without taking [his] pen off the paper except to dip it in the inkstand" (*CL* IV 728).

Bannet's study of letter manuals is the case in point, but typically the letter is secondary to the novel. The novel's "rise," Ian Watt observed, is tied to its claim to an unprecedented realism, a claim entangled, I would suggest, in eighteenth-century novels' imitation of edited collections, of which the letter manual is one type, the collected correspondence another (9–11).

The foundational study in this category of criticism, in which the letter supplements the novel, is Altman's comparative analysis of the English, French, and German standard bearers of epistolary fiction (Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa,* Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* Goethe's *Werther,* and Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses,* among others). Altman's two-fold objective is, first, to identify the properties inherent to the letter and, second, to achieve a method of understanding the way letters generate meaning. "In numerous instances," she states, "the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed by writers and readers of epistolary works" (4). Here "works" does not refer exclusively to the novel, although, as one might expect, it is the genre that predominates among Altman's examples of the letter's six basic characteristics: its mediation of distance; its negotiation of privacy; its management of internal and external readers; a discourse uniquely constituted of a particular writer and reader, a present tense, and temporal contingencies; its antiteleological potential; and its simultaneously discrete and integrative function in a greater narrative (*passim*). In explicit debt to Altman, as well as to Bakhtin and Todorov, Linda Kauffman adds to this set of "formal characteristics" the laws of gender and genre, gathered under the psychological imperatives of desire. This study of Romantic imagination conspicuously brackets both the novel and female writers in order to control for the overdetermined relationship between the two. The epistolary condition interpellates its subjects irrespective of gender and genre.

"Is artifice inseparable from longing, from language, from literature?" Kauffman asks, with an eye on Derrida's provocation in *The Post Card:* "Mixture is the letter, the epistle, which is not a genre but all genres, literature itself" (Kauffman 17; Derrida 48).[14] Starting from one version of the beginning, she outlines the discursive pattern which Ovid's *Heroides* established as precedent for all subsequent epistolary fictions: "Each epistle repeats the pattern: the heroine challenges the lover to read her letter, rages against the forces that separated them, recalls past pleasure, speculates about his infidelity, laments his indifference, and discusses the sole act that engages her in his absence: writing" (17). This reproducible outline echoes the formulae, if not the content, Bannet describes in eighteenth-century letter manuals; yet each letter also stages a "revolt" against the heroine's supposed fate, reflecting that characteristic resistance to the limits of its form, a resistance Kauffman carries through in her critical approach. Her book, she declares, is a study not only of genre but of the "transgressions of genre" (18).[15] In the Romantic period, as both Nicola Watson and Mary Favret have demonstrated, this transgressive potential easily adapts to the discourse of revolutionary politics and the crossing of geographic and national boundaries. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Elizabeth Hewitt has shown, it adapts to the needs of a newly declared nation, attempting to unify disparate and unsettled geographies and identities. "In its generic specificity" Hewitt writes, the "epistolary form…reveals…the particular features that mark the articulated 'exceptionalism' of American democracy as it was conceived from the Articles of Confederation to the Confederate Constitution" (4). These studies' respective focus on prose narrative and fiction, however, attenuates the "generic specificity" Hewitt claims for the "epistolary form." What value there is

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[14] "The Purveyor of Truth," Derrida's response to Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" and the basis of *The Post Card,* was published in 1975. The oft-cited passage from *The Post Card* is from the book's first section, a discursive novella titled "Envois." *The Post Card* was published in the original French in 1980, as was "The Law of Genre," which opens in the same key: "Genres are not to be mixed." (55).

[15] For Derrida, the law of genre is a "principle of contamination" ("The Law of Genre" 57).

in Derrida's oft-cited dictum derives from its acknowledgment that the letter is peculiar not only for the transgression of, revolt against, or exception to its generic parameters but also for its capacity to facilitate differentiated genres' mutual violation, or "contamination."[16]

As paranoiac "contamination" or the more neutral "mixture," the letter's articulating power explains its prominence in, for example, G. Gabrielle Starr's account of the interdependence of lyric and novel in the long eighteenth century.[17] Yet in spite of its centrality, the letter retains its supplementary status in Starr's understanding of generic mixture in the period. Her emphasis on the "revisionary" aspect of the lyric and novel's own "supplementary" relationship—the novel, she argues, revises the lyric to its own dialogic ends—succeeds in sending the letter even further into hiding. *Clarissa* is the first instance in her argument, she states, because "Richardson's greatest novel focuses on a dilemma shared by writers of letters and lyrics alike: the epistolary writer is isolated as a feeling subject, imprisoned at the very least by the force and uniqueness of emotion, and attempts to use the letter as a tool to build a true consensus and community" (11). Starr draws here on William Dowling's definitive assessment of the eighteenth-century verse epistle, *The Epistolary Moment,* which rests on the point I want to foreground, that a single letter always implicates other letters. For Dowling, this characteristic explains the verse epistle's eclipse of the lyric for the better part of the eighteenth century: its ability to represent a community in conversation answers the threat of absolute isolation posed by, for example, Locke's account of individualized consciousness and Hume's insistence on the instability of personal identity (2–4). By the Romantic period, Starr concludes, "free indirect discourse supplies the kind of picture of interiority letters can give, but without the limitations of

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[16] For a prestructuralist version of this observation, see Binkley, "Essays and Letter Writing."
[17] Leah Price makes a similar argument about the lyricization of the novel, but with greater emphasis on the composition and recomposition of different kinds of books, in *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel.* See chapter 1, "Richardson's Economies of Scale."

a letter's single vision; similarly romantic poetry often subsumes epistolary dialogue into the imagined space of colloquy" (12). Here in plain sight, Starr's extension of Dowling's argument verges on the distinction I have proposed, between the representational significance of a single letter and the space the accumulation of letters traces. This double duty of *sui* resistance and accommodation to other genres points, in short, to the possibility that genre does not fully account for the role of the epistolary in a given text. The complete rendering requires an acknowledgment of letters' participation in what John Guillory calls the "media concept," which recognizes the medium as a technology of communication.

…As Genre Is to Medium

Guillory's "attempt to give an account of [the media concept's] genesis within the longer history of reflection on communication," from Aristotle and Bacon to Adorno and Benjamin, returns this genealogy of the epistolary condition to McGann's corollary to his theory of the textual condition. The tension Starr implies between the "limitations" of the letter (not necessarily its "single vision") and the "picture" letters map (not necessarily of "interiority") is, I suggest, the tension McGann too hides in plain sight when he defines the text not as a bounded thing, but as a "material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced" (21). The meaning of *communication,* Guillory observes, shifts over the course of the eighteenth century from a reference to spatial contiguity (as in a room that "communicates" with the room adjacent) to the sense of mental continuity, or understanding (331). With greater specificity than the notion of a textual condition, the epistolary condition locates the materiality of space and time sedimented in the communicative interchange

of letters.[18] And "specificity is key," Lisa Gitelman argues in *Always Already New,* because "media…are very particular sites for very particular, importantly social as well as historically and culturally specific experiences of meaning" (8). Chapter 1 illustrates how letters behave like the more modern media to which Gitelman is referring, locating apostrophic moments in Coleridge's Conversation Poems as specific sites of intersubjective experience. The poet even uses *communicate* in its nearly outdated sense to preface the version of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" that he copies into a letter to his friend Robert Southey. The bower to which the title refers "communicates," Coleridge writes, between his own garden and his neighbor's; and this vision of shared space resonates significantly with the closing image of the poem—a rook in flight between the imprisoned speaker and his perambulating friends—to produce a poignant figure of the epistolary condition.

One might take Guillory's critical philology of communication and media as an oblique response to Friedrich Kittler's grandiose assertion that "the term *medium* did not exist" at the turn of the nineteenth century because all communication transpired through the "general medium" of writing (36). Guillory's coupling of the two terms opens with the rejoinder that the "concept of a medium of communication was absent but *wanted* for the several centuries prior to its appearance" at the end of the nineteenth century, in tandem with the emergence of telecommunications technologies (321). I maintain that the articulations of space and time that are crucial to the media concept as Guillory outlines it are already mobilized by the epistolary topoi established in the mid eighteenth century and remediating at the turn of the nineteenth century, as the Romantic period finds its strength. Thus the epistolary condition is both a warrant for the wanted concept and my own rejoinder to Kittler's claim; the epistolary is the medium of

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[18] In *Reading Public Romanticism,* Paul Magnuson calls out the singular role of letters for the crucial interpretive task of identifying the "location" of a text in the public discourse (38, 52–3).

the "writing" Kittler reserves for that condition of possibility—so universally, I might add, as to be, like Derrida's "literature itself," without application.

More so than print, the epistolary condition performs the determining role that in recent years tends to be assigned to print, as in Celeste Langan's "Understanding Media in 1805," which, citing Kittler, presents Walter Scott's use "of his own book" in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* to "redefine print as the 'general medium' by contrasting it to the archaic arts redefined as [print's] content" (70).[19] Chapter 2 illustrates how letters are the medium, in the Aristotelian sense, of Byron's poetics, as a single letter often supplies the midpoint between manuscript and print while letters communicate between the two. In 1812, between the first and second editions of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* for example, the poet inserts an annotation into the second canto's indictment of Lord Elgin at the suggestion of Edward Daniel Clarke, a Cambridge don with whom Byron had just begun a correspondence upon his return to England from the tour the poem documents. The annotation refers explicitly to its source and cites verbatim the language Clarke suggests in his admiring letter but for the conspicuous elision of the three words "at the time," effectively highlighting the manuscript letter's office as a spatiotemporal hinge between the verse and the printed book that envelops it. The same chapter uses a key stanza from Canto III, undertaken four years after the introduction of his epistolary hero in Cantos I and II, to theorize the spatiotemporal hinges of Byron's textual pilgrimage as activity and substance, midpoint and intermediary agent. The epistolary condition is, in Byron's words, the "fitting medium" of his self-dramatization. Chapter 3 illustrates how Poe, expressing the desire for "*representing* [his] mind in its various phases," reproduces the "fyttes" of Byron's epistolary condition within the authorial constraints of American reprinting practice in the 1840s.

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[19] Here collapsed in "his own book" are references both to the illustrated book that presents Walter Scott's poem and the magic book that figures prominently therein; it is no coincidence that the wizard to whom the latter book belongs, Michael Scott, shares his author's name.

Encompassing the communicative practices of literature and history, the individual and the social, of private and public, of sites and networks, the epistolary condition of the Romantic period also satisfies Gitelman's definition of media as "socially realized structures of communication" (7). The inevitability of self-reference amid the social commerce of epistolary writing adheres to Gitelman's further elaboration of the term. "Media," she writes, "are so integral to a sense of what representation itself *is,* and what counts as adequate—and thereby commodifiable—representation, that they share some of the conventional attributes of both art historical objects and scientific ones" (4). Whereas Gitelman's interest then tends toward the representational alliance between media and science by way of technological innovations such as the phonograph and digital machines, my own tends toward the representational alliance between media and art: between the genre of the letter, the medium that is letters, and the literary as art.[20] Gitelman likes the comparison of science and media because it "helps to locate media at the intersection of authority and amnesia," where the "supporting protocols" become transparent, such that "scientists and society at large forget many of the norms and standards they are heeding, and then forget that they are heeding norms and standards at all" (6–7). The epistolary has enjoyed the reputation of being exemplarily literary for being absolutely incapable of letting its "users" forget its norms and standards as a "frame for reading." It is, in other words, a commonplace of epistolarity that its first gesture refers to the scene of writing, be it merely siting the date and time of composition or describing the composition's immediate occasion. Shifting the representational emphasis from self-referential tropes of embodiment to relays of self-presentation and address reveals, on the other hand, a particular "amnesia" in the critical investigations of letters after the disappearance of the epistolary novel.

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[20] Gitelman concedes to "allowing for a lot of play in that word *represents*" (4).

Because it redefines the way we perceive the textual surface, the epistolary condition lends itself to a "hermeneutics of susceptibility," rather than suspicion, that is, the hermeneutics Anne Cheng proposes by way of the architectural and racialized "skins" of Adolf Loos and Josephine Baker in the recent special issue of *Representations* on "surface reading": "By this I mean a reading practice that is willing to *follow*, rather than suppress, the wayward life of the subject and object in dynamic interface" (102).[21] The chapters of this dissertation do just that: each follows the wayward life of a text not intended as a s equence yet become one; each history follows the sequence both of publication and of self-presentation. The most dynamic interface of subject and object in the group of lyrics known as the Conversation Poems, the group of cantos known as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* and the group of stories known as the Dupin tales is that which the epistolary condition of each renders as the surface of the text. "Sometimes," Cheng argues, "it is not a question of what the visible hides but how it is that we have failed to see certain things on its surface" (101). Free indirect discourse and the sublime interiority of lyric may indeed have superseded the "epistolary moment" of the mid eighteenth century, but we have failed to see where and how letters continue to dictate the contours of Romantic texts and their authors.

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[21] The fall 2009 special issue of *Representations* emerged from a symposium organized to commemorate and revisit the significance of symptomatic reading at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious.* For the context and the array of possibilities for a hermeneutics that might be called "surface reading," see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's introduction, "Surface Reading: An Introduction."

Chapter 1

The Apostrophic Relay:
Purloining the Lyric I of Coleridge's Conversation Poems

In 1925, George McLean Harper singled out eight of Coleridge's meditative blank-verse lyrics

for their reproducible "[p]oignancy of feeling, intimacy of address, and ease of expression"

(287). He argued that these eight poems constituted a then underappreciated corpus of

Coleridge's poetic achievement, overshadowed by "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Kubla

Khan," and "Christabel" (284). In chronological order of c0.2312.3333omposition, the poems

were "The Eolian Harp" (1795), "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement" (1796),

"This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), "Frost at Midnight" (1798), "Fears in Solitude"

(1798), "The Nightingale" (1798), "Dejection: An Ode" (1802), and "To a Gentleman" (1807),

which he collectively named the "Conversation Poems."[1] Though Harper makes no mention of it

in his essay, Coleridge had some awareness of his innovation. In a marginal note above "The

Eolian Harp" in a copy of *Sibylline Leaves* now at Yale*,* the poet confesses to "noticing" he has

"some claim to the thanks of no small number of the readers of poetry in having first introduced

this species of short blank verse poems—of which Southey, Lamb, Wordsworth, and others have

since produced so many exquisite specimens" (ctd. in Mays RT 232).[2] The legacy Coleridge

could only go so far as to observe was secured by M.H. Abrams in 1965, when he influentially

reconfigured Harper's canon to include as well the great odes of Wordsworth, Shelley, and

Keats, citing "The Eolian Harp" as the "inaugural instance" of the "greater Romantic lyric" (80).

By way of Abrams, however, the sociality of the Conversation Poems yielded to the priority of

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[1] Here and throughout I use the most common abbreviated titles of the poems, which vary in length and sometimes substance throughout the many versions of the individual poems.

[2] J.C.C. Mays's edition of the *Poetical Works* is in three two-part volumes. Volume 1 is the Reading Text, hereafter RT; Volume 2 is the Variorum Text, hereafter VT. Volume 3 contains the plays.

voice in the interest of what Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins call "lyric reading."[3] Whereas "conversation" is, for Harper, the right designation because "even when they are soliloquies the sociable man who wrote them could not even think without supposing a listener" (285), for Abrams, it is appropriate "because [the poems] are written (though some of them only intermittently) in a blank verse which at its best captures remarkably the qualities of the intimate speaking voice" (81). Turning from the lyric's purchase on voice and the metaphysics of presence to the prospect of a demystified historicism and Romantic sociality, subsequent scholars have hewn to the situation, rather than the speech, of the poems' "conversation."[4] This chapter observes the poems' practice of shifting address as it emerges from their epistolary condition. These "apostrophic relays" pressure the "intimacy" common to both formalist and historicist definitions of the high Romantic genre.

To be clear, the crucial term is Coleridge's, not Harper's, derived from the subtitle of "The Nightingale" as it appeared in *Sybilline Leaves* in 1817: "A Conversation Poem." Most critics understand the title as Abrams understands it: a reference to the poem's plain diction and agile blank verse, the imitation of the "language really spoken by men" that Wordsworth would later "recommend" in the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (254). This "ease of expression" is, furthermore, generally recognized as the technical innovation of the early Romantics' early lyrics (Harper 287).[5] As it first appeared in *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, however, it was "A

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[3] For accounts of lyric reading as a formation (and deformation) of twentieth-century literary criticism, see Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading,* and the collaborations between Jackson and Yopie Prins, especially "Lyrical Studies."

[4] A representative sampling includes Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988); Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (1988) and *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998); and Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (2008).

[5] See, for example, Max Schulz: "[H]is conversation voice…derives from the descriptive-meditative poem; but he has given to the formal, stylized elements of this genre a new informality and spontaneity. His response to a short-lived domestic happiness and his philosophical belief in the oneness of life helped him to transform the topographical poem, with its apostrophe to nature, narrative and didactic digression, and stiff Thomsonian blank verse, into a record of friendly discourse or silent musing which is both spontaneous and whole" (73).

Conversational Poem" (my emphasis). For a poet so disposed to minute revision, this change

ought to mark a meaningful distinction. Indeed, it constitutes one of the only substantive

revisions he made to "The Nightingale" for *Sibylline Leaves* in 1815. Yet little significance has

been attached to the difference between "Conversational" and "Conversation."[6] It ought,

however, to index Coleridge's changed relationship to poetry and to himself as a poet in the

intervening two decades, however, signaling his resignation of the poetic genius he merely

disavows during the productive 1790s.

As he prepared *Sibylline Leaves* for publication, Coleridge was also writing the

Biographia Literaria, wherein the "language of conversation" becomes a focal point of his

retrospective quarrel with Wordsworth's poetics, specifically as expressed in the preface to

Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge is newly intent to distinguish among conversation, prose, and poetry

where Wordsworth had asserted no "essential difference" between "the language of prose and

metrical composition" (253).[7] "Unless," Coleridge declares in chapter 18, "the difference denied

be that of the mere *words,* as materials common to all styles of writing, and not of the *style* itself

in the universally admitted sense of the term, it might be naturally presumed that there must exist

a still greater [difference] between the ordonnance of poetic composition and that of prose, than

is expected to distinguish prose from ordinary conversation" (II: 60–61). The dispute, as

Coleridge acknowledges, starts from what Wordsworth means by "language": whether he means

prose and verse must use the same vocabulary (i.e., "words") or the same manner of expression

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[6] J.C.C. Mays does not even note it in introducing the Reading Text version for his edition of the *Poetical Works* (516). On occasion, a critic decides that one or the other title more appropriately characterizes the poems' shared traits. I have in mind, for example, Scott Simpkins's claim that "[s]ince the poem presents a one-sided conversation with two silent auditors, [the conversation] designation seems more appropriate" (242).

[7] For two accounts of this quarrel that test the questions of orality at stake in Coleridge's claims, see Celeste Langan, "Pathologies of Communication from Coleridge to Schreber," and Margaret Russett, "Meter, Identity, Voice: Untranslating *Christabel*." Although the Horatian identification of conversation and prose has its own implications for epistolary orality, I am more concerned with what remains conversation in the poem once Coleridge discounts conversational orality (in the guise of prose or blank verse) as poetry.

(i.e., "style"). Instead of clarifying the ambiguity, Coleridge shifts the emphasis to the "ordonnance" of these three means of expression (prose, verse, conversation), that is, their arrangement, with the accompanying sense of decree implicated in his aesthetics of organic determination. For Coleridge in 1815, diction and style are less relevant than organization to the hierarchy of genres and the defense of Poetry. "Poetic composition" and "ordinary conversation" are now remote from each another, and he no longer identifies as a poet, having "abandon[ed] poetry altogether" in 1800 to "reserve for [himself] the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand [Wordsworth's and Southey's] writings, as they deserve to be felt & understood" (*CL* 1:623). So "The Nightingale" becomes "A Conversation Poem" in 1815 because it is no longer poetry.

In 1798, "The Nightingale" is still poetry. As "A Conversational Poem," it is Coleridge's primary lyric contribution to *Lyrical Ballads,* eventually prefaced by Wordsworth with the claim Coleridge then disputes in the *Biographia Literaria;* the earlier subtitle avows the offending claim's equation of the "language of" verse and prose.[8] In other words, the distance Coleridge later wants to put between poetry and conversation as the domain of prose is inherent to his engagement with Horatian familiarity. Published two years before "The Nightingale," the second of the Conversation Poems, "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," bears the epigraph "*Sermoni propriora.*—Hor." It is well known to be a misquotation of the *Satires* I.iv.42*, "sermoni* propiora," variously translated as "closer to conversation," "…to talk," or "…to prose" and alludes to a passage in which Horace disqualifies himself as a poet because his language, though metered, is too familiar.[9] Coleridge knew the correct phrase, which he

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[8] Coleridge does not distinguish between editions of the text in his discussion of *Lyrical Ballads* in the *Biographia Literaria.*
[9] The epigraph is added for second publication in Coleridge's *Poems* of 1797 (*PW* VT 353). For the translations of *sermoni* as "conversation," "talk," and "prose," see Fuchs, Bovie, and Fairclough, respectively.

scribbled at the bottom of a 1799 manuscript of "Fears in Solitude," the most overtly political

and least characteristic of the Conversation Poems: "The above is perhaps not Poetry,—but

rather a sort of Middle thing between Poetry & Oratory—sermoni propior.—Some parts are, I

am conscious, too tame even for animated prose" (*PW* I.1 469). The note alone affirms the

poem's place among the Conversation Poems, as it brings together the Horatian epigraph of

"Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement" with its first published title: "Reflections on

Entering into Active Life. A Poem, which affects not to be Poetry." More significantly, the

recapitulation shows Coleridge maintaining the Horace's aesthetic *dis*avowal in its precise form

through the first publication of *Lyrical Ballads* and his "conversational poem." One can

nevertheless observe the slide from affectation, which preserves the poem's identity as poetry, to

tentative negation, in the direction of the *Biographia*'s absolute distinction between prosaic verse

and Poetry. By 1802, after he purports to have abandoned poetry, the severance appears to be

complete. Coleridge cites the Horatian phrase a third time in a letter of 10 September to William

Sotheby. Concluding a critique of the moralizing similes in the blank verse poems of William

Lisle Bowles's *Poems* (1801), he writes: "I do not mean to *exclude* these formal Similies—there

are moods of mind, in which they are natural—pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will

often have, & sometimes express; but they are not his highest, & most appropriate moods. They

are 'Sermoni propiora' which I once translated— 'Properer for a Sermon.' The truth is—Bowles

has indeed the *sensibility* of a poet; but he has not the *Passion* of a great Poet (*CL* II: 864)."[10] It

appears that the conversational mood is no longer passionate enough to qualify as Poetry.

    The "conversational" may not be poetry in 1815, but the poem is "conversation" from its

inception. Its familiar tone and prosaic temper are not alone what align "The Nightingale" with

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[10] According to *Table Talk,* it is Lamb who in fact translated the phrase as "properer for a sermon" (1:314). It is probably a pun on Coleridge's training for the ministry at the time he wrote "Reflections," the poem to which the epigraph is attached.

Horace as verse that "affects not to be Poetry." The invocation of the Augustan poet situates the

poem's conversation in the tradition of English epistolary verse. As D.J. Palmer writes, the

"English verse letter is a revival of the form used by Horace. His own description of his epistles

as '*sermones,*' or 'conversations,' was appropriate to their familiar style, and their main

themes—the praise of retiredness and the discussion of literature—became the principal subjects

of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century verse epistle" (74). The Conversation Poems trace the

informality and local ethic of the genre that defined the eighteenth-century verse epistle as well,

though Coleridge ultimately eschewed Horace's odes.[11] What I am calling the "epistolary

condition" of the Conversation Poems' composition, however, involves more than the

repurposing of neoclassical tradition. The practice of exchange that frames and composes the

poems is another significant dimension of their material existence, which, again, the critical turn

to less author-centered, more contextualizing methods of interpretation has long since restored

the compositional "conversation" of Coleridge's circle.

The Dejection Ode's well-known overwriting of a verse letter to Sara Hutchinson thus

reads easily as a bid for lyric transcendence after the verse epistle's attempt to "solve in literary

terms the philosophical problem of solipsism as it arose between Locke's *Essay Concerning*

Human Understanding and Beattie's attack on Humean skepticism" (Dowling 3). The Dejection

Ode is at the same time inextricable from the "lyrical dialogue" in which Coleridge and his circle

were engaged at the turn of the nineteenth century.[12] Indeed the notable redirection of the poem's

address from "Sara" to "Wordsworth," which is only the most conspicuous of the apostrophic

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[11] Below an early translation of the popular neo-Latin Polish poet Casimir in the 1828 *Poetical Works* is a note in Coleridge's hand: "Mem.—Very like one of Horace's Odes, *starched.*" According to Mays, the "comment, certainly derogatory as far as [C's] own lines are concerned, may also be intended to apply to Casmir's original, and reflects C's attitude to Horace specifically as a lyric poet" (RT 118). I have been arguing that Coleridge was imitating Horatian disavowal before his attitude turned to disdain.
[12] Paul Magnuson applies "lyrical dialogue" primarily to Coleridge and Wordsworth's relationship, though it really ought to apply to the whole circle, as Judith Thompson's energetic championing of John Thelwall's role in early Romanticism demonstrates. See "An Autumnal Blast, A Killing Frost."

relays discussed below, has long been understood as an acknowledgment of the degree to which the verse letter was a response to hearing Wordsworth recite the first stanzas of what became his great ode, "Intimations of Immortality." Wordsworth acted in kind, drafting "Resolution and Independence" in response to Coleridge's recitation of the verse letter. The resulting triad is the most celebrated of the poetic correspondences to emerge from the poets' relationship, most of which involve that "species of short blank verse poems" Coleridge wrote between 1795 and 1807.

Other clusters of correspondent poems include Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," which unquestionably invokes Coleridge's earlier lyrics. In fact, the dialogue was already apparent to Harper and Abrams. Harper hears "the grand climax" of "Tintern Abbey" in the "one Life within us and abroad" and the "intellectual breeze" of "The Eolian Harp" (288). He also compares the particular phrasing of Wordsworth's "famous brave remark, 'Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her'" (123–4) to the parallel declaration toward the end of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison": "Henceforth I shall know/ That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure" (60–1; Harper 290). Abrams observes a structural parity between "Tintern Abbey" and "Frost at Midnight," composed five months earlier, as well as echoes of "specific concepts and phrases" (82). Perceptible in the moments of greatest conceptual significance, these signs of exchange suggest correspondence more than they unfold a dialogue. A more literal exchange, such as that represented by the two Great Odes and "Resolution and Independence," is realized in "To a Gentleman," the last of the canonical eight Conversation Poems. In full, the original title makes the dialogue in which it is engaged explicit: "To W. Wordsworth/ Lines composed, for the greater part on the Night, on which he/ finished the recitation of his Poem (in thirteen Books) concerning the growth/ and history of his own

mind, Jan[ry], 1807. Cole-orton, near Ashby de la Zouch." And before it was *The Prelude,* the poem Coleridge heard that night "concerning the growth and history [Wordsworth's] own mind" was addressed to "That other spirit…who is now/ So near..., that meek confiding heart/ So reverenced," and it was known to his coterie as "The Poem to Coleridge" (1805; 237–9, 248).

The disciplinary trajectory that describes these lyric correspondences continues to expand the circle of participants in Coleridge's lyrical conversation beyond Wordsworth by mapping the network of his contemporaneous relations with Charles Lloyd, Thomas Poole, William Sotheby, and others, not to mention Robert Southey, Dorothy Wordsworth, and John Thelwall.[13] As Judith Thompson has recently written of his dialogue with the latter, "Wordsworth is not the only, but only the best-known, catalyst" of Coleridge's "dependent" imagination (452). Even so, neither dialogue nor correspondence adequately speaks to the epistolary condition of the poems and its consequence for the imagination, or subjectivity, it produces, because they do not recognize letters as a material context of the poems' creation. Paul Magnuson's strategies for "reading public Romanticism" begin to more fully account for that context with respect to Romantic lyrics generally and even acknowledge the significance of the letter to that context. Following Mary Favret's observation of the "material role" of the Romantic letter in directing "its audience to confront historical, even violent change," he turns from Favret's focus on narrative to argue that Romantic lyrics, restored to the "location" of their publication, are "fundamentally public" (Favret 1–2). Invoking Habermas's privileging of the genre's negotiation of public and private identity in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Magnuson focuses on the open, not the familiar letter as that which frames the Romantic lyric's aspiration to the sublime: "These

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[13] In fact, digital humanists are beginning to map these networks with interactive visualization tools, which, Laura Mandell argues, help us ask new kinds of questions about or objects of study ("How to Read"). Mandell is the technical editor of the *Romantic Circles* online edition of Robert Southey's letters, for which a network visualization tool was custom developed. Called Relate, it can be found at http://idhmc.tamu.edu/relate.

subjective meditations on nature and human imagination obscure striking similarities between

the conventions of the subjective Romantic lyric and an essential genre of the public discourse,

the letter, which is local and located, addressed, signed, allusive, and mediated" (52–3). Between

the representation of familiar letters that concerns Favret and the open letters of political

discourse that Magnuson emphasizes is the medium of exchange through which these

representations of letters are drafted and composed.

Writing poems and writing letters are coextensive activities for Coleridge. When, for

example, he sends the first draft of "The Nightingale" to Dorothy and William Wordsworth on

May 10, 1798, in preparation for the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads,* he encloses it with the

following letter, itself written in verse:

> In stale blank verse a subject stale
> I send *per post* my *Nightingale*;
> And like an honest bard, dear Wordsworth,
> You'll tell me what you think, my Bird's worth.
> My opinion's briefly this—
> His *bill* he opens not amiss;
> And when he has sung a stave or so,
> His breast, & some small space below,
> So throbs & swells, that you might swear
> No vulgar music's working there.
> So far so good; but then, 'od rot him!
> There's something falls off at his bottom.
> Yet, sure, no wonder it should breed,
> That my Bird's Tail's a tail indeed
> And makes it's own inglorious harmony
> Aeolio crepitû, non carmine. (*PW* RT 521)

We will see in the next chapter a similar verse letter from Byron, for whom writing letters and

poems was also coextensive. If Coleridge's aim in "The Nightingale" is to rescue the titular bird

from the fate assigned it by literary convention, he more than achieves his goal in this prefatory

lark, which figures the nightingale's song in a different kind of blue. Surely one of the more

colorful paratextual disavowals Jack Stillinger takes to be characteristic of the poet's deep-seated insecurity (108–9), the verse letter points up the material conflation of letter and lyric by equating the bird called "nightingale" with the poem about a nightingale. Moreover, the latter ultimately refers both to itself and to the enclosed "Conversational Poem," since both figure nightingales and both are sent "per post." At the same time, "The Nightingale" can itself qualify as a letter simply because it is sent to Wordsworth and not for any of its formal qualities. Its explicit address to the two people it is mailed to reinforces the epistolary effect: "Come, we will rest on this old mossy Bridge! / …My Friend, and my Friend's sister!" (4, 40). So the desire and situation that motivate the writing of poems and the writing of letters are practically indistinguishable to Coleridge's composing mind.

This symmetry of lyrical letter and epistolary lyric invites the application of another concept in Magnuson's strategies for "reading public Romanticism": the importance of "connections," of "reading beyond the frame, beyond the paratext, to the immediate exterior in which the boundaries merge into other writing" (40). If, as Magnuson convincingly argues, the frame provided by the open letter makes the Romantic lyric's connection to the public discourse visible, letters such as the "Nightingale" lyric or, as I demonstrate below, the prose letter to Robert Southey that encloses "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" and models the Advertisement that prefaces the poem on first publication, also frame and connect Romantic lyrics. They do not necessarily lead to the public discourse, but they are a significant complication of the intimacy affected by the poems. Such letters are an exterior less immediate than the printed paratext. We might call them "a sort of Middle Thing between Poetry and Oratory," a "conversation," by Coleridge's own estimation, in which the lyrics participate even as they emulate it. As a practice of manuscript exchange, letters are in the first place kindred with lyrics. In the second place, the

place I am most concerned to observe, letters are the connective tissue between the Conversation Poems and their iteration over time across manuscript and print. This intermediate function is the most difficult dimension of the epistolary condition to describe and interpret, but it is crucial to what makes the lyrics both conversational and conversation. The next section tracks its articulating impact on the poems' subjectivity and address by way of a compositional phenomenon called the "apostrophic relay."

O Edmund!: The Dejection Ode's Intersubjective Excess

Even before Ernest de Selincourt published in 1937 the verse epistle that underlies Coleridge's Dejection Ode, an important source of the poem's mystique was its itinerant locus of address. The known versions already showed that the poet revised the object of its apostrophe between October 4, 1802, when "Dejection. An Ode, Written April 4, 1802" was published in the *Morning Post,* and 1814, when he excerpted several stanzas in his essay "On the Principles of Genial Criticism," published September 14 in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal.* The former addresses "Edmund," the latter an abstracted "Lady," who remains the addressee through the poem's subsequent printings in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) and *Poetical Works* (1828, 1829, 1834). In the versions sent to William Sotheby in July 1802 and to George and Lady Beaumont in 1803, Wordsworth is the addressee, identified as "Wordsworth" and "William," respectively (*CL* 2: 815–19, 966–72). When de Selincourt then revealed to twentieth-century readers the text of a holograph fair copy in the poet's hand of several stanzas under the title "A Letter to ——— / April 4, 1802," a "Sara" was added to the array; and Dorothy Wordsworth's journals confirmed that the source of the poem's dejection was not the Sara to whom Coleridge was married, née Fricker, but Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's wife, Mary. The poet's Great Ode of

frustrated inspiration is, it turns out, haunted by the frustration of a different cast of desire; or, as the default critical narrative goes, Coleridge transformed the indecorous union of Augustan verse epistle and self-defeating autobiography into a monumental lyric of Romantic imagination. I do not question the achievement of the poem as revised, but rather the textual condition of that imagination's "shaping spirit." Coleridge's practice of shifting address—in this case from Sara to Wordsworth to Edmund to William and then Lady—articulates, rather than unifies, the imagination through a succession of situating appeals. Therefore while the verse epistle is the shadow genre of the ode, the epistolary condition of its making explains its apostrophic relay.

To review: Sara, Wordsworth, Edmund, William, Lady. Five names complete the apostrophe across the known textual history of the Dejection Ode. Of these, Sara, Wordsworth, and William have specific historical referents; and "Lady" is easily understood as a discreet deflection of the original address to the Sara *not* his wife, given credence by the allusion to a convention of courtly love poetry. That which Coleridge chose for the ode's first publication, in the *Morning Post,* does not quite follow Coleridge's practice. Most often understood as a dual transposition, "Edmund" too deflects the indiscretion of the underlying letter while it suggests his known friend and collaborator as the poem's addressee.[14] The masculine name is poetically ambiguous as the female deflection is in the later version; and yet the deictic function of the proper name distinguishes it from the universalized "Lady." One wants a specific referent to flesh out the role of "Edmund." One could speculate that, sensitive as he was, Coleridge was correcting for the offense Charles Lamb had taken two years earlier to finding his full name in the subtitle of a poem Coleridge published in Robert Southey's *Annual Anthology:* "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison, A Poem, Addressed to Charles Lamb, of the India-House, London." "In

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[14] De Selincourt, for example, refers to the substitution as a "transparent soubriquet" for Wordsworth (ctd. in Parrish); more recently, Susan Stewart, determines that "the unattributed 'Edmund' is added to mask both the original love letter and Wordsworth" ("Praise Poems" 240).

the next edition of the Anthology," Lamb writes to Coleridge in a letter of August 14, 1800, "please to blot out *gentle hearted,* and substitute drunken dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-ey'd, stuttering, or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the Gentleman in question. And for Charles read Tom, or Bob, or Richard, *for more delicacy*" (I: 224). For more delicacy, then, Coleridge might have been reading Edmund for William in the *Morning Post.* Then again, the delicacy might very well have been in favor of John Thelwall.

Where the identity of the "unattributed 'Edmund'" invites speculation, Judith Thompson's ongoing recovery of Thelwall's role on the early Romantic stage obtains new relevance. In "An Autumnal Blast, a Killing Frost: Coleridge's Poetic Conversation with John Thelwall," Thompson focuses on the exchange that gave rise to "Frost at Midnight" and follows the poets' correspondence beyond the date of the last extant letter between them. "While there is no record of his response to 'Frost at Midnight' and no evidence of further poetic exchange after 1798, Thelwall's novel *The Daughter of Adoption* (1801) shows that he continued to work through, in narrative form, the politico-philosophical implications of their friendship" (454). Thompson observes that the novel's protagonist and his "free-thinking friend and servant" bear a striking resemblance to Coleridge and Thelwall; their names are, respectively, Henry de Montfort and Edmunds. Is it not too much coincidence that the first public version of "Dejection: An Ode" apostrophizes an inspired poet and friend who just happens to share his name with the very character Thelwall uses to figure himself in his novel of the preceding year? If the Edmund of the *Morning Post*'s Dejection Ode is a show of delicacy toward Thelwall, the sobriquet is less "transparent" yet more in keeping with Coleridge's habit of familiar invocation and the deictic

immediacy of the conversation lyrics.[15] The substitution furthers a number of the stated aims of Thompson's essay: to deemphasize "Wordsworth as Coleridge's sole poetic interlocutor," to characterize their underappreciated "poetic conversation," and to illuminate Thelwall's contribution to the development of British Romanticism. For my purposes, the identification of Edmund with Thelwall pinpoints the "relay" between two poetic conversations while pointing to the epistolary condition of Romantic lyric poiesis.[16]

Again I use *relay* here as Bernhard Siegert defines it: as an "epoch of the postal system" and "a site where the people became entangled in the discourse" (9). The "people" of Coleridge's circle become entangled in his conversation at the deictic moments of apostrophe, where lyric and epistolary address coincide. For Sara, Wordsworth, Edmund, William, and Lady name only the recipients Coleridge explicitly identifies in the poem. His correspondence about the poem elaborates the itinerary of its address. Take, for example, the July 1802 letter to Sotheby, which excerpts from the verse letter the stanzas that form the basis of the printed ode and introduces "Wordsworth," "William," and "Poet" where "Sara" stands in the earlier version. The intention is explicit, and yet *William* Sotheby was a poet too and admired by Coleridge; his translation of Christoph Martin Wieland's *Oberon* (1798) is thought to have influenced *Christabel* (Holmes 371). Inserted where "Sara" is used consistently in the uncirculated manuscripts, why shouldn't the variation from "Wordsworth" to "William" and "Poet" be a characteristic equivocation that allows, with delicacy, the William reading the letter to identify with the William of the poem's admiration? The eventual indeterminacy of the printed

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[15] For a fuller account of Coleridge's desire to conjure a family out of his poetic relations as a matter of political principle, see Levy, *Family Authorship,* especially chapter 2, "Coleridge. Manuscript Culture, and the Family Romance," 45–69.

[16] "In theory," Thompson writes, "Coleridge may be the primary creator and upholder of a pure, monologic, exclusive ideal of high romantic poetry; but his poetic practice, at least if 'Frost at Midnight' is any example, provides an alternative model for romantic poiesis" (452). My goal is to expose the epistolary condition of that practice.

"Edmund" ought to suggest that Coleridge could regard every addressee as a potential object of apostrophe; his prior claim to have written the poem neither for Sara nor a poet, but for Thomas Poole, offers further evidence to the fact.

Poole owned a tannery in Nether Stowey and had a political reputation in Bristol, where Coleridge and Southey lived in 1794, the year they undertook a walking tour to the Quantock Hills and points southwest (Holmes 70–1). On the tour, they befriended Poole, who later helped Coleridge and his new family move to Nether Stowey in 1796. On May 7, 1802, roughly a month after Coleridge drafts the verse letter to Sara and two months before he previews the ode in the letter to Sotheby, he concludes a letter to Poole with two "pleasing little poems by Wordsworth" and a final reflection on his own activity: "I ought to say for my own sake that on the 4th of April last I wrote you a letter in verse; but I thought it dull and doleful—& did not send it" (*CL* II: 800–1). As yet, no textual evidence has surfaced to corroborate Coleridge's claim, and indeed Mays gives it little credence: "He was sufficiently detached by 7 May to *pretend* to TP (and to himself) that he had written it to TP" (*PW* RT 696; my emphasis). Insofar as the Dejection lyric was always, in Mays's estimation, "two poems with separate tendencies and aspirations," that which defers to the superior poetic imagination is unlikely to have taken a nonpoet, however visionary he was politically, for its object (ibid. 697). Short of inserting his name in the apostrophic position, Coleridge nevertheless draws Poole, like Sotheby, into the verse letter's itinerary of address.

How to explain this promiscuous itinerary? One of the first editors to collate and publish all the known versions of the poem, Stephen Maxfield Parrish recognizes, as Mays later does, the poem's "separate tendencies" but nonetheless understands it as essentially a study in dejection: "The reason that Coleridge could carry out these shifts of address without writing many fresh

lines was, of course, that the original poem was more about Coleridge than about Sara—as much a psychological self-analysis as a love letter" (17–18). Committed to "textual pluralism" rather than formal evolution or destiny, Jack Stillinger deems the poet's practice a "self-defensive activity of intentional destabilization," counterbalanced by the "self-aggrandizing activity of working toward a unified body of poetry" (108). Here the division is in the tendencies of the poet's psyche, rather than in the tendencies of the work. Reading the ode in the tradition of Pindaric praise rather than Horatian converse, Susan Stewart is able to align work and psyche in the poet's "need to make composition transitive," where *composition* refers to the "combinative" aspect of the "esemplastic power" of imagination as Coleridge defines it and *transitive* refers to contact with an other (241–2). The poet's habit of serial address is, according to Stewart, a function of his poems' typical speech situation, a waking mind in the presence of one asleep or dead: "The poet-speaker in this situation faces the problem of the absence of intersubjective recognition. And so in 'Dejection'…the speaker constantly changes the identity of his phantom interlocutor" (240). Stewart is right to link the litany of interlocutors with Coleridge's "transitive" practice of composition, but her otherwise deft account misrepresents the nature of the Dejection Ode's audience. The apostrophic relay, as I call it, addresses not one, but many interlocutors; they are real, not phantoms, removed but not typically unconscious or dead. As Conversation Poem rather than ambivalent Pindaric, the poem figures itself through absence, of the "shaping spirit of imagination" as well as the other that embodies that spirit. At the same time, the material context of the poem's making—its epistolary condition—produces an excess, rather than absence, of intersubjective recognition. Psyche and poem are consequently less divided than articulated by the audience they individuate.

The intersubjective excess of the apostrophic relay purloins, as it were, the absence against which lyric consolidates its interiority. An articulated epistolary "I" coexists with the unified "lyric" I, such that the apostrophic gesture, so often identified with lyric, does not finally govern its movements. These competing subjectivities may explain the critical hole through which the Dejection Ode falls, such that neither of two foundational lyric rubrics precisely captures it. Jonathan Culler's exercise in applied deconstruction "Apostrophe" launches from the observation of two related embarrassments and a conspicuous absence. First he notes the "minor embarrassment" of the trope that turns outward from the discourse and temporality of the poem to confront the reader directly. He then asserts the "larger and more interesting embarrassment" suggested by literary criticism's evasion of the trope: "Indeed, one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric, even seeking to identify apostrophe with lyric itself" (135–7). Culler's first example of the critical discomfort with apostrophe? The very essay that, after Harper, renders the Dejection Ode synonymous with lyric for the twentieth century: "Classic essays such as M.H. Abrams's 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric' do not discuss apostrophe, though it is a feature of most of the poems mentioned" (136). It is not at all surprising that Romantic lyric then figures prominently in Culler's argument, which ultimately emphasizes the apostrophic present as resistance to narrative sequence. Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and Blake's invocation of spring in *Poetical Sketches* all serve uncontroversially to demonstrate the vocative gesture. Culler finds no use for the Dejection Ode to explain the radical strangeness of apostrophe, however. In fact, he does not mention Coleridge at all. Thus where Abrams finds no use for apostrophe to define the lyric genre of which the Dejection Ode is, in his estimation, a best

example, Culler finds no use for the Dejection Ode to define the trope that poem exploits to the limit of its figurative power.

This conspicuous absence from Culler's own classic essay follows from the way he circumscribes his object of study at the outset of his argument. Demurring from the "complex problems of definition and delimitation" that any study of poetics, lyric, and apostrophe necessarily entails, he decides to "focus on cases which will be apostrophic by any definition," those invocations "which turn away from empirical listeners by addressing natural objects, artifacts, or abstractions" (137–8). If the addressee cannot be an "empirical listener," then it makes perfect sense that the Dejection Ode, or any given Conversation Poem, does not make the cut. Despite the speaker's avowed dejection, the epistolary condition of the lyric denies with every relay of address the apostrophic paradox, which is, as Culler puts it, to "seem to establish relations between the self and the other" while reading "as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism" (146). Coleridge never "seems" to relate to others. As the Dejection Ode's textual history shows, the apostrophic relay establishes those relations literally into an excess of intersubjective recognition. It also distinguishes the Dejection Ode and its model of conversation from those "poems with multiple apostrophes" (Rilke's *Book of Hours,* Wordsworth's Intimations Ode) which Culler cites as special evidence that, after Shelley, "apostrophe involves a drama of 'the one mind's' modifications more than a relationship between an *I* and a *you*" (148).[17] Generated across versions rather than within a single version, the apostrophic relay espouses the I-thou relationship, such that *modification* does not go far enough in characterizing the articulation of the Dejection Ode's subjectivity. As the audience is individuated, so the poetic

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[17] Arguing that "the apostrophic postulation of addressees refers one to the transforming and animating activity of the poetic voice," Culler refers to Shelley's prose fragment "On Life": "As Shelley says, 'the words *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the mind'" (148).

self is not of "one mind" but discretely figured at each situation of address. As Conversation Poem, it appears less like a monument of lyric interiority and increasingly like a peripatetic series of cries for, to borrow proleptically from Robert Frost, "original response."[18]

I have focused to this point on the Dejection Ode, in part to highlight John Thelwall's claim on the "Edmund" of the *Morning Post* version of the poem. Yet the ode merits special attention primarily because, among all the Conversation Poems, it most vividly illustrates the apostrophic relay as a function of its epistolary condition. On either side of "Dejection," "To a Gentleman" and "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" also relay the address from version to version. The last of the canonical eight and the only Conversation Poem written after "Dejection," "To a Gentleman" is in the first extant version titled "To W. Wordsworth" (VT 1029), an immediate response to hearing for the first time Wordsworth's thirteen-book "poem for Coleridge" in 1807. In May 1815, after the rift between the two poets had formed, Wordsworth asked Coleridge not to publish the poem, and Coleridge changed "Wordsworth" to "Gentleman" for publication in *Sibylline Leaves.* He later restored Wordsworth's identity in the title for the 1834 edition of *Poetical Works, The Prelude* as yet unpublished and to remain so for another sixteen years. If this scenario sounds familiar, it should: not only does it parallel the exchange of "William" for the abstracted "Lady" in the *Sibylline Leaves* version of the Dejection Ode, but it also recapitulates the squabble over Lamb's name in the *Annual Anthology* version of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison."

That squabble erupted over but one relay in the earlier Conversation Poem's itinerary of address. The earliest extant version of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" was, not surprisingly,

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[18] Frost's "The Most of It" is a modernist return to the situation of the Dejection Ode's speaker: "Some morning on the boulder-broken beach/ He would cry out on life, that what it wants/ Is not its own love back in copy speech,/ But counter-love, original response" (5–8). Whereas Coleridge's relay manages its desire with neurotic iteration, Frost contains the nihilistic fear of nature's indifference with formal rigor.

copied out in a letter of 17 July 1797 to Robert Southey. There the closing passage of the poem

begins "My Sister & my Friends! when the last Rook/ Beat its straight path along the dusky Air/

Homewards, I bless'd it" (69–71). "Sister" then becomes "Sara" in the next extant version, again

copied into a letter, probably of early 1798, this time to Charles Lloyd (Mays *PW* VT 480): My

Sara, & my Friends! when the last Rook/ Beat its straight path along the dusky Air/ Homewards,

I bless'd it." Coleridge had no sister in the proper sense. In both letters he is addressing his wife,

Sara Fricker, whom he could not join for a walk with the Lambs and Wordsworths because she

had spilled boiling water on his foot. Sara is "Sister" in the letter to Southey because he,

individually, would understand "Sister" in the context of the poets' retired plan to establish a

utopian community in America, a "Pantisocracy," where everything would be shared and

everyone would be a "brother" or "sister" to the others.[19] In copying the poem into the letter to

Lloyd, who was not involved in the Pantisocracy vision, Coleridge alters the address with the

new audience in view, according to their mutual situation.

Apostrophe thus marks the convergence, even the impasse, of lyric and epistolary

address, while the relay designates both the intersubjective joint and the articulation of identity.

Neither convergence nor relay is confined to the apostrophic moment, however. The governing

images in the Dejection Ode and throughout the Conversation Poems suggest the poet's

awareness of the epistolary condition of his "transitive" composition. They figure relays as

intersubjective connection, or "communication," across space and time and in doing so preserve

the sense of contact and material immediacy just barely within the nimbus of that word's

meaning at the close of the eighteenth century. As Guillory remarks of *communication,* the

pivotal term in his critical philology of the "media concept," it had by the end of the seventeenth

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[19] One might note as well that, as a closing invocation, "Sister" resembles Wordsworth's turn to Dorothy, his sister properly speaking, in "Tintern Abbey."

century taken "speech and discourse" as its primary meaning, then "ceased thereafter to imply the scene of immediate contact or presence and came contrarily to be associated with an action often involving distance in time and space" (330–1). And *conversation,* he notes, "moves in a similar direction…losing its more intimate range of meanings, including sexual intercourse, and specializing eventually within the field of communication" (330–1n.).[20] Despite Guillory's caveat that "there is no way to capture this transition as a moment" and though the Conversation Poems arrive a century after the transition as he observes it, the receding sense of *communication* is still at stake for Coleridge in what makes the lyrics' both conversational and conversation. The following section reinterprets the poems' figures of correspondence as the material, or communicating, joint between the poet and those he addresses. Understood as relays, these figures further characterize the articulating effects of the poems' epistolary condition.

"Becalm'd" Vehicles and "Creeking" Joints: Relay as Communication

That communication in the sense which began to shift at the end of the seventeenth century is relevant for Coleridge as he wrote the Conversation Poems is evident in the letter he wrote to Southey in July 1797. He copied out the first version of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" in the letter, though I propose that it is the first iteration of both the lines of verse and the "Advertisement" that prefaces the poem upon first publication three years later in Southey's

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[20] Historically situating *conversation,* Kevis Goodman recalls the "full extended sense of that master word" of the period just preceding Coleridge's Conversation Poems: "As it emerged in Addison's comments on the man of polite imagination (he who can 'converse with a Picture'), or in Hume's treatment of the 'conversable world,' and elsewhere, conversability is not just a matter of style in literary or social conduct but a far-ranging cognitive ideal" (86). Goodman's immediate purpose is to identify the georgic dimension of William Cowper's conversational voice, the "distinct epistemological consequences" of which, she observes, are grounded in the Virgilian etymology Henry Fielding develops in his "Essay on Conversation": "The primitive and literal Sense of this Word is…to *Turn round together*; and in its more copious Usage we intend by it, that reciprocal Interchange of Ideas, by which Truth is examined, Things are, in a manner, *turned round,* and sifted, and all our Knowledge communicated to each other." I take the liberty of re-citing the excerpted definition because Goodman happily frames the twinned fates of *conversation* and *communication* to which Guillory points in his argument.

Annual Anthology. Now indispensable to our understanding of "This Lime-tree Bower" as a

Conversation Poem and prototype of the greater Romantic lyric's "tripartite structure" of setting,

reverie, and return, the Advertisement situates the poem's locodescriptive conventions in

autobiographical detail:

> In the June of 1797, some long-expected Friends paid a visit to the
> Author's Cottage; and on the morning of their arrival he met with
> an accident, which disabled him from walking during the whole
> time of their stay. One evening, when they had left him for a few
> hours, he composed the following lines, in the Garden Bower.

In the letter to Southey, the paragraph that introduces the copied-out verses offers much the same

information, though it is cast in the first person, of course, and describes in greater detail the

"accident" as well as the "Garden Bower" of creation:

> Charles Lamb has been with me for a week—he left me Friday
> morning.— / The second day after Wordsworth came to me, dear
> Sara accidently emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which
> confined me during the whole time of C. Lamb's stay & still
> prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong.—While
> Wordsworth, his Sister, & C. Lamb were out one evening; / sitting
> in the arbour of T. Poole's garden, which communicates with
> mine, I wrote these lines, with which I am pleased— (*Letters*
> 1:334–36)

In trimming the description for the Advertisement, Coleridge is both economizing space and

defending against a "querulous egotism."[21] By eliding "communication," he defers to the

ascendant sense of the word, "contrarily … associated with an action often involving distance in

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[21] In the Preface to the 1796 edition of *Poems on Various Subjects* (opens with "Monody to Chatterton," includes among its thirty-six "Effusions" the first of the Conversation Poems, and closes with five verse epistles and "Religious Musings"), Coleridge distinguishes between condemnable and necessary egotism: "Compositions resembling those of the present volume are not unfrequently condemned for their querulous egotism. But egotism is to be condemned then only when it offends against time and place, as in an History or an Epic Poem. To censure it in a Monody or Sonnet is almost as absurd as to dislike a circle for being round….The communicativeness of our nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; in the endeavor to describe them intellectual activity is exerted; and by a benevolent law of our nature from intellectual activity a pleasure results which is gradually associated and mingles as a corrective with the painful subject of the description" (v–vii).

time and space" (Guillory 331). I would like to think it is less than coincidence that the letter accommodates *communication* in its "distressed" sense.[22] As a genre which licenses that otherwise condemnable egotism, the letter also accommodates the discursive communication of preface and poem where the printed version does not. The apostrophic relay is in this respect a communication between epistolary and lyric, but there are imaginative figures of the relay's communicative function in the poems as well. Even as they translate distance and absence, these figures preserve the spatial contiguity traced by the distressed usage in Coleridge's letter to Southey.

Like the grove of nightingales in the lyric that gives Harper's canon its name, the Conversation Poems "answer and provoke each other's song" as well as, we have seen, the songs of others. Self-referentially, they also figure the "conversation" they espouse and enact. In addition to the grove of nightingales that wants to reclaim the bird from its traditional association with melancholy, there is, for example, the symbiotic relationship of lute and breeze at the beginning of "The Eolian Harp": "And that simplest Lute,/ Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!/ How by the desultory breeze caressed,/ Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,/ It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must needs/ Tempt to repeat the wrong!" (12–17). At the other end of the sequence, there is Wordsworth's prayer-provoking recitation in "To a Gentleman," which holds its listener embowered with the poet in "That happy vision of beloved Faces" and "Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—" of his voice (107, 111). In "Frost at Midnight," one finds the "companionable form" of the "fluttering stranger" and the silent icicles "Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" (19, 26, 73–4), although the latter also reflects the light the moon more properly relays from Sun to Earth. Two relays in particular emphasize Coleridge's

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[22] In "Notes on Distressed Genres," Susan Stewart reviews the range of meanings of *distress,* especially "to make old, to antique," in the context of the eighteenth century's antiquarian fervor and fascination with the "new antique" (67).

investment in the material joints of communication, however. Both highly conventional images figure prominently in their respective poems. The nesting moons that open the Dejection Ode, like the poem's apostrophic relay, also directly implicate the epistolary condition of its making. With the flying rook that closes "This Lime-tree Bower, My Prison," Coleridge relocates the sound of communication from the voice to the wing of the bird. Like the intersubjective excess produced by the apostrophic relay, the spatial communication figured by these relays entangles a series of identities in the iteration of the poems.

Although there is nothing extraordinary about a poem, and in particular a Romantic lyric, that hinges on the enchantment of the moon, the Dejection Ode's moon has the metadiscursive quality of figuring the hinge of the poem's communication. In and of itself, the moon is a figure of relayed light. By the time he composes the Dejection epistle and ode in 1802, Coleridge has already explored this property of the moon in the overlay of reflection, relay, and reverberation at the end of "Frost at Midnight": "Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,/… whether the eve-drops fall/ Heard only in the trances of the blast,/ Or if the secret ministry of frost/ Shall hang them up in silent icicles,/ Quietly shining to the shining Moon" (65–74). The Moon that governs the first stanza of every version of the Dejection lyric from the verse epistle of April 1802 to the *Poetical Works* of 1834 is the sign of an equally secret but less salutary ministry. Here I quote from the earliest known manuscript in Coleridge's hand:[23]

> Well! if the Bard was weather-wise who made
> The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
> This Night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
> Unrous'd by winds, that ply a busier trade
> Than that, which moulds yon clouds in lazy flakes,
> Or the dull sobbing Draft, that drones & rakes
> Upon the Strings of this Eolian Lute,
>   Which better far were mute.
> For lo! the New Moon, winter-bright!

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[23] Parrish identifies this version as the Dove Cottage Manuscript (21–34, 77–93). See also Stillinger (92–3).

And overspread with phantom Light,
(With swimming phantom Light o'erspread
But rimm'd & circled with a silver Thread)
I see the Old Moon in her Lap, foretelling
The coming-on of Rain & squally Blast— (*PW* RT 1–14)

Alongside a reprisal of the Conversation Poems' inaugural figure, the nested moons share with the Eolian lute the burden of divination. The two images mutually reinforce their respective functions as agents of communication. As such, they set in relief the obstacles to communication that drive the poem, both thematically as the source of the titular dejection and textually as the practice of shifting address.

In the fullness and duration of their figuration throughout the poem, the moons, like the lute, exceed the convention they evoke. More so than the lute, however, the moons implicate the epistolarity of the poem's "transitive" composition. The difference becomes evident where each figure reemerges in the poem after their tandem introduction in the opening lines. If the moon receives a more vivid description at the outset, "With swimming phantom Light o'erspread/ But rimm'd & circl'd with a silver Thread" (11–12), the lute returns more forcefully toward the end, when the speaker turns from the "dark dream" haunting his mind and finds the startling impulse he seeks in the winds of the storm (still citing the verse letter in Coleridge's hand): "What a Scream/ Of agony by Torture lengthen'd out/ That Lute sent forth! O thou wild Storm without!/ Jagg'd Rock, or mountain Pond, or blasted Tree,/ Or Pine-grove, Whither Woodman never clomb,/ Or lonely House, long held the Witches' Home,/ Methinks were fitter Instruments for Thee,/ Mad Lutanist!" (*PW* RT 187–94). Its language largely preserved in every version of the poem, this sympathetic apostrophe to the wind sustains by its charge the longest stanza in both epistle and ode. Properly speaking, the lute is perceptible only by virtue of the Mad Lutanist's anima, a dynamic that replicates the poet's perceived absence of imagination but for the joy that

animates the object of his affection. That object is "Sara" in the cited version but, as we have

seen, it relays from version to version in sympathy with the poet's native agitation. The poet

feels himself to be, like the lute, mismatched in temperament to his inspiration, though he is

demonstrably sympathetic with both instrument and player.

Sympathy, however, does not define the poet's relationship to the moon when it

reappears in the poem, always before the lute reappears and, unlike the lute, stripped of the

allusive significance the paired figures have in the opening stanza. From the Dejection Ode's

first printing in the *Morning Post,* the source of the moon's allusion is given in an epigraph:

"Late, late yestreen I saw the New Moon,/ With the old Moon in her arms;/ And I fear, I fear, my

Master dear!/ We shall have a deadly storm." As identified in the second line of every version,

the stanza is taken from the "Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence." More specifically, it is an adaptation

of Bishop Percy's rendition of the ballad for the fourth edition of his *Reliques of Ancient English*

Poetry (1794). As allusion, both lute and moon perform the semantic relay they figure as signs of

events to come. The moons overlay the semantic with the temporal by, in addition, figuring the

encounter of "old" and "new." The lute returns still the instrument of the wind, however

mismatched to its character, which there realizes the portent of its "dull sobbing Draft" in a

"Devil's Yule," a "worse than wintry Song" that demands an audience for its tragic story, of a

"Host in Rout—/ And many Groans from men with smarting Wounds" (6, 196–202). It remains

in the allusive register as well, still the instrument of literary tradition. The moons, on the other

hand, return in a plainer, more vernacular register, not less figurative but less fanciful, more

localized in the equally vivid detail of their return:

> O dearest Sara! In this heartless Mood
> All this long Eve, so balmy & serene,
> Have I been gazing on the western Sky
> And it's peculiar Tint of Yellow Green—

> And still I gaze—& with how blank an eye!
> And those thin Clouds above, in flakes & bars,
> That give away their Motion to the Stars;
> Those Stars, that glide behind them, or between,
> Now sparkling, now bedimm'd, but always seen;
> Yon crescent Moon, as fix'd as if it grew
> In it's own cloudless, starless Lake of Blue—
> A boat becalm'd dear William's Sky Canoe!
> —I see them all, so excellent fair!
> I see, not feel, how beautiful they are. (*PW* RT 30–43)

Collapsed into "yon crescent," the moon is here dissociated both from the ballad tradition and the lute. One might detect potential for sympathy between the "fix'd…becalm'd" state of the moon and the paralysis of the poet's imagination; but whereas lute and poet share a temperament out of sync with their environment, the moon's fixity contributes to the beauty from which the poet is alienated for lack of sympathetic feeling. Its fixity expresses the way in which, divested of its semantic and sympathetic function, it remains a temporal relay while coming to emphasize its spatial dimension. No longer a sign but likened to a vehicle, albeit "becalm'd," the moon is the threshold of communication between the poet's landscape and that of his interlocutor, the bower connecting two gardens, as it were.

The spatial suggestion of the moon's comparison to a boat or canoe is further developed in the verse epistle. It develops, moreover, in ways that posit the verse epistle as itself a communicating space between the epistolarity condition of the poem's composition and the printed ode. Three stanzas after the moon is compared to a "boat becalm'd," amid the more autobiographical passages that Coleridge largely excised for the sake of the ode, the moon joins the poet to his beloved in space as a boat or canoe is designed to do: "O Sara! In the weather-fended Wood,/ Thy lov'd haunt! Where the Stock-doves coo at Noon,/ I guess, that thou has stood/ And watch'd yon Crescent, & it's ghost-like Moon" (RT 682–3, ll. 79–82). This fantasy

of physical connection in fact reprises the scenario depicted in the stanza immediately following

the comparison in question, where the communicating joint is more broadly the heavens than the

moon specifically:

> My genial Spirits fail—
> And what can these avail
> To lift the smoth'ring Weight from off my Breast?
> It were a vain Endeavour,
> Tho' I should gaze for ever
> On that green Light which lingers in the West!
> I may not hope from outward Forms to win
> The Passion & the Life whose Fountains are within!
> These lifeless Shapes, around, below, Above,
> O what can they impart?
> When even the gentle Thought, that thou, my Love!
> Art gazing now, like me,
> And see'st the Heaven, I see—
> Sweet Thought it is—yet feebly stirs my Heart! (44–57)

One will recognize the first half of the stanza as the clearest expression of the ode's subject; the

second half is, like the passage that reprises it with the moon, absent in every subsequent version

of the poem, from the letter to Sotheby onward and including the first publication in the *Morning

Post.* In the subsequent versions, the stanza conspicuously rests at the extreme limit of the poet's

dejection, without "hope from outward Forms to win/ The Passion & the Life whose Fountains

are within!" By removing the heavens and its moon as a figure of sympathetic and spatial

connection, Coleridge rhetorically secures his solitude and the occasion of the poem. He also

obscures the figure's allusion to the epistolary exchange between Coleridge and Dorothy

Wordsworth, in which the moon is similarly figured as a joint in time and space.

In his important study of the Dejection Ode and its compositional milieu, George Dekker

draws out William's sister as yet another significant addressee of the poem. He cites Dorothy's

journal entry of March 8, 1802, which describes the moon she had spotted a few days before.

The imagery, and some of the language, should sound familiar:

> On Friday evening the moon hung over the Northern side of the
> highest point of Silver How, like a gold ring snapped in two and
> shaven off at the ends it was so narrow. Within this Ring lay the
> circle of the round moon, as *distinctly* to be seen as ever the
> enlightened moon is. William had observed the same appearance at
> Keswick perhaps at the very same moment hanging over the
> Newlands fells. Sent off a letter to Mary H. also to Coleridge and
> Sara, and rewrote in the Evening the alterations of Ruth which we
> sent off at the same time. (qtd. in Dekker 25; Wordsworth 152)

Dekker makes it perfectly clear that there is no decisive evidence that Dorothy mentioned the

moon to Coleridge in conversation or in writing. The letter she reports having sent is not extant.

However, the similarity of her description to the nesting moons in the verse epistle is enough to

persuade some critics that this is exactly what transpired, therefore that converse with Dorothy

prompted the verse epistle as much as hearing the first stanzas of her brother's Great Ode and,

for that matter, receiving the "guileless letter" from Sara Hutchinson, "weak & pale with

Sickness, Grief, & Pain—" (Dekker 26–7; *PW* RT 684, ll. 125–9). Her journal entry of May 4,

just more than a week after she reports hearing the "verses [Coleridge] wrote to Sara," invites

further speculation about the significance of their exchange. "We parted from Coleridge at Sara's

crag," she writes, "after having looked at the letters which C. carved in the morning. I kissed

them all. William deepened the T with C.'s pen-knife" (232).[24] Brother and sister amble on to an

encounter with a "Cockermouth woman, thirty years of age" and her daughter, abandoned by

husband and father. "I was moved," Dorothy writes," and gave her a shilling—I believe 6d. more

than I ought to have given," then abruptly changes the subject from her ambivalent charity with

none other than the allusion used by Coleridge to occasion the poem he was then composing:

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[24] It is too tempting to read this scene of writing as an allegory of the making of "Tintern Abbey."

"We had the crescent moon with the 'auld moon in her arms'" (233).[25] As Dekker points out,

Dorothy did not need Coleridge or the "verses to Sara" for knowledge of "Sir Patrick Spence"

(25–6). Percy's *Reliques* were well known. But the accretion of textual coincidences and echoes

starts to feel like the communication it figures; and I use *communication* again because, in the

initial entry of March 8, it is not just the vivid particulars that Dorothy's description shares with

Coleridge's but the fanciful notion of connection that immediately follows it. Her moon provides

the objective point of connection between her and her brother in Keswick, just as Coleridge's

moon provides the connection to Sara in her "weather-fended Wood."

As he selects out the verses that are to constitute the ode, however, Coleridge ends the

figuration of the moon with the comparison to the "sky canoe." He lets the figure stand with the

suggestion of communication forwarded by the simile. Limiting thus the spatial aspect of the

figure and suppressing the traces of his exchange with Dorothy are easily understood as part of

an overall strategy to justify his dejection through isolation and thereby align his feeling with his

circumstance. And yet his drive to self-defeat is so unwitting that he manages even to defeat his

own strategy, suppressing one figure of communication only to introduce another. Having

removed the verse epistle's image of poet and beloved jointly gazing on the same sky, he ends

the third stanza of the ode with his inability to be inspired by such "outward Forms." This formal

limit of his dejection abuts the very line that conjures an intersubjective excess. For the sake of

Thelwall, I'll cite the fourth stanza's first line as it appeared in the *Morning Post:* "O EDMUND!

we receive but what we give" (VT 890 l. 47). Communication continues performatively and

rhetorically in the apostrophic relay where the poet seeks most to disavow it.

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[25] The effacement of Dorothy as one of Coleridge's interlocutors might be a more criminal oversight than the effacement of Thelwall, in that Dorothy, unlike Thelwall, has always been on the stage of the conversation poems, just never acknowledged as a player.

Apostrophic relay and figured relay similarly converge on the question of communication in the earlier, more playful conversation poem "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison." The elaborated image of the poem's final passage in particular raises the question, not in the form of disavowal or an ostensible lack of sympathy, as in the Dejection ode, but as the recognition of individuated experience, including the mysterious individuated agency of the communicating joint itself. A nine-line salutation, the passage opens with the apostrophe to "My gentle-hearted Charles," its second appearance in the poem as it was published in Southey's *Annual Anthology* and the locus of the relay, described earlier, from "My Sister and my friends" to simply "Sara" and then the epithet that irked Lamb. In all cases, the address is intended to direct its object's attention to a "last Rook" flying across the sky:

> My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last Rook
> Beat its straight path along the dusky air
> Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing
> (Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
> Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,
> While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still,
> *Flew creeking o'er thy head, and had a charm
> For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
> No Sound is dissonant which tells of Life. (lines 69–77)

Like "yon crescent Moon" in the Dejection ode, the flying rook joins speaker and listener in time and space. In doing so, also like the Dejection ode's moon, it defamiliarizes the convention of the figure. As in "The Nightingale," Coleridge attempts to extricate the moon and the rook from literary convention. The rook of the "This Lime-tree Bower," even more than the moon of the Dejection ode, describes the nesting meanings of communication and the question of agency the epistolary function brings to the conversation poems.

The blessing of the potentially "dissonant" rook anticipates the Mariner's redemptive blessing of the water snakes in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* but existing scholarship has

observed the rook's allusion to other and contemporary works as well. These works are primarily locodescriptive and pastoral, since, as Mays notes, "the discordant rook, … as a disharmonious element in nature's symbolic chorus, almost constitutes a topos in 18th-century poetry" (RT 354n.). It is worth reviewing a few outstanding examples, as cited by Mays and others, in order to witness the pattern from which Coleridge's rook departs in "This Lime-tree Bower." To illustrate the conventional discourse at Coleridge's disposal, Mays annotates his reading text of the poem with specific reference to the following two passages from James Thomson's "Spring," in *The Seasons* (1730), and William Cowper's *The Task* (1785):

> Join'd to These,
> Innumerous Songsters, in the freshening Shade
> Of new-sprung Leaves, their Modulations mix
> Mellifluous. The Jay, the Rook, the Daw,
> And each harsh Pipe, discordant heard alone,
> Aid the full Concert: while the Stock-dove breathes
> A melancholy Murmur thro' the Whole. (Thomson 607–13)

> Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
> But animated Nature sweeter still
> To sooth and satisfy the human ear.
> Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
> The live-long night: nor these alone whose notes
> Nice-finger'd art must emulate in vain,
> But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
> In still repeated circles, screaming loud,
> The jay, the pie, and ev'n the boding owl
> That hails the rising moon, have charms for me. (Cowper 1.198–206)

Mays chooses these two passages, of course, because the vocabulary with which Coleridge figures the rook at the end of his poem distinctly echoes the "discord" in Thomson's and the "charms" in Cowper's. Unlike the rooks of Cowper and Thomson, however, Coleridge's rook is solitary, the *last* Rook, and its "creeking" is the landscape's only sound. The rooks to which he alludes are "harsh" and "discordant heard alone" but "Aid the full Concert." They "caw" like

kites that "scream" but "sooth and satisfy the human ear" alongside "ten thousand warblers" and "innumerous songsters." Flying alone and heard "when all was still," Coleridge's rook recalls that of Robert Southey's "Botany Bay Eclogue. Elinor," first published in the *Morning Chronicle* on 18 September 1794:[26]

> and thence, at eve,
> When, soft and beauteous, sunk the summer sun,
> Oft have I lov'd to mark the Rook's slow course—
> And hear his hollow croak, what time he sought
> The Church-yard Elm, whose wide-embowering boughs,
> Full foliag'd, half conceal'd the House of God. (*PW* 37–42)

One hardly needs to know that Coleridge ushered "Elinor" into the *Morning Chronicle* without Southey's knowledge to accept the closing passage of "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" as deliberate allusion (*Selected* 4–8). Coleridge's lime-tree bower echoes that of Southey's Church-yard elm, and the prison of his title echoes Southey's invocation of Botany Bay, the Australian penal colony to which British prisoners were often transported well into the nineteenth century and the exilic setting of his poem's speaker.[27] Despite these clear similarities, Coleridge's rook is distinguished by the peculiar sound it makes and, more significant for thinking about the epistolary condition and communication, the origin of that sound.

The song of Southey's rook issues, as those of Cowper and Thomson do, from the bird's throat, a "hollow croak," whereas Coleridge's rook flies "creeking" overhead. The conventional significance is preserved by negation in the speaker's judgment that "No Sound is dissonant which tells of Life" for the "gentle-hearted Charles." It is affirmed by the onomatopoetic

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[26] Halmi, Magnuson, and Modiano note the allusion in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (139 n.2).

[27] Some of the radicals tried for sedition in 1793 were sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay. As William Godwin writes in an open letter dated 3 March 1794, "The situation in which messieurs Muir & Palmer are at this moment placed is sufficiently known within a certain circle, but is by no means sufficiently adverted to by the public at large. Give me leave through the channel of your paper to call their attention to it" (97). Southey's eclogue is therefore an example of the Romantic poets' practice of allusion that, Magnuson argues, situates their poems in the public discourse (37–53 *passim*). I am arguing that the familiar letters in which the poems are conceived and copied out constitute an exterior to the poem intermediate between the printed paratext and drafting in solitude.

clustering of hard *c*'s, *k*'s, and *g*'s throughout the passage (Rook, dusky, black, speck, cross'd, glory, gazing) and, most importantly, by the misspelled word's suggestion of a rusty joint. The suggestion can read as basic metaphor: a comparison of the bird's voice to a sonic irritant or sign of wear. However, the suspended syntax creates an ambiguous implied subject in the second half of the lines' long sentence: "flew creeking" may refer back to the "last Rook" but it may also refer back to "its black wing." The footnote Coleridge added to the phrase corroborates the authority of the latter as antecedent:

> Some months after I had written this line, it gave me pleasure to
> observe that Bartram had observed the same circumstance of the
> Savanna Crane. "When these Birds move their wings in flight,
> their strokes are slow, moderate and regular; and even when at a
> considerable distance or high above us, we plainly hear the quill-
> feathers; their shafts and webs upon one another creek as the joints
> or working of a vessel in a tempestuous sea." (I.1 354)

Although the note does not appear with the poem until its first publication in 1800, Coleridge likely borrowed a copy of William Bartram's *Travels Through North & South Carolina* (1791) from J.W. Tobin in 1797, the year he began writing the poem (Mays *RW* 354). Referring to the wing rather than the bird or its voice is a more complex and interesting figuration, as it compares sounds (the sound of a bird and the noise of disrepair) as well as mechanisms (flapping wing and rusty joint). The subtle vowel shift from "croak" to "creek" signals the shift in the source of the sound, a deflection of its origin from the seat of authenticity (voice) and affect (throat, heart, breast) to the mechanism of movement (the wing). Thus Coleridge's reinterpretation of the rook's conventional significance grounds the converse of the poem in the material circumstances, that is, space, of communication.

In contrast to the becalm'd sky-canoe and the gardens' bower, the synecdoche of communication in "This Lime-tree Bower" is in motion. The deflection of sound from the

discordant rook to the "creeking" wing recognizes communication as the space of connection

and contact, but it also recognizes that the spatial joint is a moving target, unstable. The

communicating joint exercises an agency independent of the individuated claims of the

correspondents on the space the joint defines. This recognition constitutes yet another departure

from the model given by Southey's "Elinor," in which the solitary rook is "marked" by the

speaker alone, a projection, in the end, of the "departed Father," whose "hallow'd voice" the

speaker has also heard in the "full-foliag'd bower" toward which the rook is flying. In

Coleridge's poem, however, the rook is not the respective or shared projection of speaker and

addressee. It has a purpose and destination independent of either imagination, flying not *between*

the designated correspondents, not from one to the other, but toward its own destination,

"[beating] its straight path… / Homewards." That the bird has a home implies its differentiated

existence. It connects Coleridge and Lamb in being visible to them both; at the same time, it

translates the blessing it receives from Coleridge into the charm with which the "gentle-hearted

Charles" receives its dissonant music. Coleridge's rook collapses the time and distance between

correspondents as it delimits their respective experiences. It performs this "double logic,"

however, incidentally to the fulfillment of its own destiny, a movement in keeping with Lisa

Gitelman's observation (alluding to Raymond Williams) that "agency is so hard to specify" in

the consideration of media.[28] Coleridge's rook, in other words, figures the new communication (a

medium) with the old communication (space) in its arms. The epistolary practice that shapes and

structures these early Romantic lyrics is implicated in this figured complex of communication,

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[28] I refer to the "double logic" of immediacy and removal which Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin ascribe to
remediation. I am not convinced that remediation, as opposed to basic mediation, is required to achieve the effect. It
may in other words be impossible to distinguish between mediation and remediation. In *Always Already New,*
Gitelman critiques Bolter and Grusin's treatment of media as though they were "intentional agents" but allows that
they "know better": "People just write this way, Raymond Williams has suggested, because agency is so hard to
specify" before the specter of technology (9; ctg. *Television* 129).

where the material joint itself moves through space. Understanding this relationship between the epistolary condition, communication, and conversation significantly reinflects Coleridge's claim for the Conversation Poems as that "which affects not to be poetry."

Chapter 2

Byron's Fytting Medium:
The *Pilgrimage* in Letters

We need both the poetry and the letters to see the whole Byron.
　　　　—Leslie Marchand, *Letters and Journals of Byron* (1973)

It ought to be unremarkable, but Marchand's was an important observation in 1973. It

accompanied the first wave of midcentury Byron scholarship and the revival of critical interest in

the popularity of the most public British poet of the early nineteenth century.[1] Not coincidentally,

it also emerged in the wake of the death of the Author.[2] As the twentieth-cent ury editor of

Byron's correspondence, Marchand was uniquely capable of restoring the documents of the

poet's less-than-private life to the public record of his poetic persona without replicating the

novelized mode of nineteenth-century biography, of which Thomas Moore's own *Letters and*

Journals of Lord Byron (1830) is representative. In step with the historicist moment of the

contemporary criticism, Marchand's statement was reintroducing the significance of a material

context into the act of literary interpretation, which, in the case of Byron's poetry, inevitably

becomes the interpretation of "Byron" as quintessential author function. As he restores the letters

to the verse, however, Marchand maintains a distinction between "the poetry and the letters" that

fails to appreciate the extent of their material interdependence in Byronic poiesis.[3] This second

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[1] A representative sampling of this first wave includes Andrew Rutherford's *Byron: A Critical Study* (1961), Robert Gleckner's *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (1967), Jerome McGann's *Fiery Dust* (1968), and Peter Manning's *Byron and His Fictions* (1978). Expanding into the world of belles lettres, one might also include Jacques Barzun's 1953 essay for *The Atlantic,* "Byron and the Byronic."
[2] I am referring to the theoretical moment marked by Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1969).
[3] Here I use *poiesis* in the sense of "making," as explained by Susan Stewart in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses:* "The Greek word [*poiesis*], derived from [*poiein*], "to make," conveys two kinds of creation: the inspired creation that resembles a godlike power and the difficult material struggle, the [*techne*], of making forms out of the resources available….Like all creative acts, *poiesis* wrests form from nature without prior knowledge of ends or uses" (12). Maureen McLane uses the word similarly with reference to the Romantic period in *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and*

chapter describes the extent of that interdependence across the sequence of four cantos now regarded together as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–18). At the origin of the Byronic hero and the poetics that sustains it, *Childe Harold* serially registers the contexts in which Byron the correspondent continually situates himself, articulating rather than integrating the self the poem famously dramatizes.

The open secret of Byron's self-dramatization is the coextension of verse and letters in his writing throughout his career. The language of the letters can haunt the language of the poems, as when that of Byron's two-week visit with Ali Pacha in late 1809, recorded in a letter to the poet's mother, resurfaces in the second canto of *Childe Harold.*[4] Numerous lyrics announce or invoke epistolary address, as "To Caroline," "Epistle to Augusta," or the Thyrza elegies do. Sometimes the invocation of epistolary address is underwritten by a poem's emergence in the course of epistolary exchange: "Lines to a Lady Weeping," for example, provoked Tory outrage when it accompanied *The Corsair* in 1814, but it was originally published two years earlier in the *Morning Chronicle.* Then titled "Sympathetic Address to a Young Lady," it was one of three anonymous squibs Byron contributed in the spring of 1812 as part of some playful "scribbling" with his new friend Thomas Moore.[5] Better-known products of

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the *Making of British Romanticism.* See especially chapter 6, "Seven Types of Poetic Authority Circa 1800: Romantic *Poiesis* Reconsidered," (181–211).

[4] Cecil Lang is to be credited with the example, which he uses alongside allusions to Book 3 of *The Faerie Queen* to argue that Byron had sex with Ali Pacha during his visit. After citing the description of their meeting from Byron's November 12, 1809, letter to his mother, Lang makes the following assertion: "In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* Canto 2, stanzas 55–72, the same episode is narrated, with the addition of something new and vital—or, to phrase it more accurately, with the addition of something explicit that the letter invites us to infer" ("Narcissus Jilted" 150).

[5] The other two poems Byron is known to have contributed to the *Morning Chronicle* in the spring of 1812 are "Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill" (2 March) and "Impromptu on a Recent Incident" (6 March). Citing a letter from Byron to Samuel Rogers dated February 29, 1812, in which Byron encloses a poem (possibly "Ode") and credits Rogers with setting "Moore & me scribbling," Jeffery Vail speculates that "Byron and Moore began 'scribbling' political poems for the purpose of amusing others as well as themselves." Citing also a letter from Moore to Byron dating to January or February of that year, Vail understands the anonymous *Morning Chronicle* squibs of the ensuing months in the context of the "most immortalizing scheme" Moore proposes to Byron: "You & I shall write Epistles to each other—in all measures and all styles upon all possible subjects—laugh at the world—weep for ourselves—quiz the humbugs—scarify the scoundrels—in short do every thing that the mixture of fun & philosophy

exchange are "Remember Thee! Remember Thee!" (1813), Byron's versified retort to a taunting flyleaf inscription left by Lady Caroline Lamb; and "Fare Thee Well!" (1816), enclosed with the poet's final appeal to his estranged wife, Annabella Milbanke. To such epistolary gestures may be added numerous representations of the epistolary, such as Donna Julia's farewell letter to Juan, "quoted" at the end of Canto I of *Don Juan*.[6] Finally, there are the letters embedded in the paratext: the cited, open, and facsimile letters that document the cosmopolitan world to which Byron has privileged access.

"The letters," in short, do not stand apart from and alongside "the poetry"; they are mutually constitutive. It misses the point to claim as Marchand does that Byron's "epistolary prose is less self-conscious than his verse and therefore a truer and more balanced picture of the man" (1). A "whole Byron" is indeed the lure into any interpretation of the poet's work, since one of the radical innovations of Byron's writing was to offer up a myth of disaffected nobility for his publisher to circulate, the critics to feed on, the reading classes to gawk at. That myth has been variously characterized as an abuse of poetic egotism (Henry Brougham), "everlasting centos of himself" (William Hazlitt), "historical self-projections" (Jerome McGann), the "processual nature of the self" (Peter Manning), a "strategic eye" (Jerome Christensen), and the "feedback loop" of the "celebrity *individual*" (Tom Mole).[7] All recognize that moment to moment Byron never means the same thing, yet none has adequately characterized the epistolary condition of his public persona. The dialogized self Byron forged in the crucible of his readers'

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there is in both of us can inspires…. [It] would bring out every thing we might publish or not, comme vous voudrez [Moore 1:176]." The following year, Moore collected the anonymous squibs he had written for the *Morning Chronicle* that spring into *Intercepted Letters; or, The Twopenny Post-Bag* (51–2).

[6] Julia's letter resurfaces in Canto II (stanzas 17–21 and 74–5), first inducing a bout of vomiting in the grieving Juan and later destroyed to create the lots that determine who gives himself up to feed the remaining passengers on the *Trinidada* (*CPW* V: 94–5, 112).

[7] See Brougham, Review of *Hours of Idleness;* Hazlitt, "Lord Byron" (237); McGann, "Hero" (42); Manning, Revisionary Self" (17); Christensen, *Strength* (78); Mole, *Romantic Celebrity* (3).

opinions manifests the rhetorical tradition as well as communicative practice with his coterie and the public sphere on which new historicist and book historical criticism has focused.[8]

If the disjunctive integrity of Byron's self-dramatization is the exemplary case of Romantic authorship, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* offers particularly advantageous ground for describing the epistolary condition of its possibility. The strange new species of poem Byron offered up as "A Romaunt" in 1812 was his first narrative performance of the self that became his cultural signature. The two cantos written primarily during his orientalized Grand Tour of Portugal, Spain, Albania, Turkey, and Greece in 1809–10 founded the improvisatory poetics that compulsively reinscribe and elaborate that signature throughout the rest of his career, from the popular Turkish tales (1813–16) through a third and fourth canto of *Childe Harold* (1816–18), *Beppo* (1818), the plays (1821)*,* and the unfinished *Don Juan* (1819–24). Indeed the critical tradition accords a special distinction to the verse romance that, as Thomas Moore recounts it, made Byron famous more or less overnight.[9] The distinction is not alone a matter of its alluring misanthrope and his commodifiable brand of romance. It is also a matter of the poem's barely structured, ongoing adaptation to the print marketplace and its readers: the erratic sequence of its cantos; the compositeness of its materials, both physical and cultural; the instability of its narrator's identity.[10] Critics invariably concede, as Jerome McGann does, the "clumsiness of

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[8] The new historicist position is perhaps best captured by the conclusion of Manning's argument in *"Childe Harold* in the Marketplace: From Romaunt to Handbook": "The revolution that the name of Byron figures cannot be understood apart from the institutions in which the cosmic rebellion of the Byronic hero is also a novelty to be paired with a cookbook. An evaluative critic…who finds Byron's closeness to his audience the symptom of his inauthenticity blinds himself to the nature of Byron's force: only through the double quality of a production tied to the market yet continuously read as the sign of a status (as aristocrat and poetic genius) beyond it can Byron be grasped" (189–90). My aim here is in part to complicate the "ties" of that production and signifying.

[9] Moore's famous account goes as follows: "The effect was, accordingly, electric;—his fame had not to wait for any of the ordinary gradations, but seemed to spring up, like the palace of a fairy tale, in a night. As he himself briefly described it in his Memoranda,—'I awoke one morning and found myself famous'" (*Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* 346–7).

[10] The two most cogent analyses of Byron's negotiations with his readers by way of print may be found in Peter J. Manning, "Childe Harold in the Marketplace: From Romaunt to Handbook," and Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy,* especially 1–6 and 44–59.

Byron's whole approach" to Harold (*Fiery Dust* 76). They instead lavish their praise, as Jerome

Christensen does, on *Don Juan,* especially that poem's "last, great spirited cantos" (*Lord Byron's*

Strength xix). Whereas McGann, for one, recovers a "kind of honesty" and "artistic virtue" from

the awkwardness he detects, I rather value the chaos of *Childe Harold*'s enterprise for the way it

maintains the disintegration of the self it narrates. The epistolary condition of the poem is

essential to that disintegration.[11]

The Epistolarity of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

Among all of Byron's verse romances, the first and least coherent sets in greatest relief the joint

work of its composition. Written at a distance from his coterie and his public, in two stages, over

roughly seven years, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* accretes across print and manuscript through a

coextension of verse and letters that concatenates the narrations of poet, author, hero,

lord…father, lover, husband, infidel, rebel…as Byron goes. This joint work is exaggerated by its

motley structure, the effect of which is compounded by the poem's extraordinary textual history.

Its publication in three unplanned installments across the Regency decade warrants at least three

possible configurations, as outlined by McGann in his commentary to the *Complete Poetical*

Works: a group of four cantos (I–IV), two pairs of cantos (I–II and III–IV), or one pair and two

stand-alone cantos (I–II, III, and IV). Characteristically, McGann attempts an aesthetic and

intentional reconciliation of the poem's gestures at unity with its textual instability: "Although

CHP can and should be regarded as a single poetic *unit*—B himself saw it as such—the work

neither is nor was a unified *composition*" (II: 265). The emphases here on *unit* and *composition*

want to distinguish between the poem and the writing of it while parsing the referentiality of

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[11] John Guillory begins the "Media Concept" essay from the premise that "the substantive noun *medium* was rarely connected with matters of communication before the later nineteenth century," when it developed a sense closer to its contemporary meaning in response to such technical media as the telegraph and phonograph (321).

"work" between the product of labor and the labor itself. However, the emphasis on *composition* invokes the sense of assemblage, in addition to making, that applies to *Childe Harold* within and across the cantos in any configuration. In fact, McGann presses his distinction further to observe that the poem's composition defies even the three basic configurations his commentary posits.

Written contemporaneously with his comprehensive editing of the poet's works, McGann's "The Book of Byron and the Book of a World" calls attention to the noncoincidence of poem and book in *Childe Harold: A Romaunt,* the "handsome and rather expensive (30s.) quarto volume beautifully printed on heavy paper" that is often shorthanded as Cantos I and II (258). McGann's book-historical point is that the conflation of poem and volume effectively ignores two significant sections of the *book,* privileging the cantos and their notes at the expense of the fourteen lyrics gathered under the heading "Poems" and the bibliographical and documentary appendix on modern Greece. The latter two sections are, McGann observes, essential to the project of the book, which "[m]ore than anything else…says that the most personal and intimate aspects of an individual's life are closely involved with, and affected by, the social and political context in which the individual is placed" (261). I take McGann's point further. Once the textual limits of the poem are unbound by the noncoincidence of cantos and book, the ground is laid for testing those limits against the noncoincidence of cantos, book, and the letters that shape, surround, and infiltrate the poem across manuscript and print. Recovering the poiesis from the epistolary condition of its assemblage—that is, from the joint work of its composition—corroborates the "project" McGann describes. But it does so only to maintain the variegation of the "intimate aspects" of the individual's life, asserting the plurality of the individual's "social and political context" as a series of situated accounts.

In a recent discussion of "Dejection: An Ode," Susan Stewart calls attention to the double meaning of *composition* as making and assemblage in order to describe the "outpouring of mutations, transpositions, and turns" in Coleridge's lyric ("Praise Poems" 241). Pointing to the "combinative" function of the "esemplastic power" the poet later neologizes in the *Biographia Literaria,* Stewart aligns Coleridgean composition as practice with Coleridgean imagination in theory. She follows the poet in defining a unifying telos into the "shaping spirit" to which the ode refers: composition is, as Stewart offers it, "bringing together disparate parts to produce calm and tranquillity…; a making up or combining of elements to produce an integrated form; an arranging or setting down" (ibid.). The significance of McGann's distinctions between *unit* and *composition* or book and poem in *Childe Harold* is its recognition of composition's fundamental resistance to aesthetic unity as a projection of the integrated self. The epistolarity of the text underscores the resistance to both: in Coleridge's ode as well as in Byron's romance. In fact, Stewart implicitly concedes the divergence of Coleridgean theory and practice when she subsequently refers to his "need to make composition transitive," that is, directed across the material limit that aesthetic unity imagines (242). The epistolarity of transitive composition in the Dejection ode—and the conversation poems generally—was taken up in chapter one as the "apostrophic relay" through various objects of address. In *Childe Harold,* the epistolarity of the joint work reveals a similarly transitive motive in the composition, though its relays effect, in Peter Manning's words*,* a "textual *self*-revision" that "bound his readers to him and illuminates the grounding of the self in dialogue and exchange" ("Revisionary Self" 223, my emphasis). Although letters figure only obliquely in Manning's account of this "dialogue and exchange," the epistolary has an essential role in Byron's "revisionary self," or "play of speakers who are but temporary positions in the continuing process" of composing his personality (213).

The primary evidence of this role would have to be the dedicatory letter to John Cam Hobhouse that prefaces the fourth and final canto of *Childe Harold.* Transitive by definition, Byron's address to his devoted longtime friend and traveling companion facilitates his most explicit act of self-revision: the public exorcism of Harold from his hero. "With regard to the conduct of the last canto," Byron announces, "there will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding, and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person" (*CPW* II: 121–2). The textual joint where Canto IV picks up the pilgrim's narrative in 1817 is here marked by a letter, the transitive nature of which itself marks the relay from "pilgrim" to "author speaking in his own person." In his 1818 review of Canto IV in the *Quarterly Review,* Walter Scott echoes this latter phrase precisely in identifying the source of Byron's "novelty" (219). Manning, in turn, reads the echo against the review's "disdain for Byron's self-display" as the "collision between a style with dominant oral traits and the aggressive print culture of the magazines and quarterlies" (213). Yet the union of immediacy and affect that, according to Manning, signifies the orality of Byron's style is not the exclusive province of interpolated lyrics such as the "Good night" stanzas in Canto I or those beginning "The castled crag of Drachenfels" in Canto III.[12] Byron authenticates his self-avowal in the dedicatory letter to Hobhouse by invoking the conversational intimacy of familiar correspondence, even as the dedication is an open letter intended for print, not private posting in manuscript. Since the converse of epistolary exchange instantiates what Maureen McLane has called the "complex oral-literate conjunction in the period," epistolarity is in this case a figure for manuscript as much as speech ("Ballads and Bards" 426). The letter to Hobhouse thus frames

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[12] Childe Harold's "Good night" and the Drachenfels lyric are Manning's examples, though there are others to cite. The Drachenfels lyric is particularly relevant here because it points up the intersection of lyric and epistolary practice: Byron's first draft was sent in a letter to his half-sister, Augusta, with the following headnote: "May 11th 1816—Written on the banks of the Rhine—to my dearest sister with some flowers." (McGann *CPW* 2: 299).

and performs the transitive bond in Byron's "play of speakers" while illustrating the convergence of speech, print, *and* manuscript. It is, moreover, exemplary of the epistolary joint, because it holds in tension the simultaneous operations of genre and medium.

From its conventional position of prominence, integrated into the volume according to the conventions of dedicatory paratext, the letter to Hobhouse is not exemplary of those epistolary relays that index the noncoincidence with poem and book, however. Printed between the epigraph and the first stanza, the letter only represents the articulation that posted letters can trace beyond the confines of the printed object. Take, for example, the letter Byron wrote to his Cambridge tutor Francis Hodgson from Falmouth on June 25, 1809, just days before the poet, Hobhouse, and three servants set sail for Lisbon on the tour that was to map, if not precisely dictate, the progress of Cantos I and II. According to Moore, whose life-and-letters account put the letter into print two decades later, Byron enclosed with the letter a lyric that re-creates the anticipatory frenzy of boarding and preparing the packet boat bound for the continent. He renders the scene a comedy of types and errors, which he distills in the rhyme—*racket* with *packet*—that concludes four of the poem's five stanzas. Here is the first, opening in apostrophe to the intended recipient of the letter with which they were enclosed:

> Huzza! Hodgson, we are going,
> Our embargo's off at last
> Favourable Breezes blowing
> Bend the canvass oer the mast,
> From aloft the signal's streaming
> Hark! The farewell gun is fired,
> Women screeching, Tars blaspheming
> Tells us that our time's expired
> Here's a rascal
> Come to task all
> Prying from the custom house,
> Trunks unpacking
> Cases cracking

> Not a corner for a mouse
> Scapes unsearched amid the racket
> Ere we sail on board the Packet. (148–9)

Editors since Moore, most notably Marchand, have collected the Packet lyric as though it were a letter in verse posted separately on the later date, as opposed to a verse epistle, or poem-posing-as-a-letter (*Letters and Journals* I: 211). The editorial slippage arises in part because letters and lyrics both announce themselves in the vocative, the inflection of orality. Letter as lyric or lyric as letter, the lines to Hodgson are more than just a glimpse of the poem to come and not just a curiosity of tonal contrast with the cantos' melancholy. Until Byron's last revision before publication in 1812, the first two cantos "contained a great deal of comic and satiric material mixed in with more sober reflections and observations" (McGann *CPW* II: 271). The manuscript letter and lyric to Hodgson are therefore noncoincident and coextensive with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt.* Prior even to the paratext, the cantos' beginning precedes even the front cover of every bound volume of the first edition. Unlike the letter to Hobhouse, the letter to Hodgson is exemplary of the epistolary's power to join manuscript and print, which in this case produces the relay from Byron just-come-of-age to Byron the Poet, that is, between the Byrons on either side of "I awoke to find myself famous."

Six years and as many Turkish tales later, an infamous Byron reenacts the occasion of the first of his romances as he resumes *Childe Harold* with a third canto. His dramatic departure from England in 1816, this time in flight from the scandal surrounding his separation from Lady Byron, is only the most obvious detail of the reenactment. The epistolary joint between manuscript and print is the most obscure. Like the articulation rendered by the letter and lyric written to Hodgson at Falmouth, the letter Byron wrote to Augusta from Dover within hours of sailing for Belgium expresses the poet's final departure from England as myth and as matter. The

reenactment is a finer construction, however, since Byron wrote to his sister within hours, as opposed to days, of leaving the country. Moreover, Byron drafted the first three stanzas of Canto III aboard ship on the way to Ostend, within days of writing the letter to his sister; it was in Albania, four months after writing to Hodgson and his arrival in Portugal, that he began to draft Canto I of the "poem." I use quotation marks here not only to reiterate and extend McGann's point about the noncoincidence of work and volume with the addition of a third canto, but also to foreground the other exemplary function shared by the two epistolary moments: joining prose and verse at the convergence of orality, manuscript, and print.

As a stand-alone letter, the Packet lyric to Hodgson joins the conversational orality of the epistolary with the musical orality of the verse. When it is read as an enclosure, the conversational orality of the enveloping prose trumps the metered conversation of the verse; the letter and lyric mark a material rather than a formal union of prose and verse. Exclusively prose, exclusively conversational, the letter to Augusta defines a contiguity between letter and "poem." It materializes from without the orality the letter to Hobhouse can only figure from within the binding: "My dearest Augusta / We sail tonight for Ostend, and I seize this moment to *say* two or three words" (*Letters and Journals* V: 70; my emphasis). The prose nevertheless finds an elegiac tone of lyric, based in Byron's longing for the sister to whom he writes but carried through the comforting particulars of the death of Lord Carlisle's son at Waterloo and the desire for news of Ada, his daughter with Lady Byron. This is the precise note struck by the first of the three stanzas composed during the crossing to Ostend: "Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child!/ Ada! Sole daughter of my house and heart?/ When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,/ And then we parted,—not as now we part,/ But with a hope" (1–5). An accident of textual history sharpens the point of contact between the letter to Augusta and the apostrophe to Ada, for

the letter to Augusta survives only as a fragment. As it remains, the letter trails off at the appeal

for news of the daughter he fears he will not see again (and never does): "Address to me—à

Genève *Poste Restante*—and (<if>when you hear) tell me how my little *Da* is—&" (71). The

letter is written on three sides of a folded sheet; the fourth side is blank, so the torn-out corner

probably doesn't reveal much more than Byron's ever affectionate "Adieu" and a signature. The

"and" at which the letter falls off nevertheless invites one to ponder what is lost, censored, or

suppressed, only to return, as it were, in the stanzas of the canto. (After all, missing or mistaken

words, fragmentation, and nondelivery are the primary topoi of epistolary tradition and an

inevitable fact of epistolary practice.)[13] Chief among the absences figured here by the

composition of prose and verse is the repressed reality that Byron's sister and daughter have their

first name in common. The material contiguity of letter and "poem" focuses the relay here

between the poet's most nettled self-constructions, that is, the space wherein Lover (of Augusta

Leigh) and Father of (Augusta Ada) cohabitate.

The printed "poem" does not undermine the contiguity of the manuscript letter and draft

stanzas. It elaborates it—in tandem, of course, with the joint work that stages the textual

pilgrimage. This is true of both the letter to Hodgson and the letter to Augusta, though, again, the

latter more finely frames its joint. The relay from Lover to Father remains palpable first of all

because, unlike its counterparts, Canto III is prefaced only by an epigraph. In other words, the

only paratext after the front matter to intervene between the proleptic letter to Augusta and the

first stanza's apostrophe to Ada is the title of the poem and the brief lines taken from the "*Lettre*

du Roi de Prusse à D'Alembert, Sept. 7, 1776": "*Afin que cette application vous forçât à penser*

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[13] On numerous occasions during the tour of 1809–11, Byron reminds his correspondents to post several letters to ensure delivery. Writing from Albania on September 29, 1809, for example, he adds the following postscript to a letter to his lawyer and agent John Hanson: "You should write two or three letters, *one* may miscarry, two have a better chance" (*Letters and Journals* I: 225).

à autre chose. Il n'y a en vérité de remède que celui-là et le temps [So that the task would force you to think about something else. There is really no remedy but that and time]" (*CPW* 2: 76; my translation). An epistolary joint in its own right, the epigraph thus captures Frederick the Great mid sentence offering the "*toujours sensible*" D'Alembert the sound counsel that distraction is the only way to manage grief.[14] Byron's readers would have understood this consolation in the context of the poet's "domestic circumstances."[15] They would also have understood both the paternalizing king and the orphaned intellectual as two more "temporary positions" in the continuous parade of Byronic affect. All too temporary, though. The epigraph provides the distraction it calls for but can't sustain against the double loss of sister and daughter (not to mention wife), back to which the poet immediately turns in the apostrophic relay of the opening address to (Augusta) Ada.

In light of the diversionary relay of the epigraph to Canto III, the first cantos' suspension between Byron just-come-of-age and Byron the Poet requires further elaboration. The prefatory materials that in print intervene between the contiguity of the anticipatory lyric to Hodgson and the stanzas he drafted in Albania four months later are both more numerous and more expansive than the brief lines from the King of Prussia's letter to d'Alembert. They include, in order of their appearance all together for the seventh edition in 1814, an epigraph taken from *Le*

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[14] In the omitted clause, the king expresses his desire to provide such distraction with a difficult problem for D'Alembert to solve. As though the letter's opening reference to D'Alembert's "coeur tendre…toujours sensible" were not sufficient to invite Byron's identification with the king's correspondent, the sentence that directly follows those of the epigraph delivers an apt description of the celebrity's quandary in the Wordsworthian mode of the canto it frames: "Nous sommes comme les rivières, qui conservent leur nom, mais dont les eaux changent toujours; quand une partie des molécules qui nous ont composés est remplacée par d'autres, le souvenir des objets qui nous ont fait du plaisir ou de la douleur s'affaiblit, parce que réelement nous ne sommes plus les mêmes, et que le temps nous renouvelle sans cesse. [We are like rivers, who hold onto their name even as the waters forever change; when some of the molecules that make us up are replaced by others, the memory of the things that gave us pleasure or pain fades, because we really are no longer the same, and because time is endlessly renewing us" (Frederick the Great; my translation).

[15] In the same year, John Murray printed a small edition (fifty copies) of *Poems of Lord Byron on his own domestic circumstances*. The volume includes two poems addressed to Lady Bryon, "Fair thee well!" and "A Sketch from Private Life." It was then widely pirated in newspapers and unauthorized editions by other publishers, such as William Hone.

Cosmopolite, ou le citoyen du monde, the 1750 travel narrative of Louis-Charles Fougeret de

Monbron; the original preface to the cantos; the "Addition to the Preface"; and a dedicatory lyric

titled "To Ianthe." To these we can add the first stanza of the poem, a noninvocation of the muse

"to grace so plain a tale" (l. 9), for it entered the poem—by post, no less—only after Byron

returned to England and began finalizing the manuscript for publication.[16] Though more

elaborate in its joint work than the third canto's printed paratext, the composition of materials no

more undermines the contiguity of letter and stanzas than the epigraph to Canto III does. The

churlish "riot" of the Packet lyric picks right back up in the antiqued styling of the second stanza,

which, as the first to be drafted, introduces the supposed hero:

> Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth,
> Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight;
> But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
> And vex'd with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.
> Ah, me! In sooth he was a shameless wight,
> Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
> Few earthly things found favour in his sight
> Save concubines and carnal companie,
> And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree. (II.10–18)

A model for the reenactment Byron performs to occasion his return to *Childe Harold* six years

later, the threshold stanza here courts the melancholy from which the epistolary epigraph later

fails to provide diversion at the opening of Canto III. Indeed much more can be said about the

series of gestures performed by the composition of these introductory materials, but I want here

to highlight "To Ianthe" for its symmetry with the Packet lyric as an epistolary space on the other

side of the first cantos' publication.

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[16] McGann notes that "Stanza I of Canto I was the first addition to the poem [as copied in a second draft for the printer], sent to [R.C.] Dallas in late July [1811]" (*CPW* II: 267).

The dedicatory lyric is an allegorized address to Lady Charlotte Harley, the second daughter of Lady Oxford, with whom Byron began a brief liaison from late 1812, months after the first publication of *Childe Harold.* As such, the lyric collapses the double loss of lover and daughter as the opening apostrophe to Ada does in the first stanza of Canto III. "To Ianthe," however, was one of the last additions to the first two cantos. Along with ten stanzas of Canto II, it appeared for the first time only in 1814, for the seventh edition of *A Romaunt*. It is therefore recapitulating the several losses that motivate the melancholy Byron reinforced in revising the first two cantos for publication three years earlier; it also reveals the third canto's reenactment of the double loss as an actualization of the situation retrospectively staged for the earlier cantos. As though he would have wanted the stanzas to Charlotte to open rather than preface the canto, they take up the Spenserian stanza of the rest of the cantos, not the blank verse typical of contemporary adaptations of the classical ode. Moreover, the allegorization of the young girl as the titular Ianthe, who was herself thirteen years old when, in Ovid's account*,* she was engaged to marry the gender-dissembling Iphis (IX.666–797), adheres to the classicism of the stanza that had for two years launched the canto: "Oh, thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth,/ Muse! form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will!/ Since shamed full oft by later lyres on earth,/ Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill" (1–4). Yet six editions into publication, Byron could no more recant the epic distancing of his first stanza's gesture than he could revoke its already equivocal appeal to the muse. Neither the material nor the social circumstances were yet ripe for "speaking in his own person" as he avowedly does to open Canto III. The draft title "To the Lady Charlotte Harley" thus becomes "To Ianthe" and finds its place in the composition between the prose "Addition to the Preface" and the first lines of the narrative. Articulating the "back" end of the printed object with the middle of the composition, the transitive stanzas mark the noncoincidence

of edition with edition, as well as the contiguity of print and manuscript, prose and verse, letter and lyric. In doing so, they add Lover and Father to the paratextual relays of Troubador, Antiquarian, and Misanthrope.

Present <at the Time>: Citing the Relay

Because joints, or relays, are most visible at the margins of the text, I have been focusing on the epistolarity of the paratext that composes the beginning of each of *Childe Harold*'s cantos. However, epistolarity is in no way limited to the beginning or even the front edge of the text. Indeed the power of reading for the epistolary condition is its provision for a nonlinear temporality at the surface of the text proceeding "front" to "back," irrespective of edition. "To Ianthe" is a perfect example. Its classical invocation overwrites the address to Lady Charlotte Harley as both ode and verse epistle. At the same time, its presence among the assemblage of materials prefacing the first two cantos (McGann recognizes its "special appositeness as an introduction" [*CPW* II: 272]) documents its belated composition and insertion there. Its presence documents in turn the belated elevation of melancholy as the predominant tone of the initial narrative, in contrast to the fervor of the anticipatory lyric to Hodgson. A similarly belated insertion in the notes to Canto II attests to epistolarity in the composition of other textual margins and again to the role of letters as sites of orality and immediacy equal in resonance to the interpolated lyrics Manning emphasizes.

Along with the six poems he added to the second edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt,* Byron added a note to the twelfth stanza of the second canto. The climax of his opening lament over the ruined state of Greece, the stanza is one of two condemning the Scottish

plunder of the country's "latent grandeur" (11.86); and short of naming him outright, the stanza

vilifies Lord Elgin as the "Cold…barren…hard" man "whose head conceiv'd, whose hand

prepar'd,/ Aught to displace Athena's poor remains" (12.101–5). The note refers specifically to

the dismantling of the Parthenon described in the last lines of the stanza: "Her sons too weak the

sacred shrine to guard,/ Yet felt some portion of their mother's pains,/ And never knew, till then,

the weight of Despot's chains" (106–8). Intended to represent the country's greater political

subjection and humiliation, the scene is re-presented in the additional note by way of a letter to

Byron from Edward Daniel Clarke, who does identify the enterprising Scot by name:

> I cannot resist availing myself of the permission of my friend Dr.
> Clarke, whose name requires no comment with the public, but
> whose sanction will add tenfold weight to my testimony, to insert
> the following extract from a very obliging letter of his to me, as a
> note to the above lines:—
>   'When the last of the Metopes was taken from the Parthenon,
> and, in moving of it, great part of the superstructure with one of the
> triglyphs was thrown down by the workmen whom Lord Elgin
> employed, the Disdar, who beheld the mischief done to the
> building, took his pipe from his mouth, dropped a tear, and, in a
> supplicating tone of voice, said to Lusieri; Τελοσ!—I was
> present.'
>   The Disdar alluded to was the father of the present Disdar.
> (*CPW* II: 191–92)

Clarke was a Cambridge don who had traveled extensively in Europe, Russia, and the

Mediterranean and in 1810 began publishing just such a travel narrative as *Childe Harold* is in

part modeled on. The appeal here *in propria persona* to the scholar's authority, buttressed by the

preemptive aside that his "name requires no comment with the public," reiterates Byron's

privileged access to a world of knowledge, wealth, and culture he wants his readers to rely on

him to witness.[17] Yet Clarke's access exceeds even Byron's in this case, for he "was present" at the crime Byron uses his "strength" to prosecute.[18]

Clarke and Byron met in Cambridge in October 1811, after which they began a brief correspondence, primarily about their respective experiences in Greece. Clarke wrote the letter Byron excerpts in the early months of 1812. It is not dated except to say "Wednesday morning" and the postage stamp is faded to illegibility; but he must have written the letter between March 8, when Byron sent him a copy of the book, and April 5, when Byron first replied (*Letters and Journals* II: 169, 171–2).[19] Clarke begins by expressing his "eagerness…to make known [his] opinion of [Byron's] poem, before others had expressed <u>any</u> on the subject" and offers his "hasty, although hearty, commendation." He recounts his exchange about the poem with fellow Cambridge scholar and satirist Thomas James Mathias (author of *The Pursuits of Literature,* 1794); he then turns to Canto II, which he had just read that morning "with all the attention it so highly merits, in the peace and stillness of his study," and confesses he was "never so much affected by any poem." Prompted by Byron's defense of his "petty scribbling squabbles" in a

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[17] Writing to his former tutor Henry Drury from Constantinople in the summer of 1810, just before Hobhouse left the tour, Byron refers Drury to Hobhouse for further details of their travels, but with the following caveat: "H, who will deliver this, is bound straight for these parts [back to England]; and, as he is bursting with his travels, I shall not anticipate his narratives, but merely beg you not to believe one word he says, but reserve your ear for me, if you have any desire to be acquainted with the truth." He repeats his plea a few lines later regarding the mosques they are about to visit: "But of these and other sundries let H relate, with this proviso, that *I* am to be referred to for authenticity; and I beg leave to contradict all those things whereon he lays particular stress" (246). Byron could be mounting a defense of his sexuality in advance, but his protests must also be read as the exercise of his "strength" (see n. 15, below). Maureen McLane reads the exercise through the anthropological "work of returning," invoking Michel de Certeau's term to call attention to the first two cantos' "bid for ethnographic and ethnopoetic authority." Drawing in addition on the disciplinary critique of anthropologist James Clifford, she notes Byron's role as "participant observer" of the Eastern cultures he visits and exoticizes in those cantos, a role to which the intermediation of the poem's paratexts and peritexts testifies: "That the poem is itself a 'work of returning' seems clear, as are Byron's letters, later folded into his notes," which are, as McLane points out, *in propria persona,* unlike the Spenserian stanzas, the *persona* of which is always in question ("Ballads and Bards" 437n.).

[18] *Strength* here refers to the "eclipsed" half of Matthew Arnold's oft-cited recovery of A.C. Swinburne's appraisal of Byron; the other, of course, is sincerity (Christensen xiii). I am holding to Christensen's useful distinction, by way of Foucault, between "strength" and "power" (4–5).

[19] Byron's letter of April 5 appears either to have "miscarried" or never been sent, because Byron writes again on May 27 with apologies for "not having answered your very kind letter before" (*Letters and Journals* II: 178). In his biography of Byron, Marchand proposes March 11, 1812, as the date of Clarke's letter (I: notes, 31).

prepublication letter of January 18, Clark devotes the rest of his letter to the canto's stanzas on the devastation of Greece (157). It was a subject with which Clarke had some experience, having published just two years earlier a "descriptive catalog" of the marble antiquities "deposited in the vestibule of the public library of the University of Cambridge." The portion Byron quotes is the last full paragraph of the letter before the salutation, and it reads a bit like a postscript, generously but modestly proposing a small contribution to the poet's project: "For the 12th stanza of the same Canto, you might really add a very curious Note, to these Lines—Her sons too weak the sacred shrine to guard/ Yet felt some portion of their Mother's pains— by relating this fact." Here Clarke sets off the "fact" with a strong vertical line, and the paragraph proceeds to its end verbatim as printed in the second edition of *Childe Harold.* With one exception: Byron omits the final phrase of the proposed annotation. As Clarke relates the matter, he "was present at the time."

Byron does allow for editing when he writes to thank Clarke and gladly accept the suggestion: "The extract from your letter I shall certainly reduce into a note & with your leave state my authority" (*Letters and Journals* II: 172). Yet Byron neither reduces nor edits Clarke's language in any other way. He preserves its skillfully suspended syntax. He doesn't correct the awkwardness of the missing article before "great part of the superstructure with one of the triglyphs was thrown down." Neither is the deletion made to conform to the space on the printed page. One may therefore conclude that there is a rhetorical intention in ending the sentence on the word *present.* Indeed it "adds tenfold weight" to that which the doctor's "testimony" adds to Byron's own. On the other hand, "at the time" is a syntactical disappointment, almost an afterthought, and it returns the scene's patiently constructed immediacy to the past.

To include the phrase would have been to undermine the cumulative effect of the note, both as proposed by Clarke and then as framed by Byron. Deleting it heightens an otherwise masterful execution, the suspense of which climaxes with the immediacy of direct speech: "It's over!" That Clarke renders the Disdar's utterance using the Greek alphabet exaggerates the orality of the quotation and defers the meaning of the reference, thereby mitigating the horror it depicts and wants to provoke. Lest the "Telos" of the anecdote overwhelm his testimony, however, Clarke asserts his status as a witness to the event: "I was present at the time." Byron's improvement on Clarke's performance is, of course, to best the gentleman at his own game. By deleting the equivocal phrase, Byron achieves a second climax of quotation on "present," to echo that on "Telos." In so doing, he also more effectively mitigates the finality of the Disdar's reported cry. To finish, lest the stature of Clarke's testimony overwhelm Byron's own, he takes the promised leave to "state [his] authority" with a gratuitous clarification of the Disdar's identity. Far be it from Byron to allow someone else the last word.

Although Clarke offsets his proposed contribution stylistically and with distinct punctuation, the conversational orality of the letter that gives rise to it carries through in the first-person immediacy of the scene it reanimates. Perhaps Clarke is already exhibiting the influence of the "poem" he has just finished reading. That Byron appreciates the achieved effect of Clarke's "very curious note" in terms of epistolary immediacy and evidentiary value is clear from his framing of the passage. As though Clarke had not conceived the quoted lines for the express purpose of annotating the indicting stanza, Byron presents as merely "availing [himself] of the permission of [his] friend Dr. Clarke…to insert the following extract from a very obliging letter of his to me." He is, in other words, entangling Clarke's authority in his own, "grounding…the self in dialogue and exchange," to return to Manning's formulation, but neither

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precisely by "speaking in his own person" nor in any way to defer to the authority and authenticity of another's ("Revisionary Self" 223). At this embedded margin of the text, as elsewhere, the epistolary joint expresses the transitive, or intersubjective, motive of composition. Just as the missing corner of the manuscript letter to Augusta marks a contiguity with the third canto's opening apostrophe, the omission of Clarke's manuscript phrase creates a contiguity with the printed text, only from the other side of publication. And while the dedicatory lyric "To Ianthe" marks a remoter edge of the "back" side of the text, the passage from Clarke's letter erupts more properly *in medias res* to compose prose and verse. It also offers a model for finally recognizing the epistolary joints, or relays, within the stanzas of the poem, not just at the paratextual margins.

Especially in its proximity to the uttered "Telos," the literalization of "presence" in the cited letter stages the epistolarity of the eruptions of direct address in the stanzas themselves. These moments include the interpolated lyrics in which Manning sites the poem's orality. They also include the poem's vocative gestures, such as the apostrophe to the Rhine that arises from the high Wordsworthian mode of Canto III: "Adieu to thee, fair Rhine! … / Thine is a scene alike where souls united/ Or lonely Contemplation thus might stray" (59.563–66). When these gestures erupt in the middle of a stanza or line, they introduce into the verse the epistolary relays, or transitive moments, of composition unsignaled by any formal or material variation (e.g., a change in meter, rhyme, setting of the type). Moving from the Rhine to Lake Leman and the setting of Rousseau's epistolary novel *Lettres de deux amants* (1761)*,* the poet-narrator is seized by the vision of a storm invading the Alpine peaks at night: "The sky is changed!" the line begins, then breaks into apostrophe at the final foot: "Oh night,/And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,/Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light/ Of a dark eye in woman!" (92.860–

3). Byron is not alone with Nature in quite the way his Anglican muse would dictate. Behind the "night" and "storm" and "darkness" is the lover smuggled by way of simile into the encounter with the sublime. One could read the comparison as a displacement of the object of address, but in the context of the preceding stanzas' allusion to Rousseau's popular epistolary romance, the composition of apostrophe and simile lays bare the triangulation of address inherent to epistolary plotting: the poet-narrator's cry is directed past the thundering heavens not to "woman" in general, but to any of a number of particular women.[20] At the closest range of reading, then, the epistolary condition explains the entanglement of Byron the Solitary and Byron the Libertine.

The triangulation of poet-narrator, storm, and woman figures the romance Byron compulsively triangulates with his readers, from his coterie and steadfast publisher to the remoter magazine audiences. The epistolarity of this triangulation is what John Wilson is identifying when, in his 1818 review of Canto IV for the *Edinburgh Review,* he observes that the "singular illusion" of Byron's confessions, like Rousseau's, betray "something of the nature of private and confidential communication" (90). Tom Mole, following Manning, terms the bond between poet and reader the "hermeneutic of intimacy" (22–5).[21] That illusion of an unmediated relationship— the one Marchand reinvigorates to introduce the poet's correspondence in 1973—is the armature of the "celebrity apparatus," according to Mole, and he traces its emergence in the drafting and revision of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold.* Byron originally intended the cantos for his Cambridge friends and covertly addressed it to them, thereby imagining "an amenable and

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[20] Altman analyzes this triangulation in her second chapter, "Of Confidence and Confidants," and distinguishes the importance of the confidant in theater from its importance in epistolary fiction (47–86, esp. 50–54). Altman argues that "the passive rather than the active aspect of the confidant…is the more epistolary quality" (53). I subscribe to the essential role of the confidant in epistolarity, and I appreciate Altman's distinction insofar as plot must be handled differently in embodied and written narratives. Byron makes a theater of his confidences, however. Epistolarity, as Altman goes far in describing it, does not define the diegesis of *Childe Harold* as narrative. The epistolarity of *Childe Harold* keeps breaking the fourth wall of the text.

[21] Mole notes the origin of his formulation in Manning's: "Byron, 'speaking in his own person' and laying open the anatomy of his 'throbbing bosom,' furnished *the simulacrum of intimacy* the new readership craved" ("Revisionary Self" 216, my emphasis).

friendly audience who would emotionally mediate between him and the mass reading public"

(55). When his mother and three important members of the intended coterie died as he was

completing the first draft, Byron was forced to renegotiate his appeal to the anonymous public:

"[I]n losing one audience, Byron discovered another, creating the apparently unmediated

relationship between poet and reader that characterised the hermeneutic of intimacy [but which]

was in fact mediated by the intervention of industrial publication methods, under the direction of

John Murray" (53–4). As we cannot except letters from the orality effects of poetry, we cannot

except them from the matrix of "industrial publication methods." Epistolarity is, as Wilson's

review attests, implicit in the intimacy Mole and Manning observe, but it also exceeds the

generic limits of the figured presence. As letters compose manuscript and print, underwriting the

poem's relays of narratorial identity, they participate synecdochically in the networks of

movement and contact that simultaneously occasion the act of writing and conduct those

methods of publication.[22] For this reason, it can neither be claimed that writing was the general

medium nor that print was the general medium in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Functioning too like a medium, letters reference the joints—or relays in the sense

closest resembling Siegert's vision of the postal epoch—in the networks they map. "Address to

me—à Genève *Poste Restante*—and (<if>when you hear) tell me how my little *Da* is—" In

addition to marking the relay from Lover to Father, Byron's interrupted letter to Augusta figures

metaphorically and synecdochically the poste restante through which the anticipated news of his

daughter will relay, <if>when it comes. During the tour of 1809–11, Malta served as the primary

poste restante for Byron's communication with England from points East. Writing from Smyrna

in April 1810, he directs his mother: "Malta is the rendezvous of my letters, so address to that

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[22] I want to note the subtle distinction here from Manning's demonstration that Byronic self-revision publicly "enfolds the networks to which it responds" (223).

Island" (*Letters and Journals* I: 235). The same day, with a little more urgency, he conveys the same to his lawyer and agent, John Hanson, who had to date been silent on pressing financial matters: "I have always told you to address me at Malta whence any letters will be forwarded to me by my correspondents in that Island" (236). Thus letters document and trace the network they mediate, but they also represent the vehicles of communication. Exemplary again is the Packet lyric to Francis Hodgson that, I argue, is the first sally in Harold's pilgrimage. Malta was to have been the first stop on Byron's tour; but, as he writes to Hodgson just days before departing Falmouth: "We are going to Lisbon first, because the Malta Packet has sailed d'ye see?" (210). So "Lisbon Packet" has come down to us as the refrain of the lyric associated with that letter, referring to the vessel that transports the international mail along with Byron to the seat of his incipient imagination. Genre is at stake in the Packet lyric's collapse of epistolary into apostrophic address. As the vehicle communicating between, on the one side, the letter with which it is enclosed and, on the other, the first drafts of Canto I, the Packet lyric acts the medium These are the tandem operations of Romantic epistolarity: appealing as genre, communicating as medium.

Much later in the sequence of the first cantos' publication, the late addition of "To Ianthe" mirrors, in print, the Packet lyric and its operations. On the opposing edge of the binding, a last example of the epistolary joint expresses this tension while offering a surprising translation of the movement mapped by letters into the materiality of publication. Within the volume but without the cantos, the Appendix of *A Romaunt* concludes with the facsimile of a handwritten letter from the Bey of Corinth, who had "refused [Byron] a lodging" when the weather turned during his passage across the isthmus of Corinth on the way to Athens (*Letters and Journals* II: 23–4). Byron's complaint, conveyed through the Marquis of Sligo to Stratford Canning, the head

of the British Embassy in Constantinople, prompted the Bey's apology, not that the poet's

audience could appreciate anything more than his regret. On the preceding pages of the

Appendix Byron makes a show of his erudition by transcribing and interpreting various

contemporary Romaic texts; he makes a show of his nobility, or "strength," by leaving the Bey's

Turkish untranslated.[23] The opacity of the script ensures that Byron's readers are mystified by

the power of his name; in this the letter does the work of genre, interpellating the reader into the

social structure that subjects her. As an illegible reproduction, the letter at the same time figures

Byron's network of communication with foreign power. Neither exactly manuscript nor exactly

print, the facsimile also articulates the materialities it can only reproduce. Too large even for a

luxurious quarto volume, the page was folded in half to be bound into the back of the volume; it

then traveled, as letters are wont to do, sometimes getting lost or bound elsewhere in the book.[24]

Wherever it ends up, the facsimile letter carries the reader back into the pilgrimage while,

untranslated and unhinged, it sends her out of the book. Byron, in any case, is poised to traverse

the heroes of the Turkish tales on the way to arriving, care of Augusta, at Ada, his paternal

circumvention of the classical muse.

 "A diachronic, multifariously articulated social composition." Jerome Christensen's

parenthetical definition of the "Byronic career" is as good a formulation as we have of what

contemporaries like Brougham, Hazlitt, even Wilson did *not* understand about Byron's self-

regard (181). There is a transitive, intersubjective motive to the hero's "manifold life"; it

continually surfaces at the joints of the cantos and their apparatus.[25] Christensen, I think,

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[23] For a translation of the Bey's letter, see Peter Cochran's edition of Byron's correspondence.

[24] For example, there is no facsimile letter in the Murray Archive's first edition of *A Romaunt*. It is folded into the Archive's copy of the second edition, but in the front not the back.

[25] McGann analyzes the confusion and differentiation of Byron and Harold in the third chapter of *Fiery Dust*. Though the chapter title references a "Twofold Life," McGann is clearly aware of its manifold nature: "But Byron did not have any models to guide him in techniques for handling ego-projections in a first-person confessional form.

acknowledges this joint work and, unwittingly, its epistolary condition in his greater claim that "[b]ecause the Byronic career…is the material basis for the reproduction of the Byronic text, that text will always produce correspondences that are convulsive—whether between the character and poet, between the poem and its price, between the poet and reader, between the image and reality, between beginning and end." The epistolary condition of Harold and his pilgrimage register these convulsions, because letters are the material basis of the Byronic career. And now I have unwittingly fulfilled Christensen's prophesy by pursuing these "fits" of the Byronic text "on a case-by-case basis" through the "fyttes" of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (181–2; *CPW* II: I.93.945). The following envoi mines the fit of another apostrophic moment from Canto III for its metadiscursive suggestion of epistolarity's suspension between genre and medium.

The Fytting Medium of Desire

The epistolary condition of *Childe Harold* may be theorized in terms of one of the best-known stanzas from Canto III. Concluding an apostrophic reproach of Napoleon, who was by 1816 in his final exile on St. Helena, the narrator masks one of many reflections on the titular hero's restlessness with a reflection on the inevitability of Napoleon's fate:

> But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
> And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire
> And motion of the soul which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being, but aspire
> Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
> And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
> Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
> Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
> Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore. (42.370–78)

Had he written the poem one hundred years later he might have managed the problem much more smoothly" (69). Indeed he might have mastered free indirect speech. Then again, he might have written *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses*.

A conventional interpretation of the lines will find a Kantian aesthetics in the soul's transcendence of "its own narrow being" and a proto-Lacanian psychology in the "fatal" pursuit of a "core" desire. I want to focus, however, on the vexed aspiration, expressed at the stanza's core, to adventure "beyond the fitting medium of desire." Insofar as Byron refers to his own ambition by way of Napoleon's, we may take the reference to that desire's "medium" for an occasion to historicize the word in its self-conscious reference to Byron's poetry. Under the auspices of "fitting," such historicization confronts the generic implications of *medium,* which bears both a classical and a medieval literary genealogy.

In his bravura account of that economy, Jerome Christensen turns to what he calls the "speculative stage" of Canto III. He teases out much of the discourse sedimented in *fitting* by marking the recurrence of its root "often and variously" throughout the canto. "The peculiar dynamics of the poem," he argues, "are not only metaphorized but enacted in the equivocal word [*fit*] … which sometimes suggests the synonym of *decorous* or *correspondent,* sometimes the synonym of *convulsion*" (181). The generic implications are immediately apparent. "Decorous" refers to the classical legacy of Horace, who is, with Shakespeare, the primary source of allusion for Byron and provides both the draft and final epigraphs of *Don Juan* ("*domestica facta*" and "*Difficile est propie communia dicere,*" respectively). More greatly inflected with Romantic mysticism (e.g., Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism) than its syntactical parity with "decorous" might suggest, "correspondent" bears the association, if not the apposition, for its appeal to the Horatian tradition of philosophical converse and familiar exchange (best represented in eighteenth-century verse by William Cowper's *The Task).* This association of decorum and correspondence innocently captures the generic equivocation of their more precise Horatian origin, the ancient Roman poet's *Ars poetica.* Its conservative aesthetics had underwritten

English poetics since the Renaissance, a status that ought to have made the treatise a target for Byron's satire, rather than a model for his verse. Byron, however, drafted his own translation of the *Ars poetica* in 1811, the year after he finished writing the first two cantos of *Childe Harold,* and attempted twice but failed to publish it in his lifetime. Thomas Moore finally did so in his 1832 edition of Byron's works. This textual history is interesting enough for its speaking to, as Jane Stabler puts it, "Byron's complex attitude to Horatian critical orthodoxy;" but the textual history also points up the translation's generic ambivalence, which ironizes the principle of propriety advanced in the classical text (Stabler 47; *CPW* I: 288).

"A comic subject," Horace declares, "will not be set out in tragic verse; likewise, the Banquet of Thyestes disdains being told in poetry of the private kind, that borders on the comic stage. Everything must keep the appropriate place to which it was allotted" (126). Does a familiar verse epistle disdain setting out an aesthetic treatise? It appears so, since "it was the content [of the *Ars poetica*] rather than the form of the poem that was cited as commendable" (Stabler 47). In this collective emphasis on content over form, that is, on its epigrammatic convenience over its informal design, the significance of the Horatian text's generic frame is also suppressed. Written late in the poet's career, the epistle "ad Pisones, de Arte Poetica," as the subtitle in the Moore edition identifies it, is itself something of a generic misfit: indecorous, as it were. Clearly an expression of an aesthetic agenda, it is neither rigorous nor organized enough to be a formal treatise. In this respect, its familiar tone and discursive flexibility "keep the appropriate place" of the verse epistle, and yet it qualifies as a letter by little more than two embedded addresses to his "Piso friends" (124).[26]

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[26] Stabler cites George Colman's dedicatory letter to his 1783 translation, which compares Horace's "loose, vague, and desultory composition" to "pearls unstrung, valuable indeed, but not displayed to advantage" (ii., ctd. on 47).

Byron's translation of the *Ars poetica* recapitulates this lack of decorum with respect to the epistolary genre. He reproduces the verse of his source text, using heroic couplets as a metrical translation of the Latin hexameter, and redoubles this faithfulness to the original by recuperating the epistolary frame. He addresses his "hints from Horace" to the devoted Hobhouse instead of the family of Pisos, substituting a steadfast correspondent for Horace's placeholding correspondent, invoked largely for the occasion. In so doing, Byron assigns greater significance to the epistolary frame than the Horatian original seems to recognize. This significance crystallizes in the more public yet more intimate address to Hobhouse in the dedicatory letter of Canto IV. The communicative function of letters is then realized by his anointing *Hints of Horace* the "sequel" to *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and attempting to append it to the earlier poem in its fifth edition. Yet, in the spirit of the source text, the desired sequence undermines the epistolary appeal of translating the addressee of the treatise as Hobhouse. In the position of sequel, the poem reclaims its appeal as satire, accommodating its conservative aesthetics to the didactic reproach of his contemporaries.

Generic ambivalence is, to be sure, another way of characterizing the compositeness of Byron's major works, from *Childe Harold* onward. One can therefore find irony in his undertaking a translation of *the* locus classicus of decorum directly after completing the most "unfit" volume he will ever conceive. Irony sidesteps that which *fitting* does not: the formal legacy of medieval romance. This is one of the genealogies Christensen recognizes in the "convulsive" as opposed to "decorous" strains of *fit.* The convulsive branch of meanings includes the sense in which *fit* refers to a bout of madness, which obtains an exceptionally autobiographical resonance in the context of Lady Byron's asserted grounds for separation, the

occasion of Byron's "self-exile" from England and in turn the canto in question (III.16.136).[27] Of

more consequence in thinking through the juxtaposition of *fitting* with *medium* is the

"convulsive" discourse embedded in the pun on *fytte,* the antiqued spelling of the term for the

individual unit of verse in medieval romance.[28]

 Fytte is one of the most conspicuous instances, after title and titular hero, of the

"distressed" diction, syntax, and orthography that perform the "romaunt" of the first two

cantos.[29] The last stanza of the first canto employs the word in question to announce a coy

retreat:

> Here is one fytte of Harold's pilgrimage:
> Ye who of him may further seek to know,
> Shall find some tidings in a future page,
> If he that rhymeth now may scribble moe. (I, st. 93, ll. 945–8)

When Byron resumes *Childe Harold* in 1816, he maintains the Spenserian stanza but otherwise

abandons the affectations of medieval romance; and it is to mark its absence from "fitting" that

Christensen focuses on the formal denotation of *fytte.* He takes the abandonment for Byron's

arrival at the "fitting medium of his style," the transubstantiation, that is, of his person's

aristocratic wealth into the cultural capital of his name (181). There is more to *fytte,* however,

than the antiquing of a formal designation, nor should Byron's capitulation to the contemporary

be taken as an indication that the distressing in the earlier cantos is no longer at stake.

 Unlike Christensen, I note the degree to which *fytte* persists in the third canto. Its

metadiscursive prominence at the conclusion of the first canto, combined with the reiteration of

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[27] Christensen also situates madness in terms of increased contemporary experiments in institutionalized mental illness (cf. 159–67, 395 n.51), but this does not pertain to the generic genealogy that I want to highlight.

[28] Although the *OED* singles out *fytte* and collects the decorous and convulsive strains of *fit* under a second entry for the word, the etymologies suggest that both terms may in fact derive from the same root in an Old English word for "conflict," which may also be cognate with a word for "meeting" or "juncture." Accessed June 9, 2012.

[29] Again, I here use *distress* as Susan Stewart uses it in "Notes on Distressed Genres" to indicate a cultivated pastness (67–8).

fit throughout the reflective opening stanzas of the third, echoes in "fitting medium of desire" (182). Beyond the affected orthography and formal vocabulary, this residual distress works through the participial rendering of ongoing action (unique among the third canto's uses of the word) to align the sequence of the cantos with a medieval tradition. The "most extreme example of 'broken narrative' in the Romantic period," Stuart Curran writes, *Childe Harold* is not exactly broken but "interlaced" according to the structure of medieval romance: "Though the antiquarian revival was not so critically sophisticated that it could categorize defining structures of medieval romance with precision, Byron appears to have intuited the principle of 'interlaced structure' that Eugène Vinaver has seen as central to romance narrative," a structure "in which characters and themes disappear from view or are left in suspension, only to reappear with added resonance from intervening episodes" (152). The progressive participle thus holds the generic legacy of medieval romance in play with that of classical aesthetics. If Byron "intuited" the romance principle of "interlaced structure," however, it is a function of his epistolary practice, not alone of his antiquarian fervor and classicism. Here arises the confrontation between *medium* as it pertains to the production of *Childe Harold* and the genealogies of genre sedimented in *fitting.*

To be clear, *medium* does not figure or even allude to letters or Byron's correspondence, though the tradition of epistolary fiction does recognize letters as a medium of desire.[30] And though I do believe that "fitting medium of desire" is a self-conscious reference to the poem's composition, Byron could not have intended *medium* in the sense we cannot escape intending since it took hold later in the nineteenth century: as a technology of communication, a purveyor of information rather than truth.[31] Recalling again Guillory's counter to Kittler's claim that "writing functioned as the general medium" at the turn of the nineteenth century, one can

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[30] See, for example, Armstrong, *Desire* (1987) and Kauffman, *Discourse of Desire* (1988).
[31] Cf. Derrida, "Le Facteur de la Verité," in *The Post Card.* See also Guillory, "Memo and Modernity," 119–20.

recognize the absent but wanted" media concept in the fact that Byron's "fitting medium" is not an explicit reference to communication even though the communicative function of letters is a literal condition of *Childe Harold*'s possibility ("Gramophone" 36; Guillory 321). Letters factor prominently in the serial reproduction of the Byronic persona essentialized in that early stanza of Canto III as aspiring "beyond the fitting medium of desire." Insofar as the poem is a vehicle for the mediation of that persona, epistolarity is implicated in even the properly historicized self-referentiality of the word.

Letters are therefore a medium for *Childe Harold*'s composition according to the other classical genealogy embedded in the verse. In its context at the crux of the stanzaic set piece, *medium* traces the Aristotelian account of sensory perception, first by virtue of its ambiguous antecedent: "…there is a fire/ And motion of the soul which will not dwell/ In its own narrow being, but aspire/ Beyond the fitting medium of desire" (ll. 71–4). In apposition with both an action ("fire and motion") and the vehicle of that action ("soul"), the "medium of desire" adheres to the sense of "in-between thing or area" put forward by Aristotle in *De Anima.* Recovering this classical origin, Kevis Goodman explains the concept in Aristotle further: "This 'in-between' is both an activity and a substance; affected by the sensible object, it in turn affects and moves the organ of sense" (17–18). One thinks again of the Packet lyric or the facsimile letter from the Bey of Corinth. To the extent that *desire* works in apposition with *medium,* it captures the substantive indeterminacy of the Aristotelian definition, also captured in the stanza's proliferating figures of the Byronic hero's instability: "quick bosom," "fever at the core," and the tension between dwelling and aspiration, fate and bearing, adventure and boredom.

In its properly genitive role, however, desire is distinct from its medium, establishing a spatial relation for which the Aristotelian tradition also accounts: "Scholastic commentary …

translated the Greek [*metaxu*] into the Latin *medium,* which had a two-fold spatial reference—midpoint and intermediary agent" (Goodman 18). Fire and soul stand (midway) between the desire they (as agents) conduct and the "beyond" against which the hero's ambition defines itself. Apropos of the phantasmic investments of desire, the subject with which the "wanted communication" might transpire remains unidentified; the misanthrope nevertheless recognizes that his exilic posture depends on contact with something outside himself. Yet the misanthrope also recognizes the dependence of his exilic posture on a medium the vehicle of his relation with that which is "beyond" his soul or desire. As substance and action, midpoint and intermediary agent, *medium* describes the epistolarity of the poem's composition: the individual letter is figured and interpolated throughout, while letters communicate between manuscript and print. This dynamic of the epistolary condition is, as the foregoing participle nuances it, "fytting." It is, moreover, as fytting as the heroes through which it relays.

The penultimate stanza of the fourth and final canto of *Childe Harold* calls, perhaps equivocally, for an end to the dream of misanthropic misery: "My task is done—my song hath ceased—my theme/ Has died into an echo; it is fit/ The spell should break of this protracted dream" (185.1657–9). It might be fit, but the spell is not easily broken. It survives in Marchand's "whole Byron," as mystified a proposition as the letters' capacity to render any such thing. The epistolarity of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* moots the enterprise of seeking one. And yet Byron makes no secret of lacking integrity. The stanza continues: "The torch shall be extinguish'd which hath lit/ My midnight lamp—and what is writ, is writ,/ Would it were worthier! But I am not now/ That which I have been—" (1660–63). It is as sincere a statement as Byron is capable of: Byron was never that which he had been. On the other hand, he is here echoing with a difference his conclusion to Canto III, just before the final apostrophe to Ada: "Thus far I have

proceeded in a theme/ Renewed with no kind auspices:—to feel/ We are not what we have been,

and to deem/ We are not what we should be" (111.1031–4). The rare use of the first-person

plural here reminds, as the dark-eyed woman of the Alpine storm, that Byron—the career, the

text—is a communicative relay. Working the tension between genre and medium,

communication here is both the "realistic gauging of human situations" for which Kenneth Burke

argues and the "dream" that, Geoffrey Hartman counters, "is not so easily ranged on the side of

the reality principle" (ctd. in Hartman 32–3). The epistolary condition of *Childe Harold's*

Pilgrimage is the protracted waking from the esemplastic power that is Byron.

Chapter Three

Neither Fate nor Fortune:
Tactical Relay, the Dupin Tales, and the Phases of Poe's Mind

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Poe was not a prolific letter writer, and the pragmatic,

imploring nature of much of his correspondence is, to quote its editor, "quite pedestrian"

(Ostrom v). His fiction nevertheless defines itself by the themes of contingency that characterize

the literary epistolarity of the previous century.[1] Even the casual reader of Poe's tales will

recognize nondelivery, interception, delay, interruption, authentication, the scene of composition,

and the confusion and manipulation of address to be their narrative currency. Poe's critics are

well aware of these performative topoi and their destabilizing consequences for his characters,

for his readers across time, and for Poe's literary reputation.[2] Of course, "The Purloined Letter"

may stand as the quintessential representation of epistolary contingency, whether because it

provided Lacan and Derrida with an exemplary allegory of poststructural hermeneutics or

because their hermeneutics made of the tale such an allegory. It will be the argument of this

chapter that the epistolary condition structures "The Purloined Letter" beyond its figuration in

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[1] His first published short story, "MS. Found in a Bottle," announces by its very title the same well-worn epistolary conceit that motivates "Mellonta Tauta," one of his last published stories (part of which was revised and published in *Eureka* as "A Remarkable Letter"). (In fact, the textual history of "Mellonta Tauta" is a perfect example of epistolary asynchrony: Poe completed the manuscript and sold it to Louis Godey in January 1848, then quoted portions of it in his lecture on "The Universe" before the New York Society Library in February. Godey delayed publication of the story, and the quoted portions were, to his chagrin, published in book form as *Eureka* in July 1848. Godey did not run the story he bought until February 1849 [Mabbott 1290]). In many other stories, epistolary contingency is represented, rather than performing a structural conceit. For example, the plots of both "The Gold-Bug," often compared to the Dupin tales, and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* Poe's only "finished" novel, give considerable attention to the physical properties of the paper and ink with which a crucial message is composed, misplaced, and delivered. On Poe's preoccupation with the intermediation of manuscript and print, see Meredith McGill, "Duplicity of the Pen," and "Unauthorized Poe" in *Culture of Reprinting;* Leon Jackson, "The Italics Are Mine"; and Lisa Gitelman, "A Short History of ———."

[2] See especially Renza, "Poe's Secret Autobiography," and Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit.* Part of my argument is that while these tropes manifest uniquely and diversely in Poe's body of work, their performative self-consciousness and destabilizing consequences were terrain that the epistolary novel had explored with great sophistication in the previous century.

the narrative as an agent of power. The conventions of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction endure through Poe's negotiation of the material conditions of American reprint culture, a negotiation that renders the highly formalized dialogism of letters in sequence through frequent and abrupt discursive shifts. Recontextualizing "The Purloined Letter" in sequence with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," the first two ratiocinative tales about the analytical genius of C. Auguste Dupin, then exposes a practice of narratorial shifting throughout the tales. Observed at the level of publication as well as the level of composition, the shifting invokes the eighteenth-century novel's editorial fiction, yet without the representation of multiple authors (i.e., the correspondents). The sequence of Dupin tales thereby exhibits the tactical impulse of Poe's authorial agency, at once a negotiation of the contingencies of unregulated authorship and a rearticulation of the joint work of epistolary fiction.

In order to recognize the Dupin tales' dialogism and editorial fiction for their epistolarity, one has to recognize in them the techniques of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel. The first fiction of the epistolary novel—elaborately demonstrated by *Clarissa*'s "editor," Samuel Richardson—is the collation and sequencing of an archive of manuscript letters. This fiction implies an editor and commands a supplemental explanation of the provenance of the "manuscript" in the reader's hands, a fictional paratext so generic that it receives a category unto itself within Gerard Genette's taxonomy: the "disavowing authorial preface" (280–84). The disavowal derives from the novelist's attribution of the text to one or more of the characters represented in the narrative, rather than claiming authorship for himself. It serves to authenticate the historical veracity of the presented document(s) "without really inviting [the reader] to believe [the author]." This irony is a primary factor in the exaggerated self-consciousness of epistolarity. Genette further observes that, in spite of the name he has given them, such

"prefaces" appear at either end of the text to which they refer. Poe's exercise of the technique indeed bears out Genette's observation. The prefatory disavowal erupts anywhere in the Dupin tales, at the beginning, middle, end, beginning of the end—that is, whenever the opportunity invites editorial intervention.

Less obtrusive than the editorial preface in its appeal to the reader is the other feature of epistolarity manifest in the Dupin tales: the dialogic discontinuities of collated and sequenced letters. Again, as Altman observes, the epistolary novelist's "most compelling voice is not the one that speaks to us in editorial prefaces and footnotes. The creator of the epistolary novel who disclaims authorship reclaims it elsewhere—in the very joint work that structures the epistolary mosaic as art." As the "space of structured interplay … between letters," she explains further, the joint work is the "trace of … that very editor who typically claims elsewhere have played a minimal role" (183). Let us bracket for the moment the problematic metaphor of mosaic, the parts of which are visually synthesized into a whole in a continuous contemporaneity that reinscribes Coleridge's definition of Imagination, for it is the insistent *linearity* of epistolary sequence that both necessitates and enables the narratorial opportunism I want to observe in the Dupin tales. Posing as an editor, the author of an epistolary novel foregrounds the writerly task of negotiating between part and whole: between discrete letters and sequential trajectory, between the instant of the immediate situation and the longer duration of the narrative. The dialogism implicit in this structure works on two levels. The most easily recognizable is that of the various voices represented by the letters; the more subtle dialogism is the discursive oscillation between authoring and editing the text. Altman's rhetoric accounts for both (though she is less cognizant of the latter, sliding between the author who is "reclaimed" and the editor who is "traced" at the epistolary joint work).

Poe's Dupin tales reproduce both. The characteristic interlocutory structure that facilitates the master analyst's ratiocination effects the play of voices in epistolary fiction, most literally in the dialogue that narrates "The Purloined Letter." As for the movement between authorial and editorial roles, the great effort to distinguish between the two, belying their mutual implication, is a prevalent feature of Poe's general investment in the topoi of epistolarity (e.g., "MS. in a Bottle," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* the "Autography" series). The effort is exaggerated, however, by the peculiar serialization of the Dupin tales. The resulting joint work, both within and across the tales, affords a greater number and variety of opportunities to effect the dialogism of epistolary sequence.

In the Squeeze: The Dupin Sequence and Opportunistic Agency

Realigning the tales into their sequence foregrounds the joint work where epistolary dialogism takes place. The nature of the tales' relationship to one another is also one of their most vexing features, often invoked by critics and then left unexamined.[3] In this respect, this relationship is itself exceptional among the variety of reasons the tales retain a special status within the Poe canon, not least of which is their dubious claim to the origin of detective fiction.[4] Regardless of their collective identity, each story is recognized for its individual merits. The third of the three, "The Purloined Letter" (1844) is perhaps best known to twenty-first-century readers, both because it occasioned one of Lacan's pivotal seminars and because it weaves an exceedingly clever plot about an illicit-love letter and the chain of elaborate thefts and sleight-of-hand deceptions it precipitates. "Rue Morgue" (1841) was first, not only introducing M. Dupin by way

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[3] The importance of acknowledging the stories' grouping is indeed a key factor in Derrida's critique of Lacan's seminar; yet as both Barbara Johnson and Irene Harvey observe, he does not himself remedy the fault in "The Purveyor of Truth" (Muller and Richardson 218 and 260, respectively).

[4] Though the Dupin tales are often cited as the origin of detective fiction, and indeed Dupin and his anonymous interlocutor are the models for Holmes and Watson, nowhere in the tales is Dupin identified as a detective or as engaged in detecting.

of his ingenious solution to a gruesome mother-daughter murder, but also founding Poe's self-anointed genre, the "tale of ratiocination." Least well known of the three, "Marie Rogêt" (1842–43) stands out on account of its intertextual relationship to the contemporary investigation into the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, the "Beautiful Cigar Girl." After her story unraveled publicly in the New York City newspapers in the summer and fall of 1841, Poe undertook to "solve" the case the police could not, simply (like his ratiocinator double) by reading the newspaper reports. Late in the following year, the tale appeared in three installments over the course of four months; therefore it also stands out among the three because it is the only Dupin tale to have itself been serialized. Thus, like letters in a series, each Dupin narrative stands on its own, with little reference to the others; and indeed the critical tradition has been able and frequently content to treat each tale on its own, with little reference to the other two. To sequence—as opposed to trilogy or triptych or vaguely a grouping—grants each the formal autonomy appropriate to its unique textual history while at the same time granting a formal integrity to their interrelation that is not captured by either the intrinsic purposefulness of *narrative* or the extrinsic contiguity of *collection.*

It is, moreover, to read the tales according to Poe's expressed concern with aestheticizing the material limits of the artwork. His most succinct articulation of these limits appears after the publication of the Dupin tales, in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), when he takes up the parameters of "works of literary art." The length of literary works is universally limited to the term of a "single sitting," Poe declares, in order to achieve the all-important "unity of impression": "for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed" (15). In an essay devoted to reflecting on the composition of "The Raven" (still readable in one sitting but a rather long poem by today's standards), it is not

surprising to find that the stringency of the limit discriminates among genres: proper poems "demand unity," whereas "certain classes of prose" may not. Poe gives the example of *Robinson Crusoe,* but any epistolary novel, for its characteristic negotiation of part and whole, would have sufficed to demonstrate the "advantageous overpassing" of the single-sitting limit. The epistolarity of his own Dupin sequence also proves exemplary.

"Rue Morgue" arrives at the end of three vexed attempts (one collection and two novels) to produce an integrated and coherent episodic narrative. As his conception of and attempts to publish *The Folio Club* (1831–36) testify, Poe's prose wrestled in practice with the demand for unity from his first forays into fiction. The residual epistolary references, mentioned above as characteristic of Poe's style, also suggest the preoccupation. The popular "Autography" articles (1836, 1841, 1842), to which I return in the conclusion, sidestep the dialogic conventions of epistolary fiction and history in letters as *non*-narrative epistolary collections. The inconsistencies that emerge from the serialization of *Pym* (1837; his only finished novel) and the abandoned diary novel *The Journal of Julius Rodman* (1840; published in six installments) represent another phase of engagement and experimentation. In this context, it is significant that "Rue Morgue," "Marie Rogêt," and "The Purloined Letter" constitute the only instance across the range of Poe's fiction of his returning to the characters and settings of previous tales.

The sequence of Dupin tales is further exceptional within the Poe canon because it indexes a transition from his aesthetic investment in the book format as a totalizing medium of coherence. Begun in 1841, the tales arise at the very moment when, according to William Charvat, Poe's "conception of book unity changed" (90). Facing "the squeeze between the book and magazine economies in the 1840's," Poe refers the cohering force of the book format to the totalizing force of the writer's shifting mind and demands instead from the book an obligation to

the variety and "versatility" of the works it collects (ctd. in Charvat 90; 1844 letter to Charles Anthon, Pollin/Ostrom 470). Though Charvat doesn't cite them as an example, the Dupin tales corroborate his narrative by playing out the observed change of attitude. As a sequence, they are neither wholly divested of the novelistic unity he had attempted in *Pym* and *Rodman,* nor yet wholly invested in cultivating an aesthetic of variation derived from placing individual "articles" across the contemporary range of print venues. Poe did not anticipate the eventual trajectory when he wrote "Rue Morgue," however, so each of the three stories retains its respective narrative integrity while perpetuating in miniature the gesture at a kind of unity Poe was then beginning to forgo.

Indeed there may be no better testament to the transitional nature of the tales in their relation to one another than Poe's response to Evert Duyckinck's 1845 Wiley & Putnam edition of his tales, where they first appeared together in chronological order of publication. In the uncharacteristically reflective letter of August 9, 1846, to Philip Pendleton Cooke, Poe charges Duyckinck's ratiocinative focus with shortchanging the scope of his vision:

> [Duyckinck] has what he thinks a taste for ratiocination, and has accordingly made up the book mostly of analytic stories. But this is not *representing* my mind in its various phases—it is not giving me fair play. In writing these Tales one by one, at long intervals, I have kept the book-unity always in mind—that is, each has been composed with reference to its effect as part of a *whole.* In this view, one of my chief aims has been the widest diversity of subject, thought & especially *tone* and manner of handling. Were all my tales now before me in a large volume and as the composition of another—the merit which would principally arrest my attention would be the wide *diversity* and variety. (595–6)

If the writer is to be taken at his word (not to be done lightly with Poe, though the word of any oracle ought to be suspect), then the assembly of the Dupin tales is the case in point of the perceived disservice of Duyckinck's edition. Gathering the stories into a sort of apotheosis of

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ratiocination at the end of the collection posits a continuity of perspective that misconstrues the disjunctive integrity Poe desired for the tales within and across their individual publication as a sequence. Both Charvat and Meredith McGill return to this oft-cited passage to evidence Poe's program of material plurality in the service of aesthetic unity. Charvat rests with the conclusion that the attitude Poe expresses in the letter "certainly owes something to Poe's commitment to journalism" (91), while McGill reaches further to formulate Poe's "additive, serial relation to writing" as a response to the determinations of American reprinting practices (174–5). This singular relation is recognizable in the Dupin tales; it is recognizable, moreover, precisely insofar as their unintended sequence indexes Duyckinck's violation of the emerging vision and anticipates Poe's description of it in his letter to Cooke.

Thus exceptional but also exemplary for their sequencing, the Dupin tales reveal the debt Poe's evolving attitude toward part and whole owes to a residual epistolarity. His "additive, serial relation to his writing" is overdetermined by its mediation of the representational conventions of epistolary fiction as well as the contemporary culture of print seriality. Among the "adaptive and self-protective" advantages that McGill highlights in Poe's tactical negotiation of reprinting practices, for example, two recall distinctly the discursive dialogism of epistolary sequence: the "license to maintain a flexible and inconstant relation to his writing" and "a sense of the potential limitlessness of literary experimentation which, in endlessly deferring the consolidation of the authorial persona, preserves the privilege of self-disavowal" (174). Authorial inconstancy, experimentation, and self-disavowal are, as I noted above, characteristically epistolary by Altman's and Genette's accounts. In the Dupin sequence, among all Poe's tales, they perform the dialogic joint work of epistolary fiction. Instead of dispersing authority (as in an epistolary novel) or deferring the totalizing subjectivity (as in his idealized

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oeuvre), however, they exercise an agile and opportunistic agency, which turns every available

discursive mode to its authorial advantage.

For this reason, the narration of the Dupin tales, unlike comparable tales of ratiocination,

depends on an interlocutory, heteroglossic frame, rather than the monologic ruminations of an

unreliable narrator. For the same reason, none of the Dupin tales' characters needs to die in order

to consolidate the authority of the narrating point of view, as in, for example, "The Fall of the

House of Usher" and "William Wilson." The doubling that is such an integral feature of all Poe's

tales is not adequate to explain the concatenation of authority in the Dupin sequence. There are

too many transferences of narration among the narrator, Dupin, Prefect G—, Minister D—,

editor, and, on occasion, the invocation of Poe himself. Therefore the strategic deferral of a

consolidating persona, as observed by McGill, does not fully account for Poe's desire to give

"fair play to his mind in its various phases."

In fact, the tension between the structures of self-annihilating doubling and narratorial

opportunism is reenacted by the two illustrations of analytic play that bookend the sequence of

tales. Both illustrations present games of ostensible chance in order to demonstrate the negative

capability of the analytic genius. The first illustration opens "Rue Morgue" (and eventually the

sequence) to establish the demonstration of analytic genius as the primary objective of

introducing the reader to C. Auguste Dupin. Doing so, the narrator delivers a protracted

evaluation of the degree to which various games—draughts, chess, and whist—exercise the

"analytic faculty" (*Tales* I: 528). Dupin then prefaces his solution to the mystery of "The

Purloined Letter" with a second illustration, an explanation of his analytic method in terms of a

boy's mastery of a fourth game. The parable of the "game of 'even and odd,'" in which one

collects a heap of marbles by correctly guessing whether his opponent has an odd or even

number of marbles in the hidden hand, easily provides the decisive metacritical terms for any interpretation of the standalone story. Its interest for both Dupin and his audience is the "principle" of "*thorough* identification" by which an eight-year-old schoolboy transforms a game of chance into an apparent feat of reason through the "'observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents'" (*Tales* II: 984). The feat is only apparently one of reason, however, for the boy himself admits to achieving identification through a kind of affective mimicry. Prompted by Dupin to explain his method, the boy replies: "When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression" (984). For critics, the interest of the parable is decisive because it makes the intersubjective doubling explicit, which Poe's stories obsessively recapitulate. Recontextualizing "The Purloined Letter" in sequence with the preceding Dupin tales, however, allows for reading the boy's method of affective admeasurement not only against the "non-admeasurement" by which the Prefect and the Parisian police fail to locate the Queen's stolen letter, but also against the narrator's valorization of whist in "Rue Morgue."

Of the three games the narrator evaluates at the outset of the first Dupin tale, draughts most closely resembles the game of even and odd, but whist is most conducive to the analyst's mental agility. Not yet characterized as Dupin's less witting interlocutor, the narrator delivers this excursus in a voice recognizable at once as the impersonal, generalized voice of print (by then a studied mode for Poe) yet ultimately recognizable as the objective, disaffected voice of the tales' object of study, Dupin. He anticipates Dupin's prefatory explanation in "The Purloined Letter" in "prefacing a somewhat peculiar narrative by … [taking] occasion to assert that the

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higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully taxed by the

unostentatious game of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess":

> … in nine cases out of ten it is the more concentrative rather than
> the more acute player who conquers [in chess]. In draughts, on the
> contrary, … the probabilities of inadvertence are diminished, and
> the mere attention being left comparatively unemployed, what
> advantages are obtained by either party are obtained by superior
> acumen.… Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws
> himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith,
> and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods
> (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce
> into miscalculation or hurry into error. (*Tales* I: 528–29; following
> text of first publication in *Graham's Magazine*)

The same "*thorough* identification" with which Dupin credits the schoolboy in "The Purloined

Letter" is operative here in the successful player of draughts, an example given by the narrator in

the first paragraphs of what becomes a sequence of tales. Yet draughts does not finally pose the

greatest challenge to the intellect; the narrator continues his prefatorial assertion by admiring the

strategy of whist: "Beyond doubt there is nothing of a similar nature so greatly tasking the

faculty of analysis" (529). Similar to bridge, basic whist is a game of tricks and trump, and, more

important for the question of intersubjective geometry, it is not a two- but a four-person game. In

this it is distinct from the other three games in question, all of which reproduce the structure of

binary opposition that facilitates dialectical oscillation and doubling. Whist, on the other hand,

entangles the players sequentially in the unraveling of the hand as it is played out.[5]

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[5] Just such a system, it should be noted, defines "literature as an epoch of the postal system," according to Bernhard
Siegert: "The ubiquity and invisibility of the state were thus to be found in the representation of the postal system as
a medium for private correspondence between cognitive subjects. … If the basic element of the imperial postal
system had been the route, for the territorial state postal system it became the *relay—a site where the people became
entangled in the discourse.* As postal systems became a technology of the government with the invention of postage
and the monopolization of service, the people likewise came to believe they were capable of determining their own
affairs postally. Institutionally, this meant that the postal system fell under police jurisdiction" (9, my emphasis). In
the light of Siegert's account, the presence of the police in the Dupin tales points up the influence of an epistolary
structure.

In whist, the analyst goes outside the intersubjective circuit of the game in order to master the play. Instead of drawing out a capacity for identification and its attendant phantasmagoria of doubling, whist draws out the analyst's tactical awareness of situation, which the narrator concludes again with a comparison with the "frivolous" chess:

> The best chess-player in Christendom *may* be little more than the best player of chess — but proficiency in whist implies capacity for success in all those more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind. When I say proficiency, I mean that perfection in the game which includes a comprehension of all the sources (whatever be their character) from which legitimate *advantage* may be derived.…[I]t is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule where the skill of the analyst is evinced. (*Tales* I: 529–30)

In other words, the value of whist to the intellect is not primarily a function of inter- or intrasubjective agon. The analyst observes but does not imitate the facial expressions, inadvertent gestures, and motivated actions of all the players because "the game is the object" (530). Truth is not the object. After just a few rounds, the analyst "is in full possession of the contents of each hand," but he does not rest at mastery and preclude the rest of the play by laying down all his cards at once (as I have watched many a bridge master do): "thenceforward [the analyst] puts down his cards with as absolute a precision of purpose as if the rest of the party had turned outward the faces of their own" (ibid.). The "truth" is known, but the *sequence of play* is not determined. The structure is not entirely subject to fate while it is not entirely subject to fortune; the analyst has mastered the game but is still subject to the play. This "potential space," to borrow a term from D.W. Winnicott's very different strain of psychoanalytic theory, defines the arena of opportunistic agency.[6]

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[6] "In order to give a place to playing I postulated a *potential space* between the baby and the mother. … I contrast this potential space (*a*) with the inner world (which is related to the psychosomatic partnership) and (*b*) with actual,

At the beginning and end of the sequence, respectively, whist and the game of even and

odd are not competing representations of structural agency, but rather equal representations of

Poe's authorial practice. An alternative practice to the intersubjective identification of even and

odd, the tactical play of whist illustrates, after Raymond Williams, a "sounding elsewhere" of the

social consciousness that structures the Dupin tales as both exceptional and representative of

Poe's greater body of fiction. In the explication of "structures of feeling" he attempts in *Marxism*

and Literature, Williams allows for the tension between official forms and the practical

experience of social consciousness to make itself felt in various "situations" (among which, he

subsequently argues, the aesthetic is indispensable): "[E]ven where form and response are found

to agree, without apparent difficulty, there can be qualifications, reservations, indications

elsewhere: what the agreement seemed to settle but still sounding elsewhere" (130).[7] Given the

critical commonplace, I take Poe's use of doubling to be the "official form" in Williams's

construct, the opportunistic agency of whist to be the "sounding elsewhere" of the social.

Jonathan Elmer corroborates the stakes of a social consciousness in Poe's "ostensibly

psychological tales" when he locates a "social limit" in their reproducible visions of collapse and

apocalypse: "The doubts and double takes that besiege both Poe's characters and his readers are

the affective traces of their proximity to an irreparable breach at the heart of the psychosocial

world" (21). Lacanian/Derridean interpretation aside, the Dupin tales are not among the

"ostensibly psychological tales" Elmer has primarily in mind. They nevertheless incorporate the

same structural *abymes* that figure the social limit and the anxieties it provokes. The

untranslatability of the orangutan's voice in "Rue Morgue" is the first best example; the absent,

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or external, reality (which has its own dimensions, and which can be studied objectively, and which, however much
it may seem to vary according to the state of the individual who is observing it, does in fact remain constant)"
(Winnicott 41).
[7] Here the affect of my "makes itself felt" is crucial, as Goodman argues in *Georgic Modernity* (3–8) and Jonathan
Elmer brings to bear in *Reading at the Social Limit,* as cited in the following paragraph (21).

indeed irrelevant, text in "The Purloined Letter" is only the most obvious. The "literal translation" from the French of reports in fact quoted from actual New York newspapers is a third example, to which I shall return at greater length in the discussion of "Marie Rogêt" below. Insofar as Elmer's case for the social consciousness of Poe's fiction does ultimately refer back to the prevailing critical emphasis on Romantic doubling and intersubjective identification, these figures may be understood to recapitulate an official form in the Dupin tales. However, the Dupin sequence does not intend the same acute anxiety, for either the characters or the reader, respectively, that the grotesque tales do. Therefore, whereas Elmer cites the distinctly epistolary tropes of manuscript interception, interpolation, and authentication as markers of the social limit, I suggest that they are also the "sounding elsewhere" of a tactical social form. The form is residually epistolary—emulating Byron's practice but without the "strength" for *fama*—and the practical experience of it is, through the sequence of composition and reception, a dialogic circulation of authority.

As an alternative social practice to doubling and intersubjective identification, the tactical agency figured by whist circulates authority through various narrators. In any given moment, the authorial position is wholly absorbed into the narrating persona: whichever character that happens to be, in whichever mode the character voices itself. Authority relays itself in this way through discrete textual moments, like the situated self of Byron's heroic relay, sequentially but not incrementally, as each "phase of mind" transfers the agency of narration to a different character, voice, medium, or perspective. When the occasion requires, authority migrates to the next persona, in any of a variety of discourses (editorial, authorial, narratorial, quoted, citational).

This migration closely emulates that of the body-snatching protagonist of Robert

Montgomery Bird's 1836 novel, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself,* for which Poe managed to

find considerable praise when he reviewed it the same year in the *Southern Literary Messenger.*

Thus even though, as Christopher Looby points out, Poe "misses the point" of "Bird's depiction

of metempsychosis, which was different from Poe's use of the same device in various of his own

tales like (most famously) 'Ligeia,'" the Dupin tales, begun a few years later, reproduce at the

level of structure, if not story, Lee's circumstantially determined and opportunistic personality

(xvi).[8] Since they are not tales of metempsychosis, the Dupin sequence may not be subject to the

"fruitful field of interest" Poe critiques Bird for neglecting in his portrayal of the supernatural

phenomenon: that is, the interest of a narrative in which "varied events" influence "a character

unchanging," in which "widely-different conditions of existence [actuate] *one* individual" (401–

02). Working the comparison in the other direction, however, one may allow the structural

migration of narration in *Sheppard Lee* to suggest the epistolary dialogism of Bird's tale of

metempsychosis. In other words, if the Dupin tales are a "sounding elsewhere" of the epistolary

condition, then so also is the unserialized *Sheppard Lee,* published a few years earlier in two

volumes by Harper & Brothers. Yet whereas metempsychosis between characters signals the

transfer of authority in Bird's novel, the transfer of agency from one narrative episode to the next

is signaled in Poe's sequence by textual disjuncture in the form of narratorial relay. The

accumulation of these relays produces the joint work whereby, as in epistolary narrative, the

authority disclaimed by the editorial fiction is repeatedly reclaimed. The rest of the chapter is

devoted to detecting the epistolary dialogism of prominent joints and relays across the sequence

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[8] Looby traces persuasively traces the instability of Lee's personality to David Hume's provocative chapter "Of Personal Identity" in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (xvii–xix).

of tales, from their outward seams (how they open and close) to the inner (citation, dialogue, discursive redirection).

Fits, or Starts: Breaking Forth as Relay

According to the narrator's opening gambit in "Marie Rogêt," that which commands "A Sequel to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'" is not so much the unsolved crime to which the title alludes as the further development of Dupin's analytical genius:

> When, in an article entitled 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' I endeavored, about a year ago, to depict some very remarkable features in the mental character of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, it did not occur to me that I should ever resume the subject. This depicting of character constituted my design; and this design was thoroughly fulfilled in the wild train of circumstances brought to instance Dupin's idiosyncrasy." (*Ladies' Companion,* Nov. 1842: 18)

The development of Dupin's character, however, proves more successful as a motive to preface the tale than to narrate it. John Irwin's dismissal of the narrator's warrant for the sequel is memorable for both its decisiveness and its panache: "[A]s a character Dupin is as thin as the paper he's printed on, and his adventures amount to little more than reading newspaper accounts of the crime and talking with the prefect of police and the narrator in the privacy of his apartment" (1). Strictly speaking, Irwin's observation applies only to "Marie Rogêt." In "Rue Morgue," Dupin thoroughly inspects in person the room where Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter are murdered; and in "The Purloined Letter," he goes so far as to orchestrate and execute an elaborate, multiphase ruse to reclaim the stolen letter from Minister D——'s apartment. Irwin's point is nevertheless well taken insofar as the tales produce and reproduce the scene of reading as a scene of writing. It is also fair to say that the picture of Dupin at the end of the third story is largely the same as it is in the first: he is marvelously well read and clever; shrewd about

business; irreverent toward the law; a loyal subject; and, most delightfully, vengeful about old debts. Dupin is, in other words, precisely the sort of "character *unchanging*" Poe had in mind for the proper tale of metempsychosis, with the crucial exception that his perspective does not mediate the narrative. He only controls the discourse some of the time; and when he does, his discourse is not necessarily narrative.

It is, of course, the narrator's perspective that mediates the tale, even when Dupin is speaking. The importance of this interlocutory frame, as a mode of explicit relay, will be clarified below. First, it is important to observe the narrator's description of the relay that prefaces "Marie Rogêt," because it describes the reproducible nature of textual joints throughout the sequence. Following the narrator's properly editorial disavowal of having had any intention "ever [to] resume the subject" of Dupin's character, he reveals the opportunistic element of the sequel's occasion: "Late events, however, in their surprising development, have *startled* me into some farther details" (*Ladies' Companion,* Nov. 1842: 18; my emphasis). This startling, it turns out, is a recurrent motif and a favored transitional technique throughout the sequence. Frequently, the tales will abandon a scene, anecdote, or discourse for another with the abruptness of interruption, as though the narration were "startled" into a new direction, and with little explanation of the shift. "Marie Rogêt" happens to foreground the transitional effect of startling as theme. Its appearance in the prefatory comment above in fact refers back to the prefatory comment with which the tale begins: "There are few persons, even among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by *coincidences* of so seemingly marvelous a character that, as *mere* coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them." (ibid.) The half-credence into which the technique

of tactical relay startles the readers of the Dupin tales is not in the supernatural (mesmeric or metempsychotic), but in the dialogic transfer of authority, as in a sequence of letters.

An illustration of the technique in practice is the first interlocutory scenario of "Rue Morgue," which introduces Dupin's "peculiar analytic ability" by startling through a variety of discursive relays (*Works, Tales* II: 533). Recalling their habit of walking the streets of Paris at night, the narrator recounts their exchange one evening near the Palais Royal when, after fifteen minutes of silence, Dupin "[breaks] forth" into the narrator's musings, as well as the narration of the tale: "'He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the *Théâtre des Variétés*'" (534). The reader has not been privy to the narrator's thoughts, so the interjection is as perplexing to the reader for its opacity as it is to the narrator for its acuity. A brief exchange ensues, in which Dupin shows off a bit in response to the narrator's astonishment, at which point the narrator demands an explanation and admits, coincidentally, to being "even more startled than [he] would have been willing to express." Foreshadowing his later narration of the sequence of events at Rue Morgue, Dupin goes on to detail for several paragraphs the sequence of the narrator's thoughts, summarizing them in reverse, then marking them forward until he arrives again at the statement with which he initially "broke forth." In this way, first-person narration relays into dialogue, which itself relays into an extended appropriation of the narration.

Truly startling, though, in comparison with these passably conventional shifts in narration is the transition from this opening depiction of Dupin's character to the presentation of the mystery he will analyze and ultimately solve. No sooner have the quotation marks closed on Dupin's narration of his interlocutor's thoughts than the narrator resumes the discourse, turning to the newspaper report on the murders in the Rue Morgue:

> 'At this point I interrupted your meditations to remark that as, in
> fact, he was a very little fellow—that Chantilly—he would do
> better at the Theatre des Varietes.'
>> Not long after this, we were looking over an evening
> edition of the 'Gazette des Tribunaux,' when the following
> paragraphs arrested our attention. (536–37)

After the long opening excursus on the relative merits of draughts, chess, and whist, a reader might well expect some reflection on the analytic faculty just displayed by Dupin; yet the narrator offers no commentary whatsoever. The segue is so abrupt as to evoke a material, not just literal, separation between the paragraphs, as of the edge of a piece of paper, composition in two sittings, or a passing of the pen to someone else. The abruptness echoes in the "arrest" of attention, which will itself echo in the "startling" motif in "Marie Rogêt." That which arrests their attention marks yet another relay, wherein the narrator relinquishes control almost as swiftly as he resumed it; the quotation marks reopen, this time onto the impersonal voice of the newspaper discourse and its variation on the relay: the "citation" in sequence of the depositions by all the witnesses to the Rue Morgue murders. The sequence reproduces in miniature the abrupt and frequent shifts of controlling perspective that characterize the stories' technique throughout, which are a function of the opportunistic agency by which the Dupin tales adhere as a sequence.

The arresting quality of the textual joint between Dupin's narration and the narrator's presentation of the newspaper report reframes the passages of dialogue throughout the sequence of tales. Formally, conventional dialogue relays from speaker to speaker with the same abruptness that I am observing at these so-called discursive relays. From the brief first exchange in "Rue Morgue," however, the dialogue is Socratic, a vehicle for the demonstration of Dupin's

analysis.[9] In that initial exchange, as in the following ones, the anonymous narrator prompts Dupin to analyze the logic by which he solves the titular mystery. Among the three tales, "The Purloined Letter" executes the most elaborate interlocutory frame, wherein the theft of the Queen's letter, the exhaustively mathematical search for it, and the commission to steal it back are narrated through a series of spoken exchanges between the narrator and Dupin, as well as Prefect G—, who even assumes the narration for a significant stretch. Like whist, the interlocutory frame entangles more and more personae in its play over the course of the sequence.

Dupin's authorial appropriation of the narration is no more monologic, however, than the anonymous narrator's. Just as Dupin restores the perspective to the narrator by giving voice to an edited rehearsal of his companion's thoughts in the opening scenario of "Rue Morgue," he elsewhere assumes the narration only to perform an editorial function, assembling and interpreting other discourses, such as newspaper accounts, advertisements, and conversations with others. His narration, then, is very much like the narrator's: as much a discursive assemblage, like the series of depositions "cited" from the *Tribunaux,* as a conversation that characterizes a relationship or, for that matter, the "remarkable features in the mental character of [a] friend." The development of Dupin's character, such as it is, depends upon the interlocutory structure that is unique to the Dupin tales, while the interlocutory structure functions more in the manner of an epistolary sequence than a conversation. The suppression of the interlocutory frame in "Marie Rogêt" therefore illuminates the tales' tactical relays as the rearticulation of epistolary sequence and its editorial function.

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[9] So it is also in "The Gold-Bug," which is contemporaneous with the Dupin tales and often compared to them as a proto-detective story.

Whereas the Socratic exchange features prominently in "Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," it is almost nonexistent in "Marie Rogêt." The narrator cites his own voice but twice throughout all three installments of the tale: "'And what,' I here demanded, 'do you think of the opinions of "Le Commerciel?"'" is the first, followed just three paragraphs later by the second, "'And what are we to think,' I asked, 'of the article in "Le Soleil?"'" (*Tales* III: 748, 750). While such gratuitous prompting is, again, perfectly characteristic of the narrator's interaction with Dupin, the narrator's voice is otherwise limited in "Marie Rogêt" to brief, intermittent narration and the paratextual annotation.[10] Other than the two exceptions given above, the few exchanges that are described consist of silent provocations, as when Dupin presents the narrator with the selection of newspaper extracts from which he will draw his decisive conclusion about the murder. The narrator responds with not a word: "I waited for some explanation from Dupin" (754).[11] Dupin either registers some undisclosed cue in the narrator's waiting or else he proceeds of his own accord, having so orchestrated their exchange as to need no greater cue than the narrator's receptive presence: he immediately launches into the conclusion he had evidently prepared as he "occupied himself … in a scrutiny of the various newspaper files" over the course of the preceding week (753). His conclusion then continues uninterrupted across the lag between the December and February issues of the *Ladies' Companion* until the final paragraphs of the tale. As foreshadowed in the opening of "Rue

[10] Poe added notes when he revised "Marie Rogêt" for Duyckinck's 1845 selection of tales for Wiley & Putnam. The notes, as the introductory and concluding paragraphs of all three tales, conflate the depersonalized editorial voice that is characteristic of newspaper publishing and the persona of the narrator as he participates in the diegetic scenarios of the sequence.

[11] In fact, this characteristic practice of benign provocation, in combination with an indifferent affect, opaque personal history, and commitment to drawing out his interlocutor, is more consistent with the analyst's role than Dupin's ratiocinations, which are easily more consistent with the symptomatic analysand. His character might be "paper thin," as Irwin suggests, but it isn't wholly effaced, as the narrator's is; it might be said that any lack of depth in Dupin is characterological. Therefore, Lacan's chief blindness is in subscribing to Poe's conceit by casting Dupin, rather than the narrator, in the position of analyst. The blindness is all the more striking because, as Barbara Johnson and others have observed, Lacan argues for the importance of the narrator to any interpretation of the story (Muller and Richardson 229–30).

Morgue," lengthy appropriation of the discourse is perfectly characteristic of Dupin's response to the narrator's characteristically incredulous prompts. Therefore, in "Marie Rogêt," the greater portion of the tale is itself inside quotation marks (since the narrator is nevertheless narrating Dupin's discourse), and Dupin's analytic exuberance shares the space of appropriation with the newspaper accounts of the murder he selected and excerpted and which the narrator cited for most of the first installment of the tale. In this respect, "Marie Rogêt" foregrounds the editorial function of the narrator and Dupin to an extent "Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter" do not.

The Special Distinction of "Marie Rogêt"

Through this foregrounding of the editorial function, "Marie Rogêt" captures the double-sided authenticity of literary epistolarity, at once the origin of fiction and the documentation of history. The editorial presence effected by the characters' selection and citation of newspaper accounts of Marie Rogêt's murder fictionalizes Poe's own assembling and excerpting from the reports on the historical Mary Rogers as they ran in the contemporary New York City newspapers. (This is the "coincidence" to which the first sentence of the tale, quoted above, refers, that which can "startle" one "into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural.") The epistolarity of this effect is signaled and reinforced by the most intrusive editorial fiction in the tale and therefore of the sequence, which even takes the form of Genette's "disavowing authorial preface." Interpolated in this case, rather than introductory (a variation for which Genette pointedly allows), and offset with the customary square brackets, an editorial note succinctly marks the termination of Dupin's extended monologue:

> [For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers
> will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting,

from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the
following up of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin. We
feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was
brought to pass; and that an individual assassin was convicted,
upon his own confession, of the murder of Marie Rogêt, and that
the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms
of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe's article concludes with
the following words. — *Eds.*] (*Works, Tales* III: 772)

The "result" described here, "that an individual assassin was convicted, upon his own

confession," is in fact what the historical Poe claims to have "desired." He writes as much in his

letter of June 4, 1842, to George Roberts, editor of the Boston *Notion.* Soliciting publication of

his new story, Poe admits that Dupin's ratiocinations are a "pretence" for his own "very long and

rigorous analysis of the New-York tragedy," submitting that he "[believes] not only that [he has]

demonstrated the fallacy of the general idea—that the girl was the victim of a gang of ruffians—

but [has] *indicated the assassin* in a manner which will give renewed impetus to investigation"

(Pollin, Savoye, Ostrom 337–38). As W.K. Wimsatt observed, however, the interpolated note

ultimately marks the site where Poe, aggressively invested in solving the murder of the real Mary

Rogers by means of this "parallel" fiction, authorially retreats from his initial solution in revising

the tale for the Duyckinck collection (242–3). In good epistolary fashion, then, the editorial note

allows for the authenticity of fact as well as fiction.

The note's relay of authenticity corresponds to the relay between authorial and editorial

discourse. The correspondence is realized in several points of diction, first among them Poe's

name itself and, second, his idiomatic use of *article.* Where the historical Poe intrudes in a

narrative sequence that does not otherwise incorporate him, the editorial fiction—explicit in the

signature "*Eds.*"—introduces a fictional Poe, whose relationship to the manuscript is ambiguous

at best: "Mr. Poe's article." Poe often used the word *article* to refer to his writing, irrespective of

genre. Reviews, essays, hoaxes, tales: any and all might be an "article." The historical Poe, in writing the tale, thus ventriloquizes his own idiom through a fictionalization of the journal's editors; and he does so precisely where this fiction in turn fictionalizes his relationship to the narrative as a conflation of the authorial and editorial roles. That the "article"—what we now call the tale—is attributed to Poe within an *editorial* note suggests that this Poe *authors* the tale in some sense; yet he is clearly distinct from the narrator who has to that point served as witness to Dupin's ratiocinations. This fictionalized Poe must therefore have edited the account, while the narrator authored it. The discursive convergence of the roles in Poe's name, as well as in the word *article,* points up the ambiguity of the narrative's historical status, which is the incredible parallel "coincidence" in Paris of the events and reports that transpired for Mary Rogers in New York.

The variety of relays that converge on this editorial note extends to the interpolation itself. It will not have gone unnoticed that the note constitutes its own "breaking forth" on the narration, much like Dupin's breaking forth into the narrator's train of thought at the beginning of "Rue Morgue." The closing of the square brackets, however, does not restore the narration of the tale, as it does in the earlier tale; instead it gives way to the recognizably impersonal discourse of editorial commentary: "It will be understood that I speak of coincidences *and no more*. What I have said above upon this topic must suffice. In my own heart there dwells no faith in præter-nature" (*Works, Tales* III: 772). Here the first person is not the narrator, but rather the generalized first person of the journalistic editor, returning to the discussion of coincidence and the supernatural with which the tale began. Rather than erupting through the narration, the note signals two discursive relays, from Dupin's speech to interpolated note and from note to editorial commentary. Both relays are abrupt, if not exactly startling; and, as Poe's revision of the solution

for the Duyckinck edition demonstrates, they provide suitable opportunity for exercising authorial agency.

As it closes the diegetic frame of "Marie Rogêt" *and* contains the revision that illustrates the historical Poe's opportunistic agency, the interpolated editorial note provides a point of reference for a comparable exercise of agency in another revision for the Duyckinck edition. This revision was to the *narrator*'s editorial commentary on the selection of newspaper reports he assembles and presents to Dupin for interpretation *within* the narrative frame. To this point, the emphasis has been on the discursive relays that mark the outer edges of the tales, at their openings and closings and at the edges of the narrative frame. Because the suppression of dialogue in "Marie Rogêt" illuminates the discursive movement within the diegetic frame, not just at its edges, it is necessary to call attention for a moment to the distinction between the edge of the text and the edge of the narrative.

When the brackets close on the interpolated note and it returns to the discourse of coincidence and the supernatural, it is returning to the beginning of the "article," not the narrative about the mystery of the Marie Rogêt. This initial gambit on "the Calculus of Probabilities," like the lengthier gambit on whist that opens "Rue Morgue," continues through a second paragraph, whereupon it gives way to the diegesis, marked by the narrator's explanation of the need for a sequel to his first tale. The discursive shift from commentary to narration transpires as abruptly with the sudden entrance of the anonymous narrator as it does when Dupin concludes his rehearsal of the narrator's thoughts at the opening of "Rue Morgue." It does so as abruptly as when, at the end of "Marie Rogêt" the diegesis suddenly gives way to the editorial interpolation and then as suddenly gives way to the expository conclusion. In "Marie Rogêt," one can observe the narrator perform the same dramatic discursive shifts within the diegetic frame,

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where his persona can in no way be taken for the historical Poe, the fictionalized Poe, or the journal's editors.

Halfway through the *Ladies' Companion*'s first installment of "Marie Rogêt," a series of editorial interpolations surfaces in exact imitation of the bracketed editorial note that terminates the narration at the end of the tale. Having "procured, at the Prefecture, a full report of all the evidence elicited, and, at the various newspaper offices, a copy of every paper in which, from first to last, had been published any decisive information in regard to this sad affair," the narrator assembles and paraphrases the chronology of Marie's departure, disappearance, and discovery between Sunday, June 22, and Wednesday, June 25 (*Tales* III: 729–31). This collation and synthesis of the newspaper accounts is a significant editorial act in itself, not unlike the "cited" series of depositions in "Rue Morgue"; yet the narrator expands his editorial range beyond the basic presentation of the case by quoting several passages from one newspaper's circulation of the "suggestion" that Marie is in fact still alive. It is in introducing this series of excerpts that his voice and discourse realize the generalized editorial persona that is usually confined to the beginning and end of each tale: "As time passed and no discovery [of the body] ensued, a thousand contradictory rumors were circulated, and journalists busied themselves in *suggestions*. … It will be proper that I submit to the reader some passages which embody the suggestion alluded to. These passages are *literal* translations from 'L'Etoile,' a small daily print conducted, in general, with much ability" (*Ladies Companion* Nov. 1842: 17). Here the discursive shift that is otherwise most pronounced at the edge of the narrative frame (in "Marie Rogêt" as well as "Rue Morgue") takes place within the space of appropriation. It also registers much the way it does at the site of the bracketed note: in the dissonant use of the first person and in the editorial disavowal of authority.

Calling attention to the extracts as translations is, moreover, a shrewd deflection of authorial responsibility and renders another variation on Genette's disavowing preface. The conspicuous paradox of "*literal* translations" signals the discursive shift that tightly focuses in the outward-turning gesture to "the reader." As both Wimsatt and Mabbott observe, the passages "cited" from *L'Etoile* in the Parisian universe parallel to that of Mary Rogers are, in fact, *literally* from reports that ran in New York's *Brother Jonathan* (234, 778). The narrator, in other words, "translates" for the reader of the *Ladies' Companion* from a French that does not exist into the self-same English those readers could have read in *Brother Jonathan.* It is also yet another way that Poe demonstrates his savvy about the circulation of texts within a culture of reprinting. As the converse of the strategies McGill highlights, by which Poe manages to secure authorship without copyright, Poe "reprints" the extracts from *Brother Jonathan* in the guise of authorial representation.[12] Although the narrator cannot be mistaken for the historical Poe here, his assumption of the editorial role coincides with the historical Poe at the words *literal* and *reader,* just as the fictionalized Poe coincides with the historical in "Mr. Poe's article" in the note that closes the narration. Again, these material joints relay between fact and fiction, the enduring tactic of the epistolary condition.

They are, moreover, exceptionally situated relays, both because the discursive coincidence takes place within the narrative rather than at its edge and because Poe revised the joint work to render it less evident. Note that the narrator's editorial preface, unlike the interpolated note at the end of the tale, performs the discursive shift from narration to citation without the material signature of square brackets. The brackets are instead used to mark the editorial interpolations that interpret and link the cited passages:

[The editor here proceeds to argue…]

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[12] See, for example, her analysis of Poe's Autography series (*Reprinting* 181–3).

 …
 [In this way the journal endeavored to create the impression…]
 …
 [Some color was given to the suspicion thus thrown…]
 (*Ladies' Companion* Nov. 1842: 18)

A final citation from another newspaper, *Le Commerciel,* follows the last of these bracketed comments, whereupon the narrator resumes his narrative and the familiar characters reappear: "A day or two before the Prefect called upon us, however, some important information reached the police." The square brackets set off the narrator's editorial comments only in the *Ladies' Companion* version of "Marie Rogêt," however. Poe removed them when he revised the tale for Duyckinck's edition. Without the brackets to signal the representation of paratextual space, the discursive shift performs the editorial preface without materializing it. Yet the subtle but distinct revision establishes a perceptible relation between the editorial function and the unbracketed discursive shift. It reproduces the epistolary condition of the editorial function, such that the discursive shift can signify epistolarity and its opportunistic agency by virtue of the relay itself. This effect is the special distinction of "Marie Rogêt": to have illuminated the epistolarity of the discursive shifts that are characteristic of the Dupin tales' narrative technique.

 To conclude, despite the absence of any overt epistolary form, Poe's Dupin sequence exhibits a dialogic joint work of epistolarity, both within and across the tales. Read for their sequence, the tales set in relief the discursive relays whereby the disjunctive strategies of epistolary narrative and reprint culture coincide, as Poe's aesthetic investment was transforming from the enterprise of the novel to the enterprise of an infinitely expanding volume of stories. His notorious evasive assertions of authenticity may therefore be understood not only in the way McGill suggests, as a strategy for securing authority in a marketplace of unregulated distribution, and not only in the way Eliza Richards suggests, as an erotic fascination with the mimicry and

"lateral exchange" of poetess practice. Hidden in plain sight, the epistolarity of the Dupin tales posits a tactical subjectivity that passes through various presentations of self rather than collapsing into the vertiginous *abymes* of doubling for which Poe is best known. Neither solely emanating from the author as autocratic origin (fortune) nor determined from without by the social structure of epistolary tradition or practice (fate), the sequence plots a seriality of intention, as well as narrative. Poe's idiosyncratic authority has been both dismissed and admired for its shiftiness and its resonance with the unstable identities of his characters. His opportunistic agency should also be understood as a function of the epistolary tactics his writing traces.

Conclusion

Lyric Reading x Epistolary Reading and Poe's Autography

The letter that demarcates Coleridge's definition of the imagination ushered us to the limit of symptomatic reading. The intersubjective excess of apostrophe in his Conversation Poems, the epistolary fyttes of Byron's first hero, and the starts of Poe's epistolary tactics have shown that letters, as a medium, test the material boundaries of the letter, as a genre. They have also illustrated the interpretative consequence of reading these material and representational dimensions together as the epistolary condition of the Romantic author. Lyric reading and Poe's "Autography" series will leave us at the prospect of reading the textual surface as redefined by the epistolary condition.

When mounting her argument about the "lyricization of reading" in *Dickinson's Misery,* Virginia Jackson reserves her most emphatic language of critique for the historical status of J.S. Mill's "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." It is, she claims, the "most influentially misread essay in the history of Anglo-American poetics" (9). An oblique aside that introduces Mill's definition of poetry as "unconscious of a listener" and as "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude," Jackson's categorical pronouncement is followed by a series of citations that recontextualize the social dimension of Mill's claim in light of the transatlantic print revolution of the early nineteenth century. The misreading, it seems, is to understand Mill's definition of poetry as a definition of *lyric* poetry rather than a historically situated definition of poetry according to the range of its printed variations in 1833. Indeed, poetry as Mill describes it is the epitome of greater Romantic lyric: "feeling as it exists…in the poet's mind"; as distinct from the novel; being "of the nature of soliloquy"; the "natural fruit of solitude and meditation";

a "mixed expression of grandeur and melancholy" (348–50). The misreading is not a misreading of the essay, however; it is a faithful reading of the collapsed definition of poetry Mill espouses. Mill, it seems, is the misreader—and the culprit of our demise, distorting the historically situated print mediation of poetry and its publics, thereby initiating us into the lyric reading that is, according to Jackson and others, our contemporary practice.

While the rhetorical oddity surrounding Mill's essay is of little consequence to Jackson's adroit and rigorously argued position, it is nevertheless symptomatic of a collective inability to account for the epistolary in our latest reckonings with genre and material practice in the nineteenth century. Announcing her argument as a theory of that which it critiques—lyric reading—Jackson leaves untheorized a crucial aspect of the historical situation she so vividly materializes: the epistolary condition of nineteenth-century literary culture. Why should Jackson's argument, predicated on the epistolary condition of Emily Dickinson's poetry, result in a theory of lyric reading rather than epistolary reading?

The flashpoint in Mill's definition of poetry, especially for Jackson's interpretation of it, is its unsettled figuration of the relationship between writer and reader. Here, as is often the case with defining poetry, Mill successively defines it against what it is not—the novel, narrative, description, and, most famously, eloquence: "[E]loquence is *heard;* poetry is *overheard*" (348). To distill one's meaning to the difference of a preposition is itself a feat of lyric economy: an unforgettable one, it seems, within our economy of lyric reading. Jackson makes much of the passage that follows from Mill's distinction, as it posits the poet's "utter unconsciousness of a listener" and compares the poet to a soliloquizing actor on the stage:

> According to Mill, the circulation of poetry on 'hot-pressed paper'
> is exactly what the generic conventions of the lyric cannot
> acknowledge—that is, the lyric can no more acknowledge its literal
> circumstance than can the actor, and is at the same time no less

dependent than that actor on the generic recognition of the
audience it must pretend is not there. Thus, the difficulty of
thinking about the lyric as implicated in historical contingency is
that the discourse that surrounds the genre must admit without
acknowledging the defining effect of that contingency. (56)

On full display here are both the compelling clarity of Jackson's argument that Mill defines lyric

out of its historically circulating materiality and the precariousness of her rhetorical negotiation

between lyric and lyric reading. It can therefore be easy to miss that Jackson does *not* herself

miss Mill's attention to the relationship between speaker/actor and listener/audience; yet his

elaboration of that relationship is more complicated than Jackson's description of generic

interdependence quite accounts for. Jackson sees the distinction between eloquence and poetry as

a mutually defining interaction between speaker and listener, but the syntax of Mill's explication

locates agency in the verbal performance as well.

The initial formulation, as one might expect, establishes *eloquence* and *poetry* as parallel

subjects of parallel independent clauses only to undermine the nominal comparison with a

passive construction, which predicates the difference on the listener's act, rather than on any

properties that respectively inhere in the two kinds of verbal performance: eloquence is

eloquence because the *listener* hears it; poetry poetry because the *listener* overhears it. The agent

of differentiation becomes only harder to track in the sentences that follow: "Eloquence supposes

an audience. The peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a

listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude" (348). If the listener

hears, it is because eloquence, not the speaker, invokes the possibility of his hearing, rather than

the listener's exercising any agency to hear. If the listener overhears, it is because the poet, not

the poetry, invokes the listener's lack of agency, rather than any stealth. But finally the poet and

the listener, as well as the poetry, are figured out of the equation altogether, in favor of a closed

mental circuit of reflexive feeling, as in the *letter* Coleridge writes to himself in the *Biographia*

Literaria: "feeling confessing itself to itself." Tracking the circulation of agency, as manifest in

the grammar of his language, is not intended to indict Mill's logic; rather it serves to reveal the

difficulty Mill seems to have in locating the agency within a genre that is otherwise determined

by the epistolary condition of its making.

Agency, it will be remembered, is always at stake when there is a question of media and

mediation (Gitelman 9), but the epistolarity of the mediation in this case emerges in Mill's vexed

use of "unconsciousness" to describe the poet's attitude toward his listener. While he first claims

the poet is entirely unaware of his audience, he then denies even a passive role to the audience,

claiming instead that solitude is the optimal scene for performing poetry. Turning the tables once

again—to produce the analogy upon which Jackson's analysis depends—he compares the poet to

a soliloquizing actor (and published poetry to the soliloquy "in full dress and on the stage"—note

the shift of agency again), admitting that the actor/poet "knows that there is an audience

present." Not only is the actor *not,* this time, unconscious of his audience, but he *must* be aware

of the audience in order to be able to successfully *act* as though he is not. While Mill seems to

have as much difficulty settling the listener in the poet's awareness as he does settling the agency

in the generic system, the image with which he concludes the comparison makes use of a shared

trope of lyric and epistolary discourses: "But when he *turns round,*" he writes, "and *addresses*

himself to another person; when the act of utterance is not itself the end, but a means to an

end,…then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence" (350; my emphasis).

Whereas the Orphic myth of lyric origin makes "turn[ing] round" a condition of lyric

possibility, Mill's definition makes it the condition of poetic impossibility.[1] And whereas

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[1] For a thorough discussion of the Orphic myth of lyric origin, see Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses,*
especially chapter 1, "In the Darkness," 1–57. One might point out, on the other hand, that Orpheus turns around

Jackson concludes that the "narrowing of what is 'essential' in poetry to a form of direct address [is what] necessitates [his] famous distinction between poetry and eloquence" (131), Mill makes the listener's position behind the poet—as opposed to directly opposite, before, beside, or across—definitive of poetic address. In this Mill departs from his analogy to the soliloquizing actor onstage, who would not "turn round" but toward his audience if he wanted to break the fourth wall. What is for Mill decisively unique to poetry is the particular indirectness of the circuit of address. The circuit as he traces it therefore follows the over-the-shoulder scenario that, Altman observes, typifies the relationship between author and reader in epistolary literature.[2] That is, the readers' looking over the shoulder of the writers—within and without the diegesis— is the motivating dynamic of the epistolary fiction, irrespective of genre. What Mill's essay about poetry hides in plain sight is the epistolary condition of print's communicative situation.

Edgar Allan Poe's first "Autography" series, published three years after Mill's essay appeared in the *Monthly Repository,* provides at once a point of reference for the supervisory dynamic of the epistolary condition and a point of generic contrast for competing claims on the generic specificity of oversight and overhearing. Between 1836 and 1842, Poe published in all five pieces under some version of the heading "Autography," of which the first series is overtly epistolary.[3] It ran in two installments in the February and August 1836 issues of the *Southern*

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with the desire to "address himself" to Eurydice but instead confronts darkness, rendering him in lyric solitude, per Mill's definition of poetry, as "feeling…confessing itself to itself."

[2] "For the external reader, reading an epistolary novel is very much like reading over the shoulder of another character whose own readings—and misreadings—must enter into our experience of the work. In fact, the epistolary novel's tendency to narrativize reading, integrating the act of reading into the fiction at all levels (from a correspondent's proofreading of his own letters to publication and public reading of the entire letter collection), constitutes an internalizing action that blurs the very distinctions that we make between the internal and external reader" (Altman 111–12). I would amend Altman's statement only to point out that this is the case for the reader of any epistolary text, not just for readers of the epistolary novel.

[3] The other three parts in the series appeared as two "chapters" and an "appendix" in the November, December, and January 1841–42 editions of *Graham's Magazine.* One might argue that his *New York Literati* series are a further extension of the "Autography" project, in which case there are more than five installments to the series. The subsequent series suppress the fictionalized letters, just offering the signature facsimiles with the analyses of the writer's character.

Literary Messenger, where Poe had just become editor; and it consisted of an assemblage of fictionalized letters from celebrated "literati" and statesmen, to each of which was appended a woodcut facsimile of the "autograph" and a short analysis of the handwriting (the "MS.") as a reflection of the writer's "character." Poe framed the exercise, as he often did, with a hoaxlike scenario that he adapted from another autography piece titled "The Miller Correspondence," which ran in 1833 in the British magazine *Fraser's,* a competitor and imitator of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* the touchstone of literary print culture in Britain and the clearinghouse of sensational tales and popular literary taste. The series opens, with an account by the editorial "we" of how the subsequent manuscripts arrived in their hands. Joseph Miller, Esq., "'being smitten, as all the world knows, with a passion for autographs,'" had marched into the offices of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and presented the editors with a packet of letters in the hopes of redeeming his family's name from the insult of a "certain rascally piece of business in the London 'Athenaeum'" (140–41). He believes he has been mistaken by the *Athenaeum* for the George Miller whose autographical analyses made up the original *Fraser's* article (Elmer 40–41). Assuring the editor, therefore, that the autographs he has collected are American, not British, and that he has "resorted to no petty arts for the consummation of a glorious purpose," Miller concludes his pitch with a reminder that the autographs "will prove interesting to the public" and a suggestion to include the letters with the signatures when he runs them in the magazine

The editor does "insert" the letters, in fact written by Poe, but only in the first series. When he resurrects the series for *Graham's Magazine* in 1841–42, the fictionalized letters are sacrificed, along with the considerable humor of the epistolary impersonations and the misunderstandings they describe, in deference to the "principal…although perhaps the least

interesting" feature, the editorial commentary (*Poe's Works* 15:177). Poe himself seems to recognize where the article's greatest appeal lies.[4] Unable in the *Graham's* introduction to abandon entirely the entertainment of epistolary miscommunication, he interpolates letters from personalities who did and did not respond in kind to the playful spirit of the first series. He also somewhat concedes the occasional "error or injustice" of the commentator's "pungent" analysis, even as he defends the "strong analogy" between "every man's chirography and character" (177–8). The first "Autography" series may be a perfect representation of the surface the epistolary condition renders, but it is in the introduction to this second installment that the epistolary scenario implied in the "turning round" of Mill's purveyor of eloquence emerges. Resuming the hoaxlike frame scenario of the first installment, Poe begins the second as follows:

II.

> Our friend, Joseph A. B. C. D. &c. Miller, has called upon us again, in a great passion. He says we quizzed him in our last article—which we deny positively. He maintains, moreover, that the greater part of our observations on mental qualities, as deduced from the character of a MS., are not to be sustained. The man is in error. However, to gratify him, we have suffered him, in the present instance, to play the critic himself. He has brought us another batch of autographs, and will let us have them upon no other terms. To say the truth, we are rather glad of his proposal than otherwise. *We shall look over his shoulder,* however, occasionally. Here follow the letters. (164)

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[4] Even though the series in *Graham's* does not incorporate fictionalized letters, Poe cannot entirely abandon the entertainment of epistolary miscommunication: he interpolates letters from William Ellery Channing and Colonel Stone as representative personalities who, respectively, did and did not respond in kind to the spirit of the first series. "Much of the humor of 'Autography' derives from the oddly fragmented and decontextualized nature of these communiqués," Elmer observes. "The reader laughs in imagining what the origin of such strange communications might have been. Thus, one satisfaction of the piece lies in the realization that the literati have been lured into a correspondence which, while seemingly groundless and insignificant, manages nevertheless to communicate something—their names and signatures; it is as though the celebrated figures cannot help communicating themselves, despite their limited ability to communicate meaning" (40).

The letters are gone, but the epistolary condition remains, along with its relay: Poe's entanglement of himself, as Miller's supervisory reader, in the editorial "we," along with the *Messenger*'s readers, who now occupy the position Miller held in the first installment with respect to them. It is an epistolary, not a lyric moment, and it is highly resistant to the lyric reading that, as Jackson has it, germinates in the essay Mill published just a few years earlier.

Unlike Dickinson's overtly epistolary "lyrics," the insistent materiality of which is so historical that it is either decomposed or else simply untranslatable into print, the "Autography" series only make meaning in terms of the material conditions of American reprinting practice.[5] In other words, Dickinson's "lyrical letters" only make sense in manuscript (or what's left of them) because they refuse the leveling reproducibility of print, whereas Poe's "Autography" series only makes sense in print because they use its reproducibility to represent the epistolary condition as surface.[6] And while Dickinson's poems have become the exemplary objects of twentieth-century lyric reading, acquiring a national audience and the attendant canonicity, Poe's "Autography" series has entirely lost its national audience, no longer assimilable to critical taxonomies of genre nor exemplary of a privileged type within such taxonomies. If we recognize in its surface the play of letter and letters, genre and medium, it might teach us the pleasures of a kind of reading that "contemporary criticism has no language for" but which is sensitive to the tactical agency that is at cross purposes with the Romantic imagination yet speaks through its epistolary condition.

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[5] See McGill, "Unauthorized Poe," ch. 3 in *Culture of Reprinting* (141–86). McGill calls attention to the "Autography" series as an illustration of the savvy with which Poe negotiated the American reprint economy. He ironically plays the fascination of the autograph signature against the reproducibility of the woodcut facsimile, the inauthenticity of which is in turn ironized by the proprietary value of the woodcuts, which insure the profitable singularity of the text against its devaluation in a marketplace with minimal copyright protection.

[6] See Elizabeth Hewitt for a discussion of Dickinson's poems as a hybrid genre of "lyrical letters" (142–72). Jackson would say that Hewitt's term illustrates her argument about the lyricization of Dickinson's writing. But as shown by the overlapping language of Altman and Jackson, who both refer to Mill's claim about "overhearing," neither the letter nor the lyric has a clear and uncontested claim on the triangulation of reception that makes the reading of epistolary writing so intriguing.

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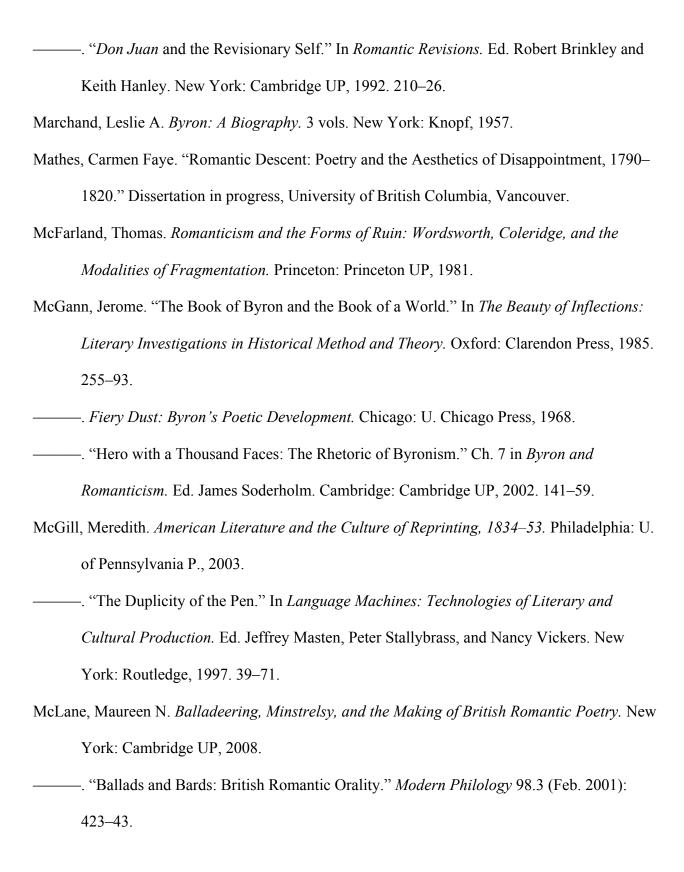———. "A Short History of ———." Unpublished manuscript, 2010.

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