The Ode's Last Stand: An Irregular Approach to Modern Verse

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ABSTRACT

With the irregular ode's dominance of the poetic scene during the Romantic period came a kind of obscurity: even as the ode became the lyrical idiom it lost its visibility as a form. Consequently, critical consensus lays the ode to rest in the early nineteenth century, but it is just here that the ode's history takes a turn, as I argue that poets as diverse as Shelley, Tennyson, Pound, and Auden revive the form by embracing its prosodic pluralism, stressing its historical burdens, and addressing the demand for cultural relevance. This dissertation thus resumes the history of the ode in English after the Romantic perfection of the form and traces the ode's survival into subsequent literary eras, where its over-conspicuousness consistently finds place in a larger aesthetic cycle – namely, the antagonism between essentialist and pluralist poetics that defines the major poetic and critical divides of literary history in English.

In the first chapter, I explore Shelley's intensive odic project, which begins with – rather than consummates in – "Ode to the West Wind," and through which he turns away from the lyrical unity and quiescence of the odes of Wordsworth and Coleridge. That Shelley's "other" odes have met with poetic and critical oblivion attests to the stronger allure of his predecessors' essentialist aesthetic, to which he responds with a hyper-formal ode practice. In the second chapter, I trace Tennyson's odic career, in which he turns a lifelong antagonism with the form to his advantage by deforming rather than abandoning its protocols. In the third chapter, I study how Pound's use of the ode challenges the prevailing critical myths of his time, by which genre was being dissolved in the prosodic essentialism of his contemporaries. In the conclusion, I present a case study of Auden, who uses the ode precisely because it is an ideologically overburdened

form, in order to explore the poetic evolutionary mechanism by which this most over-conspicuous of all forms has been turned into something unrecognizable – that is to say, virtually new. My study, by giving a historical dimension to the poetic of making it new, demonstrates that the ode's disappearance during periods of poetic essentialism is really only a vanishing act, which ultimately is achieved through form rather than in spite of it.

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INTRODUCTION

Ex nihilo, ad nauseam, ad nihil: A Brief History of the English Ode

In 1629, the ode makes a stellar double entry into English letters: Milton's

Nativity Ode ("On the Morning of Christ's Nativity") and Jonson's Cary-Morison Ode

("A Pindaric Ode: To the immortall memorie, and friendship of that noble paire, Sir

Lucius Cary, and Sir. H. Morison"). While the designation "ode" (in the sense of "song"

or "ditty") had been making the rounds in English miscellanies for a few decades,

nothing anticipates its twofold arrival on the literary scene as a fully developed,

ambitious form in its own right. And yet *ex nihilo* these odes are not: Milton's ode

derives authority from Italian verse forms, while Jonson reaches farther back to the Greek

Pindaric ode, a form ready-made to carry high matter. Two very different literary

traditions, each in turn its own multiform of precedents, thus converge in a single year

under one name. My dissertation takes this 1629 convergence as emblematic of a rich

formal pluralism that has always underwritten the ode in English, and my primary goal is

to return this sense of poetic deep time to the ode, even to those historical phases from

which it seems to have vanished.

To a certain extent, the ode's formal pluralism has been well established.

Collectively, ode criticism identifies an influx of literary currents both broad and deep:

Continental lyric, canzone, madrigal, masque, Hebrew verse, elegy, and hymn, in

addition to all Greek and Latin ode models (Stesichoric, Sapphic, Anacreontic, Pindaric,

Horatian). The particular provocation for my project is that the ode's abrupt entry into

this surfeit in 1629 is only the first of many; Abraham Cowley in 1656 is almost

immediately able to scandalize with his *Pindarique Odes*. I argue that the ode storms the

literary scene again and again, that it figures its own eruption onto the literary scene with

increasing strenuousness in each major literary era. In asserting a relationship to literary

history, each ode writer studied herein must walk a fine line between making a scene and

being unseen. I have chosen three canonical poets who in their ode practice are acutely

peripheral. Percy Shelley – the self-styled "unacknowledged" poet – delivers his "other"

odes belatedly and from abroad, thus they ever miss their occasion. Alfred Tennyson's

famous "ten years' silence" is only the first half of an ode moratorium that is twice as

long, and even after this he balks at his laureatic mandate. Ezra Pound, ever in exile,

writes odes that are fueled by that estrangement, as well as by a formal strangeness that

all but guarantees his exclusion from the canonical status he so ardently seeks.

There is a logic to this consistent marginality. The ode is a profoundly liminal

form. Even its most eagle-eyed critics cannot help but articulate its indeterminacy, as

when William Congreve declares in 1706 that "there is nothing more regular than the

Odes of Pindar."[1] The Pindaric ode is both irregular and regular – consummately both –

depending on which part of it one is focusing. Congreve goes on to say the form is so

demanding that no one has realized it in English. This of course overlooks Jonson in a

matter of just decades. But such oversights are risks that come with the territory: being

always at the threshold allows the ode to erupt into literary history, but it also has a lot to

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[1] *The Works of Mr. Congreve in Two Volumes* (London: W. Lowndes, &c., 1788), 254.

do with its seemingly easy ejection from it. Joseph Addison, who was aggrieved by "men following Irregularities by Rule" and the consequent Pindaric spawn, decries "those monstrous Compositions."[2] Here, in 1711, the odes need no introduction because they are so infamously overdone in every sense and thus on their way out of the canon for the time being.

The other main consideration of this study, then, is how the ode's pluralism dooms it to exit abruptly from literary history altogether, how its overwriting sets it up to be overwritten. This is very much in line with how Paul Fry understands matters in his seminal study, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*. He begins his book with the image of "the man at the gate" – a threshold figure who is skeptical about the metaphysics of odic invocation, but nonetheless puts the ode to work through a formal overworking – a wink-and-a-nod just in the likely case that self and other, presence and absence, I and Thou fail actually to connect. Simultaneously protection from and exposure to what we know, after the Enlightenment, about the unknown, the ode "writes itself hoarse."[3] Shelley, Tennyson, and Pound each write swan-song odes – massive odes or ode sequences that for all their unquiet seem to acquiesce in literary obscurity. This fate has always been in the cards. For the other notable detail of that 1629 literary-historical moment is its refusal to be a defining moment: both Milton and Jonson composed their odes that year, yet neither ode saw the light of day through publication until the 1640s.

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[2] *Addison's Spectator*, ed. George Washington Greene (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 385.

[3] *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 9. Hereafter cited as *Poet's Calling*.

And so the ode is, always, counteracting its big-bang origins with whimpering about its destined anonymity. I understand this dynamic as part of the ode's cycle, itself a function of a larger aesthetic cycle – namely, the antagonism between essentialist and pluralist poetics that defines the major poetic and critical divides of literary history in English. The ode is always overconspicuous, but whether its excessiveness earns it fame, infamy, or obscurity depends on the era. A half century after Congreve and Addison show the Pindaric ode the door, Thomas Gray returns in fullest force with it, in order to proclaim England's cultural and literary supremacy. Gray doubles down on the form, publishing two Pindaric odes in 1757 ("The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard"), while remaining content for the subsequent decade that he had baffled his audience: "nobody understands me, & I am perfectly satisfied."[4] When Gray released a cribbed version of his Pindaric odes in 1768, he was confessing to their obscurity – but at least it was a highly visible obscurity, as the beloved writer of the accessible "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" was afforded the benefit of the doubt. By the turn of the century, William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge were taking a more debonair approach to Pindaric pinioning, downshifting into a non-specifically irregular mode for their odes (which, as part of their strategy, they often did not label as such). John Keats perfects this project of hushing the ode, delivering his "Great" odes as a development of his predecessors' "Greater" lyrics – and thereby giving us the Greatest odes, obviating the need to say more, so that the remainder of the ode history is history.

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[4] *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 333n.

Ne plus ultra: Keats

Histories of the ode tend to stop, that is, at Keats. Fry's book concludes with not one but two chapters on Keats, even though Shelley's odes generally post-date Keats'. Likewise, John Heath-Stubbs and John D. Jump end their respective chapters on Romantic ode practice with Keats.[5] Their brief ode surveys (often not much more than annotated anthology) do conclude, like Fry's longer study, with some mention of Victorian and Twentieth-Century ode practice, but all three critics consider it far from poetically viable: a "purely formal" "survival" with "no further room for development"; "widely abandoned as an embarrassment"; "a virtuoso oddity," "an ironically approached last resort."[6] On the whole, the form is laid to rest with Keats: "Some have seen in this poem ["To Autumn"] the consummation of Keats' work as a lyric poet: his ultimate acceptance, in the face of his own approaching death, of the elements of change and decay as a positive part of the totality of life itself."[7]

The history of the ode thus stops at Keats, but the literary reality is that odes continue well into the twentieth century. Fry acknowledges this to some extent, though he makes it clear that the ode's future will no longer be written in terms of the ode:

> [T]he way poems have of subverting themselves and their themes is not a
> symptom of recent origin. It is not least the purpose of this book to show how

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[5] John Heath-Stubbs, *The Ode* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); John D. Jump, *The Ode* (London: Methuen, 1974).

[6] Heath-Stubbs, 98; Jump, 59; *Poet's Calling*, 276.

[7] Heath-Stubbs, 97.

poetic forms overburden what might be called the conscience of discourse. The strain is most apparent where the forms chosen are most extravagant, and it is from this correlation that the special nature of the ode appears. One reason why I shall not carry this study beyond the Romantic period (to include, for example, some consideration of Tennyson) is that increasingly during the nineteenth century, as doubt and self-consciousness more and more openly marked the artistic intelligence in general, so also the element of form in poetry came to be more and more openly experimental, more self-justifying than hitherto, and hence the form of *all* poetry came to serve the subversive function that it had once served … most notably in the ode. (36)

To augur that the ode becomes "*all* poetry" is to damn it with transcendent praise, to give the remaining history of the ode short shrift. If there is a point in the nineteenth century where all poetry begins to do what the ode had been doing all along – headlonging into formal extravagance as a function of vocational-ontological self-consciousness – it makes future instances of the form no less capable of this same performance – but *a fortiori* it commits them to *more* extravagant versions of themselves (which is what they indeed become). Reports of the ode's death are greatly exaggerated, and its supernova-like self-destruct sequences serve only to reseed the poetic cosmos. This dissertation thus aims to specify Fry's sweeping claim, to demonstrate that the ode performs, but does not succumb to, or just insolvently become, the generic disarray of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Keats standstill is made explicit by Nathaniel Teich, who in "The Ode in English Literary History" argues that the very vehicle of cultural and literary progress becomes the sign that all poetic progress is illusory. From era to era, ode to ode, there is

"movement" but not necessarily "improvement."[8] Teich resists literary value judgments (of Fry, namely) by studying non-canonical odes, and connecting them with canonical ones. "I shall examine two of Keats's odes which, if they do not end the genre, at least destabilize it and reduce it to 'lyric' – the essentially modern species of 'poem'" (92). In this way, Teich effectively agrees with Fry that the ode becomes "all poetry." Teich concludes:

> The distinctiveness of the ode as a genre was being erased because it could not supply functional, conceptual, or formal organizing principles for the private or personal voice of increasingly self-conscious poets. For authenticity, they turned to a more generalized lyric genre, to the elegiac, or to the satiric. … As a genre, *ode* was gradually submerged by the rising modern tide of *poem*, conceived as lyric self-expression. (107)

This observation somewhat confusingly comes just after he notes that Keats and Wordsworth both gravitated toward triadic (i.e., Pindaric) structures. In a footnote, Teich obfuscates the fact that Keats *added* "Ode" to "On Melancholy" and "Autumn" between draft and publication, so that he may arrive at this verdict: "there is little need for the title 'ode'" (107). Indeed. And yet this odic unnaming exists not for the reason Teich posits (that the poems don't strictly conform to classical ode convention), but because the ode has (once again) become the poetic idiom – and perhaps even a state of mind.

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[8] "The Ode in English Literary History: Transformations from the Mid-Eighteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century," *Papers on Language & Literature* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 91.

In the most recent sustained study of the ode, Robert Eisenhauer, in his ruminations about *Ode Consciousness*, wanders into the Keatsian mists, though he does manage to emerge from them:

> [A] desire for invisibility, in the moment prior to liquidation/saturation, attends Keats's "To Autumn." In the "Ode on the Grecian Urn," on the other hand, the consolation of the artifact – its message for the future – is based on a contract that can only be validated through the painful experience of previous poetic generations. … the ode is "more than" a genre, reflecting heightened states of being and/or mind, defining where one is or where one wishes to be, but also the uncanny sense of "having been there before."[9]

The Freudian gravitational well is clear enough. Eisenhauer's "ode consciousness" thus reiterates (what might be called) Harold Bloom's "ode sub-consciousness." In "Tennyson in the Shadow of Keats," Bloom claims that Tennyson's "internalization" of Keats is "the largest single factor in British and American poetry from about 1830 until about 1915."[10] From this intriguing bridge over and breach of the Romantic-Victorian divide (the same the ode history cannot seem to surmount), Bloom beats a retreat: "the precursor poem has been absorbed as impulse rather than event" (128). The precursor poems are all odes; yet whether all odes are id (Bloom), ego (Eisenhauer), or super-ego (Fry), they will be paid no mind.

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[9] *Ode Consciousness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 178.

[10] "Tennyson: In the Shadow of Keats," in *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 128.

Before relinquishing ode history to psycholinguistics or cognitive science, Eisenhauer does offer a platform for poetic continuance in the idea of "the artifact." Keats achieves "invisibility" with his "camelion" poetry that neither has an identity nor needs it.[11] Helen Vendler seconds this achievement, in a decisive statement of New Critical poetic autonomy: "The ode has floated free of its occasion, and ends poised in the sound of song, sufficient unto itself."[12] But even if Keats transcends poetic containment ("'more than' a genre"), the consequence for the poet after Keats is to avoid invisibility through poems that are "more than" themselves, generically and materially. The ode is often understood as a *sui generis* poem, while really it is especially adept at creating this illusion through a kind of "sui-genericism."

Sequencing

In 1800, William Wordsworth sequences the ode genome. About "Tintern Abbey," he writes:

> I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition.[13]

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[11] "The odes of John Keats … stand in a class by themselves" (Heath-Stubbs, 93).

[12] *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1983), 261.

[13] *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1800*, ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), 289. The comment appears as a Note to the poem in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

To do this flies in the face of mythological accounts (both long before Wordsworth's time and long after) of the ode's peculiar ability for renascence. Cowley, the author of *Pindarique Odes*, somewhat self-contradictorily declaims: "*Pindar* is imitable by none;/ The *Phœnix Pindar* is a vast *Species alone*."[14] Robert Shafer, writing some 260 years later about the sheer variety found within just Pindar's corpus of odes, says that these differences "are in reality held together by a secret force, an informing spirit," which extends no less hazily into English literary history:

> Ben Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Gray, Collins, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson – all these have united to give the ode, a vague and indeterminate species on a superficial view, a consistency of spirit and a common residuum of inner qualities which fairly entitle it to consideration as a distinct "kind" in our lyric poetry.[15]

More scientifically, Wordsworth's comment offers a profound insight into the structure of the structure – whatever the ode's outward variegation it can be distilled into a formal as well as topical open-endedness. At the same time, this marks the beginning of the end. Wordsworth's "I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode" will metamorphose into Tennyson's "I dare not write an Ode…" – a feint, of course, but one for which we have taken his word, to the detriment of recognizing the ode's continuity where it is most abandoned, i.e., at the great Romantic-Victorian divide.

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[14] "*The Praise of* Pindar," ll. 1-2. Quoted from *Poems: Miscellanies, The Mistress, Pindarique Odes, Davideis, Verses Written on Several Occasions*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: University Press, 1905).

[15] Robert Shafer, *The English Ode to 1660* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1918), 22, 3.

Not coincidentally, Tennyson is again grandfathered into Shafer's list but to purgatorial effect, as some of his keenest formalist critics consign him to that "indeterminate" sprawl, that poetic "residuum" left after the Romantic ode implodes. Though Tennyson's resistance to structural taxonomy is born of his profound engrossment with the irregular ode, both Dwight Culler and Robert Pattison simply label it "amoeban"[16] – and not even in the microbiological sense of a germ splitting, as Tennyson himself will style it about the poiesis of *Maud*, a poem which we will later dare to read as an ode.

Wordsworth is explaining how his poem is essentially an ode without being called one, as if the ode were speaking for itself (without the apologetics or apoplexy of the earlier century), not a notorious and invasive species, but enjoying an easy pervasiveness. His collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge makes this explicit when he says that the *Lyrical Ballads* in their entirety "are to a certain degree *one work*, in *kind tho' not in degree*, as an Ode is one work – & that our different poems are as stanzas."[17] While this is an elegant statement about the ode's speciation ("*one work …* one work"), it also begins to admit its hybridity, deformity, and pluralism.

This dissertation begins where it no longer takes two poets to deliver on this poetic, but one. With Shelley, the ode resumes its monstrous proportions; Tennyson and Pound continue the vast, sprawling, incorrigible, transcontinental project. For none of

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[16] A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 113; Robert Pattison, *Tennyson and Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 58.

[17] *Lyrical Ballads*, 456. Letter to Joseph Cottle, May 28, 1798.

these poets is the ode a silver-bullet singularity (though the ideal is kept in the collective

memory), and it is on this point that Keats and Shelley part ways, so that the ode's history

can meet its long-overdue sequel. Vendler attempts to read "sequence" into Keats' odes

as she theorizes about their proper order by taking into account "structures both

architectonic and miniature … thematic, temporal, spatial, and emotional."[18] Fry rightly

stipulates that there is an upper limit (and an ultimately small one) to these

"architectonics": "I would guess actually that Vendler's order is correct; but it still seems

to me safer and truer to Keats's poetic stance to treat the odes as a group, not a sequence"

(120). Fry writes this in his next book, *A Defense of Poetry*, a sequel of sorts to *The

Poet's Calling*, especially as it defects from Keatsian transcendence, in order to align

with Shelleyan *en-gardism*, defending poetry against historical irrelevance (New-

Historical irrelevance, in Fry's opinion). Shelley's sequences are more readily ascertained

and interpreted than Keats'. The formal differentiation Shelley invests in his odes might

seem to scatter them to the wind, but compared with the unfussy Horatian uniformity of

Keats' Great Odes – which goes toward their "my form, my temple" air of aesthetic

detachment that requires readers to take them singularly, insularly even – there is a

dawning sense in Shelley of trans-poem dynamics, of the idea that a poem must be read

alongside other poems, the result being not a consolidation of meaning, but a differential

that causes suspense. Shelley attempts this with a generic undergirding (and a temporal

strait-jacket): nothing but odes for twelve months. Shelley thus still brings to bear a

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[18] Paul H. Fry, *A Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasion of Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 120.

Romantic intensity on the ode, but it is also matched by an extensiveness that culminates in odic over-extension, i.e., the ultra-Pindaric "Ode to Naples."

My first chapter addresses Shelley's "other odes." His "Ode to the West Wind" is a literary hybrid; when Shelley ultimately designates its generic restlessness an ode, he turns away from the lyrical unity and quiescence of the odes of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Ode critics (such as Fry) and Shelley critics (such as Stuart Curran) alike interpret this formal mélange as a generic chaos which heralds the decline of Shelley's visionary power and of the genre he has made its vehicle. But the West Wind ode is Shelley's *first* attempt at writing a putative ode. In the year that follows he explores both the Horatian and Pindaric forms, gravitating finally toward the ultra-Pindaric "Ode to Naples." That Shelley's other odes have met with poetic and critical oblivion attests to the stronger allure of his predecessors' essentialist aesthetic, which in turn prefigures and informs twentieth-century poetic theories. The odes – all written in response to contemporary upheavals in Europe's political theater – reveal Shelley's astute awareness that a successful revolution (political or poetic) must have a diachronic dimension – a diplomatic relation to past forms (of government and of poetry alike), lest one particular order be confused with the need for order itself. Shelley's hyper-formal ode practice is an attempt to arbitrate such ideologically overburdened forms, and I contend that his hybrid poetic may be understood more precisely as a convergence of forms.

The ode, as Shelley and Keats leave it in 1820, is formally perfect, highly personal, and sublime in tone and content. In my second chapter's discussion of Tennyson's "sublimed" odes, I note that the Victorian's larger poetic is quite different:

his forms are irregular and asymmetric, his perspectives deflect a sense of self, and his imagination is directed earthward. Shelley's odes are written during twelve feverish months; Tennyson's relationship with the ode unfolds throughout an entire career. Long before his monumental Laureate piece, "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," Tennyson demonstrates a preoccupation with the form, followed by a profound antagonism (he ultimately strikes "ode" from the titles of all but three of his poems). I argue that Tennyson's mastery of the ode in fact arises when he deforms, rather than abandons, its protocols. "Mariana" is a third-person ode, reduced to Mariana's bare apostrophe, "Oh God, that I were dead!", while in "The Lotos-Eaters" a choral ode mutates from Spenserian stanzas. Claiming as late as 1861 that an ode must be "a free song," Tennyson produces his own kind of "free verse" – although he continues to worry that his readers might fail to recognize the prosodic intertexts and echoes that shape its proper reception and interpretation.

In my third chapter, I study how Pound's use of the ode challenges the prevailing critical myth of his time (one that he himself helps to create): that the traditional genres were failing poets. Pound eventually contends that poets were failing genre. In *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, the title character is a weak poet whose search for ever subtler expressiveness leaves him in fragments. Pound positions himself not as the writer of this poem, but as the anthologist who must synthesize Mauberley's fragmented works. Pound's figuration of this synthesis as an ode suggests that genre serves to hold Mauberley together rather than hold him back. The success of this poem about poetic failure comes in its organization and higher-level structures, which Pound in his critical

essays calls "major form" and "form-combination." "Major form" – Pound's euphemism for "genre" – is an ideal about the highest level of poetic control, where poet and genre exert upon one another mutually (as symbolized when he weaves his own initials into the "E.P.Ode" of *Mauberley*). I argue that this poetic, of synthesis and synthetics alike, reveals Pound in reaction to the prosodic essentialism of his contemporaries, who were dissolving genre with claims that their poetries were structured by nothing but the purest of correspondences to breath, music, language, or events in the natural world. Pound's later Confucian Odes, in which one culture's folk songs become another's high art, study expressly how nature and artifice become one another, while they also question genre's ability to survive outside of a culture or to persist historically within one.

The Pindaric aesthetic of impassioned and hyperbolic expression in verse meets its match in W. H. Auden, a poet of science, casualness, and calm. In "Ode to Gaea," Auden lays bare Pindaric mechanisms: the jet engines that vault him into the sky render apostrophe obsolete, while the sublime perspective of earth is reduced to "the spell/ of high places." Auden's famous dictum, "poetry makes nothing happen," is a pointed disenchantment for a genre so invested in the idea of occasion. Yet, as I argue in my conclusion, this detached poet ultimately makes the case against a detached poetry by using the ode to stress poetry's submission to history and inter-dependence with culture. Auden uses the ode to consider poems as palimpsests, multilayered records of whatever is impressed upon them. In this scheme, forms become ideologically overburdened, but such overdetermined poetry is better than nothing, as poets become the custodians of meaning in a chaotic world that threatens to erase it and to sterilize the forms that bear it.

Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" treats these themes but guards its form a little too well, as no critic has ever observed that the poem is a nearly perfect Pindaric ode.

My project thus concludes with the ironic image of an over-conspicuous poem that has become all but invisible. Though the ode strains for three centuries to signal its difference, it seems here to succumb to the prevailing aesthetics of formal transparency. However, Auden's vanishing ode is only the latest in a history of repeated extinctions. My study, by giving a historical dimension to the poetic of making it new, demonstrates that the ode's disappearance into this poetic is achieved through form rather than in spite of it.

CHAPTER 1. SHELLEY'S OTHER ODES

1.1 Introduction

The five odes that Shelley wrote between October 1819 and October 1820 have all but scattered in the critical wind. Bearing no formal resemblance to one another, and not quite attaining a topical consensus, the odes exhibit little of the generic gravity that might bid their concurrent study. Fry includes a chapter on Shelley in *The Poet's Calling*, but of this group he considers only the star, "Ode to the West Wind," to the exclusion of the other four odes so-called. Instead, to his new designation of "ode of presentation," Fry subjoins to the West Wind ode the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc."[19] In yoking the later ode to these earlier poems, Fry adds to that poetic pile known as "the greater Romantic lyric," a concept begun fifteen years earlier by M. H. Abrams. In a famous essay, Abrams understands the greater Romantic lyric as the successor to the "greater ode" of the neoclassical Augustans.[20] The parallelism of Abrams' phrase announces the main difference between long lyric poems written around 1750 and long lyric poems written around 1800: that the moral, theological, or philosophical weight of the poem derives from its lyric center, rather than from odic authority and "Pindaric artifice" (543). While intended mainly as a periodizing wedge to

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[19] *Poet's Calling*.

[20] "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

characterize "Romanticism" as a fundamental shift from pre-Romantic sensibility, Abrams' concept has also had a simplifying effect on the classification of the poetries born of Romantic experimentation. Abrams himself starts the trend when he intimates that even a blank-verse epic such as Wordsworth's *Prelude* can be considered a greater Romantic lyric (533). This re-classification comes from Abrams' belief that what drives the "ordonnance" of Romantic poems – be they long or very long – is a "structural subordination" of the description to the describing mind (552).[21]

What Abrams begins, Fry makes explicit and refines. Fry commences his chapters on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats with a discussion about the radical amendment of genres effected by the Romantics. Fry notes "an implicit belief at the root of every generic theory until 1800 that poetic space is what we largely perceive and moderately re-create according to received models given either by nature or by nature's best metonym, Homer." Fry then explains that, in contrast,

> [a] Wordsworthian poetics leads to the new conclusion that poetic space is what we half perceive and half create on the basis of an ad hoc symbiosis of mind with nature. Thus the cosmic syntax or taxonomy formerly given ready-formed to the creative faculties of the poet becomes in Wordsworth a unitary principle that appears in changing ways, according to the pressure of the moment, at the joining

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[21] Abrams' observations don't provide much direction in getting at these structures, nor in comprehending Romantic formal debts and inheritances. This kind of focus Abrams gives only to Coleridge, whom he credits with originating the greater Romantic lyric, after internalizing then expelling the "slender talent" of his predecessor William Lisle Bowles. Ultimately Abrams' essay – though it in title undertakes an explanation of "The Structure and Style" of his new category – treats matters more biographical than formal.

place of mind and nature. This powerful reduction to "the one Life within us and abroad" (Coleridge) undermines all gross classification even as it promotes the unique selfhood or substance of "the meanest flower that blows" within the imagined unity of things.[22]

Where Abrams loosely identifies a phenomenon of generic decline, Fry discerns an overt agenda of generic attenuation. Moreover, Fry reinstates the ode, with its inherent "skepticism about the contentments of form," as essential to this agenda: "This antigeneric faith … is none other than the faith that typifies the genre called the ode. Were it not antinomian, defiant of determinacy by externally given origins, this faith would attach itself to the office of prayer" (135). Though Fry's prefatory remarks revolve mainly around Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is especially in this last excerpt that Fry seems to have Shelley in mind. That "office of prayer" is precisely the one with which Shelley strives in the West Wind ode. Moreover, Fry's conclusion to his Shelley chapter designates the poet as "[t]he most *antinomian* of all odists" (217, my emphasis). Yet in Fry's discussion of Shelley, "genre" is scarcely an operator, and the notion of "antigeneric faith" remains isolated a hundred pages back, unable to discharge its critical potential. Instead, the burden of the argument is how Shelley performs in Coleridge's shadow, and how this context teases out the implicit politics of the West Wind ode.

In being antinomian – i.e., rejecting established morality, as well as opposing poets who returned to that morality after they had retracted their revolutionism – Shelley used *established* forms and genres, thereby becoming himself a poetic antinomy, a

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[22] *Poet's Calling*, 134.

"generic anti-faith" of sorts. Put simply, Shelley's revolts, even his poetic ones, are returns to form. Fry is not completely silent on this phenomenon. In the West Wind ode alone, he observes elements of ballad, pastoral, sonnet, epic, and hymn, and suggests that Shelley performs with his ode an "eclipse of the greater genres" after "mourning for the lesser ones" (205). The problem, as this dissertation chapter begins to frame it, is that Fry reads this formal mélange as a generic chaos, which is read in turn as Shelley's death knell for his own visionary power. When combined with the similar bowings-out of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley's ode was a sure signal that the end of the ode as a genre was at hand in the early nineteenth century. According to Fry, the West Wind ode is "a becalmed westering" (204), "more like a hymn than the 'Hymn' was" (208), a "last gasp" (216), a concession of vision on the order of Wordsworth's (216) – all this, when, in fact, the West Wind ode is not the last but the first of Shelley's several attempts at the ode so-called.

Concluding with (or at least thetically anticipating) the West Wind ode is a common critical maneuver, even in those rare studies that do acknowledge the existence of Shelley's other odes. The first twentieth-century instance of this is in Volume II of Newman Ivey White's magisterial 1940 biography, *Shelley*. After treating the "Ode to Liberty" as a reversion from "Shelley's philosophic and aesthetic growth of eight years,"[23] White – in a work that is thoroughly chronological in its organization – volte-faces for a page, in order to locate "a reaffirmation of faith" (193) in the West Wind ode,

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[23] *Shelley* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1940), 192.

even though it was composed earlier.[24] In the "Purgatorial and Prophetic Odes" chapter of *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis* (1975), Stuart Curran understands the later "Ode to Liberty" and "Ode to Naples" primarily as reiterations of the West Wind ode.[25] In "The Hymn and Ode" chapter of *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), Curran revisits the three odes, noting "[t]he complexity of the accrued paradoxes" of the Liberty and Naples odes, then explaining that it is the West Wind ode that synthesizes, apparently *avant la lettre*, such "multiplied dialectical force."[26]

To be fair, White's broader point is "the intense strength and unity of Shelley's poetry and prose of 1819 and 1820" (193). Curran's thrust is similar, for his chapter is about the odes in the overall context of Shelley's *annus mirabilis* ("early autumn of 1818 to the beginning of 1820" (xiii)). Curran sees the odes as stepping stones to higher things – "the maturing of an epic vision," to quote his earlier book's subtitle – and so their precise compositional chronology is irrelevant, once they are understood as part of the general synergy of the period. Shelley's ode production, however, only roughly corresponds to these eighteen or so months; the composition of the Naples ode (August – October 1820) is a troublesome postscript. Moreover, for either scholar to extol the unity of poetry *and* prose, albeit in order to recognize the interconnected sense of purpose in Shelley, might be to miss his bristling poetics – a more engaging platform, I believe, of

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[24] As the "1819" page-heading reminds us, in a chapter otherwise full of "1820" page-headings.

[25] *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), 172.

[26] *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 81.

his maturation. Thematic affinity among Shelley's works, after all, is run of the mill –

readily distilled into statements about humanist prevailings against oppression, or the

efficacy (or futility) of imagination and language amid systems of conflict. Equally

predictable, as F. R. Leavis ungenerously pointed out half a century ago, are Shelley's

imagery and diction: a "hypnotic rote of favourite images, associations and words."[27]

If Shelley's themes and images are predictable to us, it is because his was a

profoundly typological understanding. In Shelley's conception of history, a truth of

Platonic constancy refashions itself politically and poetically throughout time. Yet

Shelley's belief in the ideal is only half of his much-studied, much-criticized Platonism.

The other half is the dance of forms around that ideal – the material manifestations that in

their changefulness tested the ideal, and that in their restless return held onto it. Four of

Shelley's odes were published with *Prometheus Unbound*, at the conclusion of which

Shelley issues what has been misunderstood as one of his most laughably Platonic,

naïvely earnest assertions: "to hope till Hope creates/ From its own wreck the thing it

contemplates" (IV.573-574).[28] In the odes that follow close upon these lines in the

published volume, such reiterated hope is seemingly exemplified, as the poems are

increasingly emphatic in their yen for liberal revolution: "Ode to Heaven" and "Ode to

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[27] "Shelley," in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 275.

[28] *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Shelley's poetry and prose are taken from this edition, hereafter cited as *SPP*.

the West Wind" give way to "An Ode, written, October, 1819, before the Spaniards had

recovered their Liberty" and "Ode to Liberty." While critics note the reiterative effect of

the ode sequence,[29] they do not detect the tension that results when this same message

gets recast in extremely diverse forms, for Shelley puts some rather strenuous prosodic

distance between the literary hybrid "Ode to the West Wind," the Horatian "Ode to

Liberty," and the ultra-Pindaric "Ode to Naples." This formal incongruity of the odes has

tended to discourage critics from formal assessment other than at the level of individual

ode.[30] This seems a shortcoming, especially once we take into account the compositional

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[29] See Chapter 4 ("Revolution and Prophecy: The Political Odes") of Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), and Chapter 5 ("Purgatorial and Prophetic Odes") of Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*.

[30] Francois Jost ("Anatomy of an Ode: Shelley and the Sonnet Tradition," *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 3 [Summer 1982]: 223–246) argues for the inclusion of the West Wind ode in dueling sonnet traditions, as Shelley reconciles his Petrarchan and Shakespearean patrimonies: "Each of the five parts … follows both Italian and English sonnet rules at the same time" (230). This mid-level structural approach is useful as it demonstrates Shelley's ability to effect a convergence of still other formal precedents: "Terza rima begat sonnets and sonnets begat an ode" (245). However, Jost's approach leaves aside the question of the poem's top-level generic designation, as he calls it at best a "truncated Pindaric" (226). Nancy Goslee ("Pursuing Revision in Shelley's 'Ode to Liberty,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 36, no. 2 [July 1, 1994]: 166–183) understands the "Ode to Liberty" as a reconception of the Liberty odes of Thomson and Collins. She traces the textual history of Shelley's ode from draft to publication, arguing that the "heavily emended" and incessantly rearranged stanzas figure into "his sense of the poem's shape and direction" (168). In two articles on the "Ode to Naples," Michael Erkelenz ("Unacknowledged Legislation: The Genre and Function of Shelley's 'Ode to Naples,'" in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, eds. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996]; "Shelley's First 'Pythian,'" *Modern Philology* 97, no. 3 [February 2000]: 393–416) discusses the Pindaric inheritance of the form ("public, politically topical, and encomiastic" [2000: 408]), which he characterizes as pure – i.e., "unmediated" by Horace or by Shelley's eighteenth-century odic forebears. While the ode's formal precedents and its

circumstances. The compressed chronology of the odes (October 1819 – October 1820), along with the fact that no poem written before or after this period receives the "ode" classification from Shelley, invites a certain kind of critical understanding about the poet's sense of his own development within this genre. Shelley's strategy in such a generic approach is to make even subtle changes into powerful ones; the rules are well-known, but contingent, and so imminently breakable. What results then from a formal reading of the ode sequence is not simply a sense of hope's resurgence, but of hope's (or any idea's) insurgence against its own material manifestation. Such a reading begins to touch on the darker implications of that *Prometheus Unbound* excerpt, with its notion of Shelleyan "wreckage" – the destructive, catastrophic aspect in Shelley's poetics and his politics alike.

Shelley himself names his project, in the last line of the Liberty ode, the "tempestuous play." This is a nod to the dramatic undercurrents tugging at the structure of most of the odes,[31] as well as a full-on acknowledgment of the odes' many staged

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position within literary histories microscopically Shelleyan and macroscopically British/Western figure largely into each of these accounts, each critic understands his or her respective ode as an ultimately singular production.

[31] Irene Chayes considers the Romantic ode as essentially dramatic: "a pattern of dramatic Plot may develop within a lyric frame, with the speaker playing the role of a protagonist whose 'actions' are contained in his words and who is brought to a Reversal or Discovery by what he himself says" (68). Chayes' interest is in this peripeteic "inner structure" (67) of odes across the Romantic spectrum; her "primary concern is with the common form of the ode rather than with the individual poems" (68). Her notion of the "lyric frame" would be particularly apt for describing Shelley's odic project (as we will see), but her phrase refers instead to the "rhetorical amplification" (67) by the Romantic subject as he dramatizes the action of his mental processes. In fact, it is in her discussion of Shelley and the West Wind ode that

destructions. To Shelley, in the script for political and social renewal, denouement – a resolution that is simultaneously an "undoing" – is inevitable for any power system (philosophical or political, poetic or linguistic). Therefore, surrender and succumbing pervade the odes thematically (a lyric speaker is repeatedly put to death, civilizations collapse); the formal integrity of the poems is often fractured; and there is even a paradoxical skepticism about linguistic value itself.

Shelleyan wreckage is absolute in its application – applicable even to the sources and structures of signification itself (i.e., authorial centers). This explains why his odes so consistently take to task the poetry of his forebears and, more difficultly, themselves. As Chernaik and Goslee each observe, Shelley's odes are out to dismantle the formal hegemony of the self-satisfied, nationalistic progress poetry from the century before (that of Thomson, Collins, and Gray), by weakening its ideological, monovalent grip on content.[32] In a precise reversal of their consummate function, Shelley's odes refuse to celebrate Britain, just as they refuse pure celebration of any type of nationalism. While Wordsworth and Coleridge demonstrate a comparable reaction, in that they too detach

Chayes' notion of the "lyric frame" drops exactly away: "The whole poem is a single, sustained apostrophe, which begins abruptly, without preamble or descriptive frame" (72) ("Rhetoric as Drama: An Approach to the Romantic Ode," *PMLA* 79, no. 1 [March 1964]: 67–79).

[32] Chernaik says that Shelley's odes are "revolutionary," while those of Thomson and Collins are "patriotic" (*The Lyrics of Shelley*, 98). About the Liberty ode, Goslee similarly notes that Shelley "finds hope … in the abolition, not the praise, of present rulers." She also argues that Shelley, by figuring the erraticism of his own compositional process into his ode, "questions the appeal to a classical order and to 'progress'" ("Pursuing Revision," 171). I will be reading a similar figuration into Shelley's entire ode sequence.

from nationalism (in this case, their own) through their ode composition, Shelley

recognizes still a different kind of hegemony in the individualistic stances of his

immediate Romantic predecessors. Though Wordsworth and Coleridge, after

experiencing their political upsets, take refuge in the introspective lyric voice, they still

insist on an aggrandizing subordination of the greater genres (ode, epic) to this voice.[33]

The problem with such a subjective, subjecting "ordonnance" is that, even as it occupies

the hollowed-out genres of nation-building, it contains no directive for social or political

renewal, and in abandoning all collective hope for merely personal redemption, it

deauthorizes any attempts at such renewal.

The earlier Romantics lyricize the Pindaric form by frustrating the synthesis of its

dialectic progress. This frustration is signaled formally by a refusal to compose in "true

Pindaric" or by use of an inverted Pindaric syntax. Because the stasis of the epode (the

"stand") is a figurative death, which the earlier Romantics must veil, they move the epode

earlier into their works, often inserting it between strophe and antistrophe. The effect is a

depiction of the mind that persists and prevails in its duality. Shelley, in a contrast only

apparently regressive, unifies the individual mind against its own subversions, so that it

can instead be pitted against other forces (politics, history, mythology, time), and then –

more importantly – succumb to them. Shelley must maneuver away from the

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[33] Joseph Sitterson, building on observations about eighteenth-century odes and modes by Norman Maclean and Ralph Cohen, remarks that the irregular ode represented to the Romantics "a kind of highly compressed epic," primarily for its inclusion of "all lower genres" (*Romantic Poems, Poets, and Narrators* [Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000], 92).

idiosyncratic pull of the Romantic ode, in order to reclaim and redirect the dialectic

aspect of the Pindaric form: strophe – antistrophe – catastrophe.

Unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, who entrust to others a conversion of their

poetries into political, ethical, or moral autonomy,[34] Shelley's scheme for his own poetry

is, of course, more legislative. Preferring to deal in peoples rather than in persons, Shelley

through his odes wrenches away from the "lyric" of the greater Romantic lyric. Yet, as

we shall see, the lyric voice is an allegiance that runs deeper for Shelley than that to God

or country, and so it proves a difficult knot to untie. Shelley never simply omits the lyric

speaker, but undoes him; never eliminates him from the poem, but makes him liminal to

it. Why Shelley cannot quite shake loose from the lyric voice has much to do with his

esteem for the figure of the visionary: a receiver and disseminator of revelation, whose

individuality parallels the solitariness of the lyric speaker, yet whose authority and public

conscience distinguish him from the same. That well-known legislator with whom

Shelley concludes *A Defence of Poetry* is perhaps more completely understood as a

visionary rather than merely a poet, for he has "the power of communicating *and*

receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature" (*SPP*, 535,

my emphasis).

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[34] Fred Randel discusses Coleridge's and Shelley's differing approaches to "the pragmatic potential of poetry." While Coleridge, in *A Statesman's Manual*, espoused "reading texts for the 'spiritual truth,' 'general principles,' or usable ideas," Shelley aspired "to make his imaginative visions of a potential future seem unthreatening, familiar, and even attractive to a learned reading public" ("Shelley's Revision of Coleridgean Traditionalism in 'Lines Written among the Euganean Hills,'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 52 [January 1, 2003]: 54, 55).

The "power of … receiving" is a complicated notion, as Shelley seems to be displacing the communicative authority he has just claimed onto external, more supreme sources. Similar negations and perplexities abound in the last paragraph of the *Defence*, and as Shelley struggles to characterize the visionary and the complex nature of his power, it becomes clear that he is demonstrating the problematic politics of the body politic – i.e., the thorny notion of sovereignty, without which Burke saw anarchy, and by way of which Paine saw tyranny. Shelley explains that the visionary is "compelled to serve … the Power which is seated upon the throne of [his] own soul" (535). Shelley's choice of metaphor here is intriguing, in that he endorses the figure of the visionary by using the language of monarchy. Because revulsion at the idea of monarchy is pervasive elsewhere in Shelley's work, his attraction to it here during the finale of his *Defence* deserves study. When it came to political reality, Shelley was in fact a supporter of constitutional monarchy, the establishment or endangering of which is consistently the historical occasion of his odes. Those very odes, however, will gainsay monarchy, as when in the Liberty ode Shelley says, "O, that the free would stamp the impious name/ Of KING into the dust!" (ll. 211-212).

This kind of annulment, so close on the heels of the coronation, is a species of Shelleyan wreckage, an undoing of what has just been done. It marks a development from Shelley's earlier, unequivocal stance against monarchy, such as that found in "Ozymandias." In that poem, the overthrow of the "King of Kings" is conveyed in no uncertain terms: atemporal ruins, surrounded by desert, reported through legend. In contrast, Shelley in the odes is careful first to enthrone the power that is to be

overthrown, and so to enact a process of ruination, rather than simply celebrate the ruins.

The idea of process correlates with Shelley's pragmatic, gradualist political philosophy,

while the recurring images of ruins and ruination, when in a general context of

revolution, possess dual significance as either fate or starting point. The odes reveal

Shelley's astute awareness that a successful revolution must have a diachronic dimension

– a diplomatic relation to past forms (of government and of poetry alike), lest one

particular order be confused with the need for order itself. As with revolution, so with

revelation: Shelley's visionary is not a prophet; he does not see the future.[35] Shelley's

eye is on poetic and political pasts, and seeing them again manifest in the present, or as

one critic has called it, "prophecy in reverse."[36] More exactly, Shelley fathoms that his

own present will be the past to a future age, as he says in the *Defence* that poets are "the

mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present" (*SPP,* 535). In this

light, Shelley's role as a visionary must be understood through his tendencies to be

revisionary. This chapter will address this theme in its several manifestations, primarily

in the fact that the direction of Shelley's poetic growth lies not from but toward the

ancient ode forms. Keenly aware of the intersections of poetics and ideology, Shelley was

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[35] In Note 7 to his lyrical drama *Hellas*, Shelley demystifies prophecy somewhat: "The final chorus is indistinct and obscure as the event of the living drama whose arrival it foretells. Prophecies of wars, and rumours of wars &c. may safely be made by poet or prophet in any age, but to anticipate, however darkly, a period of regeneration and happiness is a more hazardous exercise of the faculty which bards possess or feign" (*SPP,* 463).

[36] Andrew Franta, "Shelley and the Poetics of Political Indirection," *Poetics Today* 22, no. 4 (2001): 774.

unafraid to revisit the behemoth models of classical antiquity, confident in the shadows he could cast onto the forms.

1.2 Odes Unbound, Rebound

Shelley's first four odes were written in the shadow of *Prometheus Unbound* and published with it. To understand Shelley's odic arc, the odes must considered in relation to this "Lyrical Drama." In her examination of Romanticism's general project of putting lyric in its (or any) place, Tilottama Rajan observes that the lyric "is increasingly absorbed into larger structures which place it within a world of differences."[37] She then identifies in *Prometheus Unbound* the culmination of this poetic:

> As visionary lyric, Shelley's text assumes that the world is an extension of the Promethean *cogito*, and can therefore be imaginatively modified by the mind. But as drama it concedes the material objectivity of space and time and does not allow the visionary poem to be a shut imaginary structure insulated from being-in-the-world. (202)

While this passage equips us with a powerful critical expectation (which might see us through not just Shelley's odic career, but Tennyson's and Pound's), it perhaps overstates the extent to which *Prometheus Unbound* actually delivers on it. Shelley proclaims proudly in the drama's Preface that he averts reconciliation between Prometheus and Jupiter, but by the same token he averts conflict between them too. The drama observes

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[37] "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hošek and Patricia A. Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 195.

its unities of time and place so well that the action is never observed; all overthrows are

reported by immortals or their shades, issued with a sterile dreaminess. Thus the drama

does not concede "the material objectivity of space and time," but instead remains "a shut

imaginary structure." Perhaps this is Shelley's point, his stated intention for this drama

being the conveyance of "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" (*SPP,* 208), which

clearly align with what Rajan calls the "ideality of lyric" (202).

Rajan does allow that some voices "seem to exist in a world of noumenal identity

behind the world of the text and therefore in a realm where language has not yet

discovered itself as difference" (203), but this effect she confines to lyrics within and

throughout the drama, rather than through a lyricality at large.[38] There is of course plenty

of poetic "difference" in *Prometheus Unbound*, as Shelley cycles through dream vision,

paean, epithalamium, love-song, prophecy. Later, in the *Defence*, Shelley overtly

formulates this poetic:

> The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression
> of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connexion of
> poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other
> form. (*SPP,* 521)

But for all its hybridity, *Prometheus Unbound* misses its "connexion," as the differing

lyrics are united chorically in purpose, their pluralism sacrificed to a greater work about

moral and spiritual largesse. With a vantage onto all of human history, *Prometheus*

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[38] Her interest is in "which *parts* of *Prometheus Unbound* can technically be classified as lyric" (203, my
emphasis).

Unbound is a myth for after the end of time, and all its lyrics comprise a hymn book for such time: "These are the spells by which to reassume/ An empire o'er the disentangled Doom" (IV.568-569).

As the reference to "spells" suggests, lyric should stand materially for utterance; it should not operate as "idealism" or "ideality" but rather remain consecrate to its realization in voice. But in Shelley's drama, the spells give way to a spelling-out:

>   a voice
> Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless
> (II.iv.115-116)

Prometheus commences the drama not in chant but in recant:

>   The Curse
> Once breathed on thee I would recall.
> …………………………………..
> What was that curse? For ye all heard me speak.
> (I.58-59,73)

The curse gives way to discursiveness, as reports of the curse are given more space than the curse itself. Similarly throughout the drama, lyric vocalization is undercut by dialogic deferral:

>   some God
> Whose throne was in a Comet, past, and cried –
> "Be not!" – and like my words they were no more.
> (IV.316-318)

Panthea's monologue does indeed stop here, upon "no more," and the actualization of silence would seem to be at least an inversely lyrical achievement, as Shelley delivers on the "imageless" truth. The problem, though, is that Earth takes Panthea up on her silence:

> The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness,
> The boundless, overflowing bursting gladness,
> The vaporous exultation, not to be confined!
>   Ha! ha! the animation of delight!
>   Which wraps me, like an atmosphere of light,
> And bears me as a cloud is borne by its own wind!
> (IV.319-324)

Drama to Shelley was essentially dialogic, and it is just this dialogic hand-off that undercuts the potency of assertions like those by Panthea or Earth. Shelley's goal is to convert their claims into exclamation, and to do so on lyric rather than dramatic authority.

Thus, the story of Shelley's odes is their unbinding from the dramatic slime in which they quickened. Earth's words will be reconfigured in the West Wind ode; Panthea's reified silence will be more credibly executed in the Liberty ode, which concludes the *Prometheus Unbound* volume, and in which the easy idealism of the volume's eponymous drama finds its lyric counterweight. The Liberty ode is irresolute and uses its homogeneous form to ironize that irresolution, but as it finds its place in the ode sequence at large, Shelley reclaims the potential of formal hybridity that had been lost to his drama. The odes work together by standing apart, as Shelley plays the discrete lyrical circumscription of a single poem against its sequence.

As if to reattempt "connexion" with the real, "social" world, Shelley writes *Hellas*, another "Lyrical Drama," which is remarkable for being composed, revised, and published in real-time with respect to the current events occasioning it.[39] Because it was

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[39] Reiman and Fraistat's headnote to the poem describes in detail what Shelley called the "newspaper erudition" of his drama – i.e., the ongoing process by which he incorporated the latest accounts of Greece's struggle for independence from Turkey (*SPP*, 427–428).

being "written at the suggestion of the events of the moment," Shelley intriguingly claims

that "[t]he subject in its present state, is insusceptible of being treated otherwise than

lyrically" (*SPP,* 430). Shelley takes up *Hellas* after his ode sequence; we see by this time

his rededication to lyric – a rebinding to the very different sense of lyricality in that later

Lyrical Drama – for even as that mode acquiesces to being bound in and by the present, it

may by the same token boast of having an ear to the ground of the real world.

Shelley's ode sequence authorizes this lyrical reinvention, especially in the ode's

generic commitment to occasion. Occasion is an idea pertinent both to odes and to the

political imagination that Shelley matured in their writing. Occasion, in its broadest

sense, is the event to which a poem is attached – the event that inspires the poet and

causes him to write. In the West Wind ode, the autumn storm is the occasion that

motivates Shelley to write (it occasions the putting-of-pen-to-paper), but Shelley

questions any profounder continuity: does it also cause his poetry? Does it impart (not

simply metaphorically suggest) a kind of causative efficacy? In his next ode, the Spanish

ode, Shelley picks up on this idea of efficacy and reverses the direction of causation. He

positions poet and poem before the event, and so implies that he causes the occasion. In

the Liberty ode, Shelley's concern broadens, as he investigates the poetic and historical

dimensions of occasion. Especially as Shelley witnesses the reversals of the European

theater – liberal revolutions that must restart against the Conservative Order, or that

devolve into civil war – during his ode year, in which many events seem to be causes

without lasting or desired effects, he wonders whether the ode's circumscription of an

occasion is a kind of historical misreading. In the Naples ode, his fifth and final one,

Shelley, by not committing to one occasion, nor to one city, nor to one poetic mode, nor

even to one poem, uses the material excess of the ode (its hyperstrophic format) to

accommodate multiple readings, even as it culminates in its own silencing.

1.3 "Ode to the West Wind"

Shelley's most famous poem is a literary hybrid: terza rima stanzas build into

sonnets, which allude variously to conventions of ballad, pastoral, prayer, hymn, elegy,

and epic. When Shelley finally designates this generic restlessness an ode, it is a directive

to read its energy over and against the quiescent lyrical sprawl of the latest odes in

collective memory, those of Wordsworth and especially Coleridge. Though itself long

hailed among Shelley's most lyrical creations, the West Wind ode is better understood as

a critical assessment of lyricism – the kind that Wordsworth and Coleridge, having been

handed *tabulae rasae* via British empiricism, were cultivating. In a philosophical as well

as formal conversion, the first-generation Romantics were stripping the ode of its *I-Thou*

dynamic and refitting it with an *I-I* one. Shelley's tack in the West Wind ode is to

reinstate the *I-Thou* structure (or "thou-me," as it were).

The West Wind ode is an impersonal poem, despite the demanding speaker of its

conclusion. Though those loud first-person exclamations in the fourth and fifth stanzas

have a lyrical contour, Shelley's poem just doesn't commit lyrically – especially when

compared to the intimacy and detail of Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode and Coleridge's

"Dejection: An Ode." Moreover, the flurry of genres it either alludes to or performs as

makes it difficult to pinpoint its emotional register. Even when the poem self-identifies as

a "prayer," something seems amiss in how Shelley understands this genre to function: i.e., as a platform for "strife" or "striving." As a nature poem, the West Wind ode is equally difficult: its speaker confronts nature rather than finds correlation to it, and this has consequences for notions of lyric subjectivity. This is especially apparent in how Shelley, as compared to his predecessors, envisions the entity of the wind. The wind for Wordsworth is self-confirmation, whether the "correspondent breeze" of *The Prelude* or the echoing wind of the Intimations ode (ll. 27-28). To Coleridge in "Dejection," the wind, even in its duality (strophe VII), suits the torn poet, cueing the direction of his meditation as well as the structure of his poem. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, the wind (nature at large) is source and symbol of temporal, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, autobiographical, and poetic *continuity*. Wordsworth, quoting himself, prefaces his ode: "I could wish my days to be/ Bound each to each by natural piety."

Shelley takes up skeptically this idea of continuity (especially for its provenance in nature),[40] but less attention has been paid to how he performs his poetics of

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[40] This reverses Bloom on the matter, as he says Shelley's "magical aim" is to seek relationship with rather than experience of things in the world, and that the poem's great power derives from Shelley's refusal to concede the inanimacy of objects: "how remarkably primitive … a mythmaking poem it is" (*Shelley's Mythmaking* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969], 72). Bloom, citing "that inanimate cold world" from the "Dejection" ode, sees this as an especially Coleridgean concession. This complicates somewhat the point I have just made about Coleridge and natural continuity, especially given his more explicit statement against such later in his poem: "I may not hope from outward forms to win/ The passion and the life, whose fountains are within" (ll. 45-46). Ultimately, however, Coleridge uses natural objects (inanimate or no) to affirm the role sensation plays in his poetic life, while Shelley keys up natural objects into the sensationalism of the odic objective. The difference will be fully cultivated by the time of "Ode to Naples," in which Shelley converts the Romantic "living soul" into a "listening soul."

discontinuity. Though Shelley's speaker declares that he is "too like" the West Wind, the presiding irony of the poem is that the West Wind is itself no single thing. This chameleon entity is "Wild" and "everywhere," an "unseen presence" whose physical characteristics are conveyable only through its effect on the other natural objects – the leaves, clouds, and waves – that all move in response to the wind's energy. Beyond this actual, kinetic energy, the speaker observes a metaphorical energy with which the natural world seems to organize and reiterate itself. The clouds are "like" the leaves in their motions, the water can take on the form of land, and even "the sapless foliage of the ocean" behaves like the foliage on the land. About this last example, Shelley remarks in a note: "The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of the seasons" (*SPP*, 300n.).

By this scientific verification, Shelley is distinguishing between objectively observable, naturally occurring metaphor and a poet's metaphorizing – a different type of phenomenon that, when it does occur in this ode, is dead on arrival:

> If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
> If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
> A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
>
> The impulse of thy strength, only less free
> Than thou, O Uncontroulable!
> (ll. 43-47)

The conditional phrasing doesn't immediately predicate, and thus absorption into the natural order will not happen for this speaker, neither by a stretch of boyhood imagination (ll. 47-51) nor by a leap of faith (ll. 51-52).

The speaker's conjuring-by-metaphor isn't working, but he tries again anyway in the climactic imperative of the final stanza: "Be thou me" (l. 62). This is metaphor at its imperative barest: copula, vehicle, tenor. Shelley here exposes the gears of the willful lyrical machine. External becomes internal, in that what begins as an appreciation of divine/mythic power is diverted into an assertion of self. Accordingly in this final stanza the metaphorical contract between speaker and nature is turned on its head. The wind is the tenor, the speaking subject is now the vehicle, who bequeaths his human attributes to the wind. A shift in the imperative voice[41] marks the change in the power structure, as the wind is described in tropes of human expression and artifice: verbal, vocal, textual, tonal.

"Be thou me" is Shelley's rejoinder to – by being an extreme, essential form of – that type of Romantic statement, which is exemplified by Coleridge's "in our life alone does Nature live" (l. 48), and in Wordsworth's "obstinate questionings/ Of sense and outward things" (ll. 141-142). Both statements from the earlier odes are informed by British empiricism and respond in different ways to John Locke's categories of sensation and reflection. These categories are dominant organizational notions in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Sensation is primary: an experiential basis for later reflection and the formation of ideas. In *The Preface*, Wordsworth articulates the categories as emotion and recollection, while for both poets, particularly in their odes, the categories manifest through a pervasive feeling–seeing binary, as when Coleridge, looking upon the stars, says "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" Though Coleridge

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[41] The whole poem is imperative, but the first three stanzas draw out and dissipate the sense, so that "O hear!" seems just an interjection.

judges his two faculties permanently divorced, Wordsworth is less accepting of the loss

of the "visionary gleam" – implying, by so naming it, that it can be recovered through

intellectual sight rather than the animal sense from which Coleridge is so estranged. The

word "Recollections" in the ode's subtitle (added after Wordsworth read Coleridge's ode)

similarly insists that memory is more than reflection and is a means of recuperation. The

same goes for strophes 8 and 9 (also added as response to Coleridge), in which sight is

heavily thematized as the intellect's way to salvation.

While Wordsworth implies that life isn't real until it's "realised" (l. 145),

Coleridge maintains that life loses reality through a paralyzing reflection:

> For not to think of what I needs must feel,
>   But to be still and patient, all I can;
> And haply by abstruse research to steal
>   From my own nature all the natural Man –
>   This was my sole resource, my only plan:
> Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
> And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul.
> (ll. 87-93)[42]

Either way, Shelley isn't interested in the experiential trap. The lyric suicide that Shelley

imagines in "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" (l.54) is a way out. "I fall" is a

contraction of Wordsworth's "I feel—I feel it all"; it elides what is in essence a rhetorical

prolongation, a stay of execution against the sentence of mortality. Shelley's exclamation,

in questioning Wordsworth's resolution (reflection-as-sensation) and Coleridge's

dissolution (reflection about sensation), initiates a poetry of negation: it redefines crisis,

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[42] *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2004). Hereafter cited as *CPP*.

not as a synthesis born of turning back, but as a departure that welcomes the discontinuity of turning forward and outward.

Accordingly, Shelley's final stanza takes up prophecy as its subject. More specifically, it demonstrates the distance between lyric and prophetic modes, as symbolized respectively in the lyre and the trumpet. These are the same instrument-symbols with which Shelley frames his *Defence* (the lyre in the second paragraph, the trumpet in the final paragraph), and though the consistent ordering suggests a preference of one mode over the other (or growth from one to the other), there also seems to be a reciprocity between modes: "Make me thy lyre … Be through my lips … the trumpet." Shelley's hunch here about lyric-prophetic interdependency won't be fully developed until his final "Ode to Naples." But by binding the language of commandment to images of suspended agency, Shelley succeeds for now in blurring the line between lyric rendering and prophetic surrendering, thus underscoring the dual nature of that "power of communicating and receiving."

This blurred line is central to Bloom's reading of the West Wind ode, in which he quotes Martin Buber about the difference between Greek prophecy and Hebrew prophecy:

> The oracle gives answers to a situation which is brought before it as a question by emissaries who ask for information; the *nabi*, sent by God, speaks unasked into the biographical or historical situation. The answer of the oracle is a prediction of an unalterable future; the warning of the *nabi* implies the indeterminism and determining power of the hour.[43]

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[43] Buber, as quoted by Bloom, in *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 66.

Bloom relates this to Shelley's own qualification in the *Defence*: "Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events."[44] As his phrase "the form … of events" suggests, Shelley's indefinite poetic mode carries with it anxieties about form. These are borne out by the West Wind ode's formal indecidability – its "indeterminacy" as Buber's translator perhaps meant to say. Though, because Shelley's formal indeterminacy here will be framed within a larger generic decisiveness, "indeterminism" – i.e., a determination to be indeterminate – is quite right. The West Wind ode may be the *ne plus ultra* of lyrics, as Fry et al. have maintained, but Shelley is not done with the ode.

With the concluding invocation of larger-level seasonal rhythms (in which the West Wind's "tumult" will coordinate into "mighty harmonies"), does the virtuosic romp through the lyrical forms stay within its lyrical season (ultimately identifying as a sonnet), or does it give way to a different organization (perhaps a five-part drama or "tempestuous play")? With respect to historical outcomes, do poems render anything, or can they only ever surrender? Shelley, for now, is not willing to forecast. We know this from the familiar concluding question of this poem, which used not to be a question at all. In a draft, Shelley asserts, "o Wind/ When Winter comes Spring lags not far behind."[45] His revision cultivates a suspense and as well an interrogative openness that become the defining features for all the odes to come.

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[44] *SPP*, 513.

[45] *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts: A Facsimile Edition, with Full Transcriptions and Scholarly Apparatus*, ed. Carlene A. Adamson (New York: Garland, 1997), V: 286–287 [adds. e. 6, p. 137 rev].

1.4 "An Ode, Written October 1819, Before the Spaniards Had Recovered Their Liberty"

What makes this second ode of Shelley's "an ode" is not immediately apparent. It seems to be more of a battle hymn, though even this designation suggests an involvement with a divine being, which the poem simply does not have. Instead, the poem addresses mortals (the opening image is of bloodshed), and it does so with exhortative refrains and in a mostly straightforward vernacular (another count against its status as ode). White describes the poem as one of the "vigorous and simple" compositions of the autumn of 1819, written "for the direct inspiration of the common people in the revolution that [Shelley] thought was approaching."[46] This remark would almost suffice for an otherwise unremarkable poem, were it not for its peculiar subtitle and concluding couplet.

The "recovered liberty" of the subtitle refers to the revolt against the Spanish king Ferdinand VII, begun on January 1, 1820, and to Ferdinand's consequent acceptance of the constitutional monarchy that Spain had lost eight years earlier. On one level, the subtitle is simply a reminder. Because the Spanish ode was published with *Prometheus Unbound* in August 1820, it came a good half-year after the events to which it connected itself. Such attachment by Shelley would be an understandable pat on the back during a period when the European theater was proving generally noncommittal to liberal revolutions. Shelley's insistence, however, that the poem was "written before" these

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[46] *Shelley*, 107–108.

events implies more than just an attachment. Shelley is vying for his poem's historical

relevancy and perhaps even – if he is situating the poem causally – its efficacy. This is a

lost cause, because in the very claim, the subtitle draws attention to the postfactual nature

of the published poem; its relevance to those it nominally exhorts is effaced by the fact of

its publication. Also at odds with the poem's supposed populist tenor is the last stanza,

where Shelley seems to run out of breath:

> Bind, bind every brow
> With crownals of violet, ivy, and pine:
> Hide the blood-stains now
> With hues which sweet nature has made divine:
> Green strength, azure hope, and eternity:
> But let not the pansy among them be;
> Ye were injured, and that means memory.
> (ll. 29-35)[47]

The ambiguous verb tense in "Ye were injured" plays right into the temporal structure

that the composition/publication history foregrounds, while it also contributes to the

general perorative deflation of the final couplet. The lines lack the vitality of a final

rallying call to an oppressed people, while its enigmatic gloss ("and that means memory")

offsets the earlier, bolder declarations about blood, tears, battle, and glory. Shelley thus

refuses this ode the afflatus that is generically central to it, just as the strategy of the

poem's *mise-en-temps* is revealed. Here, in late, late summer, Shelley does not want the

pansy – via any figure of inspiration – to blow, blow upon, or otherwise communicate

what "meanings" it holds.

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[47] *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, vol. IV (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1926). Hereafter cited as *Works*.

And none of this is to mention that the poem is in English, which poses obvious problems for an audience of Spaniards. Once we note that Shelley did undertake an Italian translation of his own "Ode to Liberty," and that a Spanish translation would have been within his linguistic powers, the question compounds: who is this ode's audience?[48] An answer involves understanding Shelley's own sense of the textual/material existence of his poems, and deciding whether the proposition of the subtitle reveals on Shelley's behalf an ignorance (a naïve longing to be the cause of an effect) or an erudition. That is, could its illogicality be thematic? Could its non sequitur be a deliberate "non sequitur" uttered by a poet aware of his belatedness? We might think not, were it not for Shelley's well-known instruction to his publisher Charles Ollier, regarding the printing of the *Prometheus Unbound* edition, "specially to pet him and feed him with fine ink and good paper." Shelley was quite aware that *Prometheus Unbound* and its "*Other Poems*" were destined for an elite readership ("'Prometheus' cannot sell beyond twenty copies"). In the same letter, Shelley contrasts it to *The Cenci*, which was "written for the multitude."[49]

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[48] Chernaik says that "this poem is about the Peterloo massacre; the title may have been altered for political reasons" (*The Lyrics of Shelley*, 7n.), but this type of allegorizing, where one historical event is given in place of another, seems unlikely. Shelley anyhow does address the Peterloo massacre, both directly and allegorically, or in Masque as it were, in "The Mask of Anarchy: Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester."

[49] To Charles and James Ollier, March 6, 1820. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1909), II: 766.

Moreover, even as he and Mary "eagerly scanned" the papers for updates on the Spanish

revolution,[50] Shelley must have felt the delay of exile in the news that was not new.[51]

Shelley's vying for a primacy he knew he did not have is a literary gesture. Like

Milton in "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," he foregoes matters of chronological

sequence, in order to get at a truth of greater consequence (in Shelley's case, though,

having more to do with poetic eschatology than religious primacy). Shelley complicates

the usual function of the ode as *epinicion*: a song *after* victory. His subtitle refers to a

victory but positions the song before it. Conversely, in the final stanza, Shelley (with a

quite different Milton poem in mind) evokes pastoral elegy and its perspective of

aftermath – not of victory but of defeat. In "Lycidas" the laying-on of flowers is done

"with false surmise" – there is no body to bury, no bier to "laureate." Shelley, on the

other hand, must deal with an excess of corpses:

> Arise, arise, arise!
> There is blood on the earth that denies ye bread;
>   Be your wounds like eyes
>   To weep for the dead, the dead, the dead.
> What other grief were it just to pay?
> Your sons, your wives, your brethren, were they;
> Who said they were slain on the battle day?
>
>   Awaken, awaken, awaken!
> The slave and the tyrant are twin-born foes;
>   Be the cold chains shaken
>   To the dust where your kindred repose, repose:
> Their bones in the grave will start and move,
> When they hear the voices of those they love,
> Most loud in the holy combat above.

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[50] White, *Shelley*, 191.

[51] Mary notes the March 10 surrender on March 26 (*The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980], I: 139–140).

> Wave, wave high the banner!
> When freedom is riding to conquest by:
> Though the slaves that fan her
> Be famine and toil, giving sigh for sigh.
> And ye who attend her imperial car,
> Lift not your hands in the banded war,
> But in her defence whose children ye are.
> (*Works,* ll. 1-21)

Shelley's solution to elegiac posteriority is to depict an insurrection turned resurrection, so that the final stanza has not to memorialize but to anticipate. Shelley's complicated temporal positioning as he teeters between genres is a consistent feature of his odes. This poetic suspense ties in to his anxieties about the interpretability of historical events – or in odic terms, occasion.

Shelley's imagery is steeped in Isaiah's taunt against Babylon (14:1-23). In it, the prophet promises the house of Jacob that their rise as a nation will happen simultaneously with the downfall of their oppressor. Additionally, Isaiah furnishes his addressees with the curse to celebrate this occasion. Despite its affinity with the older prophecy, however, Shelley's contemporary version is dogged by its inability to authorize the meaning of its occasion. Shelley's strategy in categorizing this poem as "An Ode" here begins to emerge. While the poem's insistence on its occasion might qualify it as an ode, it still lacks the deity that would be the linchpin between the occasion and the right to celebrate it. Or, if the Spanish ode does have a presiding deity, it is the hapless Epimetheus. Thus we see how the postfactual subtitle in its hindsight intends such an authorization, but falls short as mere historical verity rather than divine prophecy.

The deity of an ode serves as the context for reading the signs of its occasion. In the Spanish ode, those signs remain dispersed among earthly forms, without a divine cipher-key. The "Who said…?" of line 7 most explicitly announces the hermeneutic fray resulting from the absence of a divine author. In such an absence, even the most final of human conditions can be reinterpreted, courtesy of a metaphysical conceit, and so reversed. The blood dripping from the "wounds" of combat are merely the tears of grief; the crying of mourners may then metamorphose back into the cry of combat, which the dead will "hear" and as a result be resurrected. Vocalization is everywhere in the poem, particularly in the repetitions. Through the rhetorical immediacy of these repetitions, the poem no longer exists as an exhortation to mourn (or to celebrate), but becomes itself the voice of mourning (or celebration).

Benediction soon becomes contradiction in mortal mouths, however. The quality of sound that gives "Arise, arise, arise!" its force almost immediately bestows a finality to "the dead, the dead, the dead." The resulting negation is thematic to this ode, and it stems from Shelley's anxieties about the paradoxes of political overthrow:

> Conquerors have conquered their foes alone,
> Whose revenge, pride, and power they have overthrown:
> Ride ye, more victorious, over your own.
> (*Works,* ll. 26-28)

Again, the language comes from Isaiah, who prophesies that the Israelites "will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them" (14:2). But the poet and pacifist in Shelley cannot long abide the reciprocated violence (nor does he have Isaiah's divine certificate of cloture), and so he begins to metaphorize. In the center stanza (ll. 15-21, where this ode neither counterturns nor stands, but back-pedals),

the "combat" is revealed to be merely a conceit, which if taken to its fullest conclusion, delivers the revolutionists back into slavery. Shelley specifies to the throng that he does not intend that they *actually* fight: "Lift not your hands in the banded war." How the "hands" may more productively be "lifted" is suggested a few lines earlier: "Wave, wave high the banner!" More specifically, the people should "fan" liberty's banner with the winds of "toil," starvation, and slavery. Also in this stanza, a small change is made at the terminus of the fourth line, the usual position for the repeated exhortations, which radically undermines their urgency and their sense of resolute progress. The exhortation dwindles into "sigh for sigh." Thus revealed is the true nature of any exchanged "blows": tit-for-tat susurrations whose reciprocity deflates any political or poetic cause.

The palinodic last stanza is Shelley's acknowledgment that the contradictions of overthrow pervade even the rhetoric that seeks to establish a cause, in both senses of that word. In order to ratify the one kind of cause (i.e., the revolution), one must identify and attach it to the other kind (i.e., the primum mobile). But, etymologically at least, it proves impossible to wrench out of the realm of effect, for one must acknowledge the "re-" of revolt, revenge, and even reform. Bound up in conflict is the issue of priority, which a man speaking from inside of history cannot possibly resolve. Even structurally there is no way out; the perfectly identical stanzas throughout suggest that this ode has been all taunt, all antistrophe, all antithesis – no resolution. The "twin-born foes" of tyrant and slave are an emblem of impasse. Shelley knows this, and so softly bows out of this ode. What "bind[s] every brow" in his last stanza, then, are not just the evergreen laurels that symbolize victory and peace, but the political and poetic systems that generate their

symbolic meanings. The poem's final gesture is an attempt at erasure: "Hide the blood stains now." The manmade marks are supplanted by a natural signification: "hues which sweet nature has made divine." But even here Shelley reads conflict. The "injured" pansy "means memory," and a remembered injury is a returned injury. In denying memory, the faculty that would hold the past in its place, Shelley espouses an impossible oblivion, and this he concedes as the final stanza's literary allusiveness – its poetic memory – overtakes it. Shelley's ode strains – ultimately unsuccessfully – against monody (Milton's name for his elegy) for the way that genre compresses lyrical solitude and lamentation into a single purpose. His next ode, the "Ode to Heaven," though it seeks recusal from this bind through its celebratory choric plenitude, cannot ultimately escape through this technicality.

1.5 "Ode to Heaven"

Where the Spanish ode is an occasion without a deity, the "Ode to Heaven" (composed two months later)[52] is all deity, but no occasion. This might make it a hymn, except for the fact that Shelley writes the ode as a critique of hymnody and of his own "Hymn" from three years earlier. Hymns typically assume "a consonance … between eternal laws and social laws,"[53] but to Shelley this is still lyric solipsism, only in unison. Shelley starts this poem *as* a hymn: a "Chorus of Spirits" delivers the first three stanzas.

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[52] December 1819 (*SPP*, 296n.).

[53] Fry, *Poet's Calling*, 187.

Then, exploiting the dialectical energies of the ode,[54] Shelley corrects the Chorus's

missteps through "A Remoter Voice," which is in turn silenced by "A Louder and Still

Remoter Voice," through which the deity of this "Ode to Heaven" talks back.

The Chorus, in the first two stanzas, tries optimistically to depict the infinity and

eternity of heaven, as well as its resonance in all the "shapes" of the earth and the

cosmos:

> Palace-roof of cloudless nights,
> Paradise of golden lights,
>   Deep, Immeasurable, Vast,
>   Which art now, and which wert then;
>   Of the present and the past,
>   Of the eternal Where and When,
>   Presence chamber, Temple, Home,
>   Ever-canopying Dome
>   Of acts and ages yet to come!
>
> Glorious shapes have life in thee—
> Earth and all Earth's company,
>   Living globes which ever throng
>   Thy deep chasms and wildernesses,
>   And green worlds that glide along,
>   And swift stars with flashing tresses,
>   And icy moons most cold and bright,
>   And mighty suns, beyond the Night,
>   Atoms of intensest light!
>   (*SPP*, ll. 1-18)

The superlatives soon prove to be limiting, however. Though the sequence of "Palace-

roof," "Presence chamber," and "Dome" adds up to a kingdom of heaven, the coldness

and absoluteness of these architectural designations contrast with the idea of "Home" and

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[54] The "Chorus of Spirits" that fully occupies the poem in its earliest version is later relegated to the first of its strophic movements, with the other two strophic movements being reclaimed by single "Voices."

its abstracted, relative sense of space. ("Temple" could go either way.) "Presence

chamber" – not "Presence, chamber" – reminds us that the deity of this poem has not yet

been named, and does not yet inhabit the space of the poem, nor the spaces (outer or

inner) that the poem describes. Heaven is turning out to be an immense emptiness. All the

universe is a stage, where the "acts" (of God) are "yet to come."[55] The second stanza

attempts to redress this absence with throngs of planets, comets, and moons, but what

should be heavenly bodies are Ptolemaically bound as "all Earth's company." The stars

are similarly diminished; the "mighty suns, beyond the Night" are reduced to "[a]toms of

intensest light" – that is, mere "points" of view in the night sky as in the human eye.

Heaven is thus a repository of mortal perspective, a space of conceit and conceits.

The third stanza confirms this:

>Even thy name is as a God,
>Heaven! for thou art the abode
> Of that Power which is the glass
>   Wherein man his nature sees;—
> Generations as they pass
>   Worship thee with bended knees—
>   Their unremaining Gods and they
>   Like a river roll away—
>   Thou remainest such—alway!—
> (ll. 19-27)

This is meant as a proof of eminence: man will always have an idea of heaven even if the

exact content of that idea changes over time. But here the Chorus unwittingly subverts

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[55] As "all Earth's company" throng the "Living globe[]," it would seem that the King's Men (if not the
King) are starting to arrive. This dramatic allusiveness will soon have structural import, as The Chorus will
find its monologic speculations chorically curbed by The Remoter Voice, to whom the same thing will
happen by the Louder and Still Remoter Voice.

itself. Somewhere in this stanza, the ode's deity is named for the first time. But where exactly? Not in "a God." The anonymity of the indefinite article and the similed construction prevent identification or reification. "Heaven!" then might qualify, yet it is immediately specified as the "abode" of "that Power." The "Power," though, so often the closest Shelley gets to deity in other poems, remains just as obscure here. The relative pronoun "which" is applicable equally to either "the abode" or its occupant, and so makes them inseparable. And this is the point. Odes call upon their deities as authorizing contexts for interpreting human occasions. The trick of the Heaven ode is that "context" is the defining feature of the invoked deity. Heaven's status as an "abode" for meaning *is* the celebrated occasion. Deity is a reflection ("the glass") of the mortal.

But when man makes God in his image, God cannot be divine: the "unremaining Gods" "pass … away" along with the mortals who worship them. "Gods" is plural here, not necessarily to distinguish pagan polytheism and Judeo-Christian monotheism, but to refer to the accrual through time of all gods. The stanza itself re-enacts this accrual with its multiple namings of deity.[56] Thus Shelley relates this eternal misdirected worship to man's signifying faculty. "Generations" are on bended knee *not* before the deity, but before Heaven ("thee"), whose "name is: as-a-God." This is a stark contrast with the naming episode in Genesis, where man names everything except God, who in Exodus names himself: "I am that I am." Such tautological perfection is punctured by the

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[56] Even the alpha-word "Even" is an unaspirated "Heaven." It off-rhymes with the "Heaven" below it; this forms a symmetry (or mirror-image) with the off-rhyme of "God/abode" in the end position of the same two lines.

relativity of the simile; "as a God" will, unfortunately, prove most accommodating (as all the first-stanza references to architectural space and lodging suggest).

The Chorus has botched its hymn; there is a greater authority in the "Remoter Voice" that follows. The Voice is a single voice (i.e., not a Chorus) with a single stanza, yet it presents a conflict, and seems to acknowledge it as such. The "and … and … and" of the sanguine Chorus turns into the "but … but … but" of the discerning Voice:

> Thou art but the Mind's first chamber,
> Round which its young fancies clamber
>   Like weak insects in a cave
>   Lighted up by stalactites;
> But the portal of the grave,
>   Where a world of new delights
>   Will make thy best glories seem
>   But a dim and noonday gleam
>   From the shadow of a dream.
> (ll. 28-36)

The Voice immediately registers its understanding that Heaven, as the Chorus has it, is merely a function of "the Mind." It is mere in that it is a "first" attempt, a child's concept. It is a diminution not of heaven, but of man's fantasy that he has already fully imagined it. Those "young fancies" are not just the wishful fantasies of childhood that persist into adulthood; they are the beliefs or philosophies that persist in their immaturity across time. The Voice, in the stanza's central line, then turns against the language of eternity in the Chorus by evoking mortality. "Thou art … but the portal of the grave" – i.e., you are merely solace for the fact that we are mortal. Nonetheless, in gainsaying man's idea of heaven, the Voice advocates the perfectibility of that idea (viz. the reference to Plato's cave). In all three usages in this stanza, "but" acts as a diminutive adverb, but the specter of disjunction hovers above its use in this central line, and so wants to create the new

sense of an independent clause about the potentiality that death's mystery confers on the grave, not as an end but a beginning: "But the portal of the grave,/ Where a world of new delights …" This intimates a change of voice for the Voice, whose contempt for the consolation-prize aspect of heaven is simultaneously a vision of the improved idea of heaven – and a hope for it.

But this new sentence isn't permitted to predicate, as the "Louder and Still Remoter Voice" here interrupts:

> Peace! the abyss is wreathed with scorn
> At your presumption, Atom-born!
>   What is Heaven? and what are ye
>   Who its brief expanse inherit?
>   What are suns and spheres which flee
>   With the instinct of that spirit
>   Of which ye are but a part?
>   Drops which Nature's mighty heart
>   Drives through thinnest veins. Depart!
>
> What is Heaven? a globe of dew
> Filling in the morning new
>   Some eyed flower whose young leaves waken
>   On an unimagined world.
>   Constellated suns unshaken,
>   Orbits measureless, are furled
>   In that frail and fading sphere
>   With ten million gathered there
>   To tremble, gleam, and disappear!—
>   (ll. 37-54)

One critic notes that this last voice "breaks odal decorum by referring to Heaven in third-person statements rather than vocative address."[57] It seems more likely that the voice *is*

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[57] Christopher R. Miller, "Shelley's Uncertain Heaven," *ELH* 72, no. 3 (2005): 593.

the Heaven-entity – like God's voice from the whirlwind to Job after he'd heard enough[58] – and that decorum is here being reasserted after that rough apostrophizing of the earlier stanzas has violated it. The vocative persists, though now as "ye … ye" in order to indicate a change in the direction of address. In fact, words from the Chorus are repurposed in this section in order to effect a more thorough change of perspective. "Atom" and "globe," even as images of spherical perfection, are mistakenly used by the Chorus; the divine voice, to put man in his place, restores to the terms a sense of materiality ("Atom-born") and of proportion ("globe of dew").

These two stanzas perform the shifting nature of words, and so Shelley ties man's insignificance closely to man's significations. As man calls to the emptiness of heaven in order to fill it, he perpetuates its emptiness. Shelley said as much three years earlier in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." After asking the "Spirit of Beauty" a series of questions about the intermittent nature of its visitations, Shelley says

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[58] The allusion is furthermore endorsed by other details from Job, namely God's interrogative fury and the architectural conceit with which it begins: "Where wast thou when I layd the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding./ Who hath layd the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?/ Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who layd the corner stone thereof …?" (Job 38:4-6 [AV]). Perhaps Coleridge was impertinently answering these rhetorical questions in "Kubla Khan" as he furnished specs for the "pleasure-dome" of Xanadu: "So twice five miles of fertile ground/ With walls and towers were girdled round" (ll. 6-7). The curious terra-firma figurations of man's imaginative firmament intimate that it is not infinite but confined; the twice-measured dome is a much smaller version of the twice-mentioned "caverns measureless to man" (ll. 4, 27). As Shelley changes the "Immeasurable" of the first stanza to the "measureless" of the final, he is answering Coleridge, calling out his paradox of the "caverns measureless" by rendering a more obvious (because more overtly circumscribed) paradox in the "Orbits measureless." Shelley's is a deeper impertinence in the Heaven ode; he may be voicing man's imaginative shortcomings, but he does so through impersonating the deity.

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
  To sage or poet these responses given—
  Therefore the name of God and ghosts and Heaven,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells—whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
   From all we hear and all we see,
   Doubt, chance, and mutability.
 (ll. 25-31)

In the Heaven ode, Shelley somewhat playfully envisions the "voice from some sublimer world" finally speaking up and coming to conclusions, similar to those of the "Hymn," about "chance, and mutability." Shelley's assumption of the *vox Dei* here aligns with Fry's understanding of how ode and hymn are to be differentiated generically: "The aim of the ode is to recover and usurp the voice to which hymns defer: not merely to participate in the presence of voice but to *be* the voice."[59] Shelley's "Hymn," though, is generically subversive to begin with, in that the voice to which it defers – the voice that it "fears" – is that of the poet "himself" (l. 84). This certainly explains why Fry will eventually categorize the "Hymn" as an ode, but it does not account for the difference Shelley senses between his later ode and his earlier hymn.

What the "Hymn" does not subvert – and for this reason it may rest generically as a hymn – is that sense of consonance the speaker feels between the human and the divine. Consonance might be hard to detect in the "inconstant" Spirit of Beauty, but even those "uncertain moments" ultimately serve to highlight the potential for divinity in man:

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[59] *Poet's Calling*, 9.

> Man were immortal, and omnipotent,
> Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
> Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.
> (ll. 39-41)

Divinity in this formulation seems a difference of degree rather than kind. In this respect, "immortality" is more a waiting game – as it is for Wordsworth and perhaps Coleridge – than an impossibility. Shelley at his first opportunity corrects himself in the starting line of his next poem, "Mont Blanc," by assigning "everlastingness" strictly to the "universe of things." The "human mind" may hold "an unremitting interchange" (ll. 37, 39) with these things, but the division is permanently "there," as the single-word refrain consistently reminds a reader. Careful that "Mont Blanc" not perform as a hymn, Shelley respects his division from "the power," and for most of the poem gives no sign of consonance. In fact, any category of *sonance* is off limits, as the poem's trope shifts from noise to silence, which symbolizes cosmic indifference to human activity.

The poem's conclusion – that what governs human thought also legislates heaven – offers an understanding of hymnal consonance (and shouldn't be confused as an instance of it):

> The secret strength of things
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
> Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
> And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
> If to the human mind's imaginings
> Silence and solitude were vacancy?
> (ll. 139-144)

It is inevitable, Shelley is saying, that man's thought will inhabit, linguistically and imaginatively, the cosmic silence that surrounds him. The human mind deals with the notion of mortality by troping away its inaccessible secrecy. "Some say … that death is

slumber" (ll. 49-50); Shelley wonders whether this is right. That he ends with a question seems to indicate that, for now, he is respecting the void and its absolute negation.

We also sense that Shelley, in concluding with a question, is confessing the limits of his poetry to this point. Though the "power" of "Mont Blanc" refuses to answer, at worst such an answer would involve an unknowable "secret" about an ineffable yet fundamental compatibility of subject and object. And perhaps it should not surprise us that this human poet's mind, which has at this point in his life (1816) experienced the stings only of love and of exile – not yet the death and defeat that mark the next few years – has found only consonance so far in life and letters. Dissonance – the notion that there is an antagonistic cosmic force that writes itself into (just as Mont Blanc effaces itself from) historical events – is a feature of the years, and odes, to come.

The Heaven ode, with its layered antitheses, performs such dissonance, though its cosmic force is forced, impersonated. No voice from some sublimer world should ever give an odic poet the response he seeks; thus Shelley is crossing generic/metaphysical lines in this "Ode *from* Heaven." Nonetheless, he leaves a record of his vain endeavor. The Heaven ode was written two months after the West Wind ode, but printed before it in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume. The transposition suggests Shelley's own sense of his ode's frail spell. In the same way that "Heaven" is hollow, this ode may itself be hollow – a ready but unoccupied structure, an "abode" or "ab-ode." The dramatic interplay of voices (most booming or a-boding at that) leaves little room for lyric or visionary purchase, though it does set the stage for it. In the West Wind ode, which follows the

Heaven ode in publication, Shelley resumes the lyrical center; in the "Ode to Liberty,"

which followed the Heaven ode in composition, Shelley will invent a lyric periphery.

1.6 "Ode to Liberty"

Composed almost precisely between "Ode to the West Wind" and "Ode to

Naples," the "Ode to Liberty" shows Shelley to be developing the conflict between lyric

and prophetic voices. Between the first and final odes, Shelley shifts from ecstatic

yearnings to prophecy as such. But it is a tempered prophecy in the Liberty ode. The

supplication in the West Wind ode has an imperative quality ("Be thou me") that mellows

into interrogatives in the Liberty ode. Though the West Wind ode itself ends in a

question, it is a rhetorical one that rests ultimately on the laurels of seasonal certainty.

The Liberty ode, on the other hand, addresses a wind of an epochal order – i.e., the

visitations of liberty that can catalyze a civilization into a political, artistic, and

philosophical golden age. However, the "olive-cinctured brow" (l. 123) is a rare

distinction that Liberty bestows on the kings of history for their successful reigns, bright

moments that disappear back into a perpetual Hobbesian darkness. As Shelley emboldens

his scope – and opens himself to uncertainties that are more profound than an individual's

lyric salvation – he asks more questions in this ode:

> Comes she [Wisdom] not, and come ye not,
>   Rulers of eternal thought,
> To judge, with solemn truth, life's ill-apportioned lot?
>   Blind Love, and equal Justice, and the Fame
>   Of what has been, the Hope of what will be?
>   O, Liberty! if such could be thy name
>   Wert thou disjoined from these, or they from thee:
> If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought
>   By blood or tears, have not the wise and free
>   Wept tears, and blood like tears?
> (ll. 261-270)

Liberty's inverse correlation to human suffering, and its oblique relation to "the will/ Of man" (ll. 70-71), tempers his prophecy; it ends here with these questions.

Though the prophecy concludes, the poem does not. In a final stanza, the poem's speaker comes out of the prophetic trance brought on, presumably, by Liberty's current visitation in Spain. This information is found in the first stanza, where the speaker enters the trance. The poem begins:

> A glorious people vibrated again
>   The lightning of the nations: Liberty
> From heart to heart, from tower to tower, o'er Spain,
>   Scattering contagious fire into the sky,
> Gleamed. My soul spurned the chains of its dismay,
>   And in the rapid plumes of song
>   Clothed itself, sublime and strong;
> ....
>   there came
>   A voice out of the deep: I will record the same.
> (ll. 1-7, 14-15)

The reference to Spain, in addition to establishing the occasion of this ode, has another strategy. It is an allusion to the Spanish ode, and an acknowledgment that its occasion is ongoing – though unfortunately, as the Spaniards are *still* trying to recover their liberty. When Shelley asks, "[H]ave not the wise and free/ Wept tears, and blood like tears?", he

is evoking his earlier utterance as well as questioning its efficacy. This is a remarkable acknowledgment – a confession that the earlier ode merely positioned itself prophetically: it took a historical verity and passed it off as foreknowledge. Shelley's keener sense of prophecy, as he develops it in the Liberty ode, is that it exists as – and must remain – a question. What happens after prophecy – what shape history ultimately takes – must necessarily remain unknown. As this ode demonstrates through a shift of genres, what intervenes before we are given answers is the lyric voice, which cries out in its desperate desire for closure.

The personal "dismay" of the first stanza returns in the final stanza, where "the spirit of that mighty singing/ To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn" (ll. 271-272), and the poet must again speak by and of himself:

> As summer clouds dissolve, unburthened of their rain;
>   As a far taper fades with fading night,
>   As a brief insect dies with dying day,—
>   My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
>   Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
> Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
>   As waves which lately paved his watery way
>   Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.
>   (ll. 278-285)

The emboldened expression from the prophetic portion of the poem ebbs here into oblique reference and layered analogy, typical hallmarks of Shelley in high lyrical mode. The prophecy is thus bracketed by two lyrical stanzas, what Stuart Curran calls a "rhapsodic frame."[60] One function of this frame is to demonstrate that "the influx of

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[60] *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 81.

visionary inspiration corresponds to the gradual exfoliation of liberty through time" (80), while the "obverse" function is to underscore the tentativeness of national liberty by giving a tentativeness to the song that is both a manifestation and commemoration of it. That the poetic voice is absorbed by "the great voice" after being sustained by it, is a paradox, which Curran understands in Shelleyan terms of creation and destruction. Curran culminates his discussion in the West Wind ode, where Shelley supposedly synthesizes the paradoxical forces into having an "essentially creative impact on the mind" (81). This conclusion seems to ignore not just the chronology of the poems, as we saw above, but the concluding and destructive image of the Liberty ode, in which the poet drowns inside his own metaphor. This is no synthesis, but rather Shelley demonstrating the proximity of lyric closure and lyric *cloture* – not just an ending (or demise, in the case of this drowning poet), but also a barrier between the poet and any interpretive synthesis the future might hold.

As such, this image is emblematic of the general plot of Shelley's odes, in that it explores how lyric termination frees the poet into prophetic indeterminacy. The first two odes of Shelley's sequence both claim foreknowledge; any uncertainty is rhetorical. Yet, the West Wind ode's determination is better understood as the speaker's promise to go with the flow, to be okay with any occasion (or meteorological event). Tide and time wait for no man, however, as the staged obsolescence of the Spanish ode demonstrates. In the Heaven ode, unknowing (or agnosticism in the particular conceit of that poem) is recast as a potentiality.

In the particular case of the Liberty ode, which exists somewhere between lyric and prophetic modes, this profound sense of indeterminacy is fitting – a kind of freedom in this poem to Liberty – and we recognize Shelley extending this consideration into the formal corners of this poem. When compared with the West Wind ode's overdetermined stanza structure, the Liberty ode downshifts into mere Horatian uniformity: nineteen 15-line stanzas, whose lines range internally from tetrameter to hexameter. Shelley abandons the nimbleness and multiform cleverness of terza rima sonnets, and opts instead for the calm and balanced Horatian. The form is capable of handling the narrative thrust of Shelley's subject matter, and it is weightier, by three to four lines per stanza, than Keats' Horatian odes published just months before. Where Keats takes the curtal route to avoid the feel of the sonnet, Shelley goes caudal – adding that fifteenth line and the bulk of hexametric weight. While using the Horatian is a step away from lyric voice for Shelley, the form is in no way alyrical. In fact, its associations with meditation and its modest formal flexibility might make it the lyric form par excellence, were it not that the irregular odic forms of the earlier Romantics hold meditative sway at this time. Thus it is the regularity of the Horatian that appeals to Shelley, with its flavor of narrative or epic progress, unhindered by the regressions of an individual mind.

The Horatian thus seems to occupy a space that is perfectly liminal with respect to the ideologies of forms – certainly beyond the sonnety showiness of lyricism but not beyond the gravity of introspective meditation. "Liminal" does not equate to "neutral," however. The irony of the Liberty ode is that it is a progress poem that questions its progress. The resounding *quo vadis?* after eighteen stanzas suggests that its epic-like

march is on a road to nowhere. Ultimately, the Horatian has a transparency (like blank

verse); its reiterations seem to be more complicit with those dreadful timespans *between*

the visitations of Liberty (sometimes as long as "a thousand years" (ll. 121, 167)), than

with the visitations themselves. It is significant that Shelley breaks from this Horatian

regularity in one of two interstanzaic enjambments, and that the first of these is at the

very moment of the first manifestation of Liberty:

> Art's deathless dreams lay veiled by many a vein
> Of Parian stone; and, yet a speechless child,
>   Verse murmured, and Philosophy did strain
>   Her lidless eyes for thee; when o'er the Aegean main
>
> V.
> Athens arose
> (ll. 57-61)

Appropriately, the images of unrealized artistic and philosophical expression (unchiseled

marble, unformed words, unseeing eyes) suggest Shelley's own concern that the form he

gives his thoughts might be made better or truer. Indeed, a year and half later, Shelley

will reuse the line in *Hellas*:

> Let there be light! said Liberty,
> And like sunrise from the sea,
> Athens arose!
> (ll. 682-684)

Shelley in *Hellas* is a poet in harmony with history's course. The play's *Preface*

emphasizes that, as surely as Shelley reiterates Aeschylus, so will Greece win its freedom

from Turkey and Russia, and the future reiterate the past. The Liberty ode holds no such

poetic-historical harmony – or rather, it depicts a harmony of a different sort: not mere

dissonance, but an anti-harmony. Speechless and murmuring, these Horatian stanzas

don't render, but instead surrender to the march of an anti-Liberty.

The other interstanzaic enjambment of the poem comes after the penultimate

stanza, to indicate the expulsion of the vision from the visionary:

>   —The solemn harmony
>
>   XIX.
>   Paused, and the spirit of that mighty singing
>   To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn
>   (ll. 270-272)

If this has been the wrong vision, then the speaker is exorcized – consigned to the

exterior of this poem and, thankfully, its version of history. Goslee notes a similar effect,

as the "material conditions" of this poem in draft (ink blots and other markings on the

page) "signify the malleability of larger material conditions," namely how Shelley's

personal representations of Liberty revise the culturally inherited ones:

> [T]he material excess and hence 'free' undecidability of [the ode's] figurative
>
> language is a form of anarchy, and the historical determinisms reflected in the
>
> hierarchical language and structures of power and praise a form of tyranny.[61]

Though ink blots will figure importantly in the Naples ode, the "material excess" of the

Liberty ode should be understood most manifestly in its form, as its massiveness, even

homogeneity, suggests to Shelley the potential of its "free undecidability." This epistanza

aids Shelley in his exit strategy, while it also suggests a powerful method for reifying

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[61] "Pursuing Revision," 179–180. The Heaven ode might also be considered in this light, as the linguistic power to personify a deity is by turns invoked and revoked.

silence. The anti-Liberty has diverted human history into blank spaces, a negated abyss where Shelley will soon chase it in the Naples ode, in order to reinstate and re-form it. As he switches from Horatian to Pindaric gears, the "material excess" of the entire ode sequence comes into view, its strategy not just a "form of anarchy," but an anarchy of form, in which Shelley avoids odic tyranny by acknowledging the genre's multiple figureheads.

After the bulk of the Liberty ode was written, Shelley penned what would become its first stanza, where a thoroughly Pindaric allusion describes his assumption of the Spirit's voice: "As a young eagle soars the morning clouds among,/ Hovering inverse o'er its accustomed prey" (ll. 8-9). It is an image of poetic hesitation, and perhaps a judgment of the poem he has just written, a foreshadowing of his theme of indeterminacy: he will be *hovering in verse* – a poetic purgatory that seeks entry into history, seeks synthesis with it and of it. This Pindaric allusion is one of many in the draft of the Liberty ode, but it is the only one that makes it beyond the draft. After a few months, this Pindaric longing will finally release itself as the fiery, ultra-Pindaric Naples ode – but not before Shelley "hovers in verse" one last time in "To a Sky-Lark."

1.7 "To a Sky-Lark"

If the imagery and rapid-fire analogies of the Liberty ode's concluding stanza remind us of "To a Sky-Lark," it is with good reason, as portions of the poem were likely composed around the time of the Liberty ode. Because the "Sky-Lark" drafts are found in the pages immediately after the last drafts of "Liberty," Goslee suggests it is Shelley's

escape from the wearisome oscillations of history portrayed there: "a longing to escape

history's 'before and after' into the pure joy of the bird's song."[62] The very assertion of

"To a Sky-Lark," however, is that the lyric escape cannot occur. All manmade songs are

"empty vaunt[s]" (l. 69), even those genres that celebrate man's union with his various

desired "objects" (l. 71) – i.e., hymns (l. 38), anacreontics (l. 64), and epithalamia (l. 66).

"To a Sky-Lark" is itself in four-line anacreontic stanzas that get sobered up by the

alexandrine that is the fifth line. This reading is yielded by the fully developed poem. But

even in its nascent form in Shelley's notebook, it cogently makes the case for the artifice

and deception of lyricism. That fifth line is there before Shelley knows precisely what

words will fill it:

> What art thou blithe Spirit
>   For bird thou hardly art
> That from blue Heaven, or near
>   Dost pour from thy full heart
> Such sweet sounds [   ] art[63]

Shelley's effusion is destined for "art" in all senses: as rhyme word, as the stanza

boundary that dictates the logical and ideological structure of the poem-to-be, and as a

treatise about art. The ellipsis is wonderfully emblematic of the divide Shelley perceives,

perhaps even at the moment of inspiration and audience, between the birdsong and his

quite premeditated apprehension of it. In this, Shelley's version of Wordsworth's

"emotion recollected in tranquillity," the deliberation of a composing poet is what

separates the "sweet sounds" of the moment from the "art" that of necessity must come

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[62] Ibid., 178.

[63] *Bodleian MS*, V: 206 [adds. e. 6, p. 97 rev].

afterwards. In hovering on the draft, Shelley will come to oppose "art" in these senses to "art" as it is meant in lines 1 and 2 – i.e., as the second-person singular present tense form of "to be." This sense of the word seems to linger in line 5, where in its elliptical isolation "art" refuses to predicate – a grammatical prospect that Shelley cultivates in the next stanza of the draft:

> Ah, what thou art we know not
> But what is like to thee?

In composing, Shelley appears truly to have suffered from not knowing the answer to his question. "Morning star," "clouds," and "moon" are all crossed out before he in draft settles on "rainbow" (the final poem has "rainbow clouds").

I suggest that Shelley transforms this compositional irresolution into the trope, structure, and strategy of the emerging poem. Though struck in draft, each of the words will be reinstated to the finished poem by elaboration into a corresponding stanza (the morning star in stanza 5, the cloud in stanza 2, the moon in stanza 6). As well, these lines will eventually become stanza 7 of the finished poem, where Shelley's question shifts from "What is like to thee?" to "What is most like thee?" The poetic objectivity promised by the phrasing "*most* like" is confounded by the sequence of similes that follows. Though long noted for their appeal to the senses, the similes do not clarify the physical reality of the bird, but instead baffle it: its invisibility is made sensate. Despite the non-sense, Shelley does not purge his initial expressive impulses, but accumulates them. These compositional errancies represent Shelley's artwork finding its true subject and method: in the elaboration of negation. The consequence of this process, as another in-draft emendation makes clear, is that the reality of the bird is effaced:

> Hail to thee
> ~~What art thou~~ blithe Spirit
>
> never wert!
> ~~For~~ bird thou ~~hardly art~~

The bird is deprived of the "art" that is its existence and relegated to the "art" of likeness.

All of these emendations are made in a different ink and in a bolder pen stroke than the original lines of the draft. They are evidence of a later composition session,[64] in which Shelley steers the poem away from a rather honest attempt at understanding the unknowable nature of the bird, to a deliberate indulgence in filling that unknown with what Shelley calls in "Mont Blanc" the "human mind's imaginings." Indeed, the concerns of "Mont Blanc" are writ small in "To a Sky-Lark," as the blankness of the vast mountain finds its counterpart in the bird's thematic "vacancy." The invisibility of the bird, in the first movement of the poem, gives way to its non-substantial description in the second; while in the third movement, this translates to an epistemological emptiness, evident in references to the skylark's ignorance (l. 75), unknowing (l. 80), and general emotional imperturbability. These observations run contrary to the rhetorical surface of the poem, which subordinates man's expressive ability to the skylark's. But the poem's rhetoric eventually unravels; the cumulative effect of its hyperbole and strained optation is a mild sarcasm:

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[64] Ibid., 206n.

> Yet if we could scorn
>   Hate and pride and fear;
> If we were things born
>   Not to shed a tear,
> I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.
> (*SPP,* ll. 91-5)

Trickily, Shelley here espouses the human emotional palette, rather than vacuous avian purity. To rid ourselves of the first three emotions ("hate and pride and fear"), we still must scorn. The real "empty vaunt," when the poem is all told, is the bird's. Its song is without content ("What objects are the fountains/ Of thy happy strain?" (l. 71-2)). Nor does it have any lessons to impart, as Shelley's request in line 61 ("Teach us…") remains unanswered like the final stanza: "Teach me half the gladness/ That thy brain must know." There is no such data transfer, and Shelley is still "listening" at poem's end.

"To a Sky-Lark" demonstrates how imaginative opportunity prevails in the face of epistemological uncertainty, though its conclusion insists otherwise. We can better appreciate how strange the conclusion is, once we acknowledge the notional retreat it makes from Shelley's conclusion years earlier in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

> The day becomes more solemn and serene
>   When noon is past—there is a harmony
>   In autumn, and a luster in its sky,
> Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
> As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
>   Thus let thy power, which like the truth
>   Of nature on my passive youth
> Descended, to my onward life supply
>   Its calm—to one who worships thee,
>   And every form containing thee,
>   Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
> To fear himself, and love all human kind.
> (*SPP,* ll. 73-84)

When compared to the usual deference with which a hymn would end, Shelley's "Hymn" resolves its dilemma with plucky self-reliance. As the enjambment makes clear, "the truth/ Of nature" is a broken one and, as the stuff of youthful wish, must be replaced by the "calm" and "fair" cognitions of "onward life." Yet by the time of "To a Sky-Lark," the "Spirit fair" reverts to "blithe Spirit" and the "calm" seems forgotten for a "madness." Shelley's show of deference throughout "To a Sky-Lark" resonates with that "passive" kind of natural instruction that he has allegedly abandoned in the "Hymn."

As noted before, the poem calls out other poems for posturing about emotional, spiritual, or sexual unifications, when really they are hiding their wants. Shelley rather readily exposes the want of his poem: that it lacks the "harmonious madness" of inspiration. Moreover, from the beginning, Shelley is forthcoming about the poem's primary dissemblance: "Bird thou never wert." "To a Sky-Lark," however, is ultimately not as candid as it makes out. What this poem exposes and what it hides become critical to its interpretation, for it contains an "art unseen" (l. 20).

We, here, may apprehend this art generically. For, structurally, the poem is an ode. Its three movements invite comparison to the triad of the Pindaric, as does the fact that the first two movements match each other in length (30 lines each), as would a strophe and an antistrophe. In title however, the poem isn't an ode. Though its "To a…" resembles so many ode titles, in a volume that has four other odes so-called, its status as an ode seems at best implicit. That the seventh stanza was the second to be written, and that it marks the ode's formal counterturn in the finished poem, symbolizes at least a

latent concern on Shelley's behalf about the thematic counterturn he wants to make against the protolyrical bird.

Again, we note that the emendations point to a later composition session, which would have to postdate the lyric moment of inspiration made famous by Mary Shelley in her "Note on the Poems of 1820."[65] This textual circumstance exposes the deception of the poem's conclusion: "The world should listen then – as I am listening now" (l. 105). This is a strange fashion of listening. For all the poetic self-effacement in this poem, it is the poet who emerges, communing with his own composing self. Such an illusion – of being "in the moment" – has great lyrical import, where lyrical is synonymous with apolitical. As Fraistat has observed, [66] Mary Shelley's anthological restructuring of the Shelley canon involved detaching his "pure" poems from his "shocking" or political ones.[67] "To a Sky-Lark" is one of the "pure" poems of the 1824 edition, and is readily considered under that rubric. But the strange sense of the last line complicates the poem's relation to time and consequently its lyrical status. "Now," as Shelley means it, is a stab at the temporal immunity of lyric poetry. Most of the poem's alexandrines depict an overflowing force (they also enact it metrically). The "then – now" opposition of the final alexandrine is a kind of overflow, in that it introduces the notion of causality/sequence to

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[65] "It was on a beautiful summer evening, while wandering among the lanes ... that we heard the carolling of the skylark, which inspired one of the most beautiful of his poems" (*The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley [Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, 1851], 305).

[66] "Illegitimate Shelley: Radical Piracy and the Textual Edition as Cultural Performance," *PMLA* 109, no. 3 (May 1, 1994): 410.

[67] *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 397.

a single moment – "now" – that would otherwise be lyrically circumscribed. The overflow into the future – "then" – is an enlargement of the usual scope of a lyric poem.

"Sky-Lark" does not deliver the future, nor is it a political poem, but its post-lyricality – "That was Now, this is Then," as it were – allows an interchange between lyric moment and odic occasion. As an unacknowledged ode, then, it might help us legislate between the lyrical stasis that is the starting point for Shelley's final "Ode to Naples,"[68] and the fiery prophetic impasse of its finale.

1.8 "Ode to Naples"

In an 1881 anthology entitled *English Odes*, Shelley's Pindaric "Ode to Naples" entry is riddled with a variety of errata. In the most remarkable of them, the anthology's compiler, Edmund Gosse, replaces the Greek strophic headings with Roman numerals. Though he was likely attempting to simplify the exasperating muddle of headings that appeared in the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824,[69] Gosse's orthographical error betrays the spirit of an ode dedicated to the Italian city, which was in 1820 trying to heave off decades of intermittent, Rome-centered despotism and to claim what Shelley saw as a thoroughly Greek inheritance: a constitutional government. Nor did three decades do much to improve Gosse's acumen about Shelley's grasp of the Pindaric ode. Writing the

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[68] This feature landed the poem, curiously, in the "apolitical" section of Mary Shelley's 1824 edition.

[69] Epode I.α, Epode II.α, Strophe α.1, Strophe β.2, Antistrophe α, Antistrophe β.2, Antistrophe α.γ, Antistrophe β.γ, Epode I.β, Epode II.β (*Posthumous Poems: 1824*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Revolution and Romanticism Reprint Series [Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991]).

"Ode" entry of the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,{ Gosse says that "Shelley desired to revive the pure manner of the Greeks, but he understood the principle of the form so little that he began his noble 'Ode to Naples' with two epodes, passed on to two strophes, and then indulged in four successive antistrophes" (2). By this time Gosse seems to have forgotten entirely that Shelley's ode has a grand total not of VIII stanzas but of X, and that Shelley continues his "indulgence" by concluding with two more epodes. The bracketing effect of the double epodes is Shelley's innovation on, not a misunderstanding of, the Pindaric ode, based on his very precise sense of how that form works. In fact, the Naples ode, as the last in Shelley's repertory, shows the poet at the height of his odic development. The daring hyperstrophic format earns Shelley the title of most ingenious practitioner of the Pindaric ode in English, while it also shows him to be its biggest critic, particularly with respect to the lyric domination of the form by earlier Romantics.

Gosse's gaffes are not without some basis, not the least of which is the poem's convoluted textual history. Very late in 1818, Shelley visited nearby Pompeii, his impression of which informs the first two epodes of the Ode, which are not in fact set in Naples, but "within the City disinterred." It is this visit that Gosse has in mind when he notes in the anthology that the ode was "written in 1819."[70] However, the occasion for the ode, Naples' constitutional revolution, did not occur until July 1820, the month before Shelley composed the ode. In anticipation of the Congress of Troppau, at which the fate of the new Neapolitan constitution would be decided, Shelley's ode underwent two

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[70] *English Odes* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), 207.

printings. The first was on September 26, 1820, in the *Morning Chronicle*. The second (closely following the text of the first) was done serially, on October 1 and 8, 1820, in *The Military Register*.[71] Literary historians agree that Shelley probably did not know about these printings.[72] This fact leaves room for still another version of the ode: "a consciously distinct version of the poem" that never made it to press, though it was probably intended to.[73] This version, a fair copy in Shelley's hand, omits the first two epodes entirely, and begins instead with what in the earlier printings is labeled "Strophe I."

Thus the only printed but unauthorized versions of the poem include the introductory epodes, while Shelley's later handwritten copy excludes them.[74] Shelley's apparently deliberate stanzaic perforation suggests that he perceived something extraneous about the epodes. We recognize right away that, topically, in an ode to *Naples*, Pompeii would lie outside the area of odic address and responsibility. But the actual, archaeological recovery in process at the time of Shelley's visit so well fits the figurative political recovery Shelley desires for Naples that this objection seems unlikely. A better motive for separating the epodes appears when we note that they are a lyrical

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[71] Michael Rossington, "Claire Clairmont's Fair Copy of Shelley's 'Ode to Naples': A Rediscovered Manuscript," *The Review of English Studies* 56, no. 223 (February 1, 2005): 67.

[72] White, *Shelley*, 2:223. Rossington, "Naples," 65. Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 280.

[73] Rossington, "Naples," 66.

[74] The epodes are included the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824. Though this version of the ode, prepared by Mary Shelley, has provided the received text, it "has no authority" (Rossington 66), as neither of the printed versions nor Shelley's fair-copy version of the ode is used for it.

aperture, through which Shelley dramatizes his reclamation of the prophetic mode.

Without the epodes, the ode would begin with an apostrophe in the classical tradition:

"Naples! thou Heart of men."[75] Shelley begins instead in the first person ("I stood within

the city disinterred"), which might be understood as falling squarely within the more

recent Romantic tradition of turning the ode inward toward private meditation. If so,

Shelley does not stay within this tradition for very long. The syntax governing

"disinterred" is ambiguous,[76] so that we are free to suppose the lyric "I" is being

excavated along with the ancient city, and therefore is not just lyric but already historical

too. Indeed, Shelley's tone seems almost confessional in this first stanza. As he drifts

through some loose allusions to his earlier odes, he seems to be cleansing the doors of

perception:

> I stood within the City disinterred
>   And heard the Autumnal leaves like light foot-falls
> Of spirits passing through the streets, & heard
>   The Mountain's slumberous voice at intervals
>   Thrill through those roofless halls:
> The oracular thunder, penetrating, shook
>   The listening soul in the suspended blood;—
> I felt that Earth out of her deep heart spoke,
>   I felt, but heard not—through white columns glowed
>   The isle-sustaining Ocean-flood,
> A plane of light between two Heaven's of azure!
> (ll. 1-11)

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[75] All "Ode to Naples" quotations are taken from Rossington's diplomatic transcription of the Ogden MS (the copy-text for the two printed versions of the poem).

[76] The gloss that pins the meaning of the line to "Pompeii" has been equally printed and omitted.

Shelley insists twice that he "heard" something, but then retracts: "I felt, but heard not."

In his interchange with the universe of things, *feeling* (shorthand here for all modes of

sensation) has gotten in the way of a truer kind of hearing.

Hearing becomes the issue – as in "…as I am listening now" from "To a Sky-

Lark" – as this epode crescendos into silence:

> Around me gleamed many a bright sepulcher,
> Of whose pure beauty, Time, as if his pleasure
> Were to spare Death, had never made erasure,
>   But every living lineament was clear
>   As in the sculptor's thought, & there
> The wreaths of stony myrtle ivy & pine
> Like winter leaves o'ergrown by moulded snow
>   Seemed only not to move & grow
> Because the chrystal silence of the air
>   Weighed on their life, even as the Power divine
>   Which then lulled all things, brooded upon mine!
> (ll. 12-22)

Typically lyrical sensuous observation is here replaced by depiction of a different kind of

natural world, where there is no cycle of life and death, but where the two seem united in

purpose, fused by images of wroughtness. Where the West Wind defers to a cyclical

sense of seasons (and its ode to a cyclical sense of form), here Shelley seems to occupy

two seasons simultaneously: autumn (l. 2) and winter (l. 18). The surroundings are

unmoving, not because they have been singed to death by volcanic ash, but because an

as-yet unnamed divinity has yet to pronounce judgment on their fate. The judicial sense

of "weighed on" is confirmed in the final line of the epode, where Shelley says that "the

Power divine … *brooded upon*" his life. Decidedly, this reverses the circumstances in

"Mont Blanc," as it also marks Shelley's general abandonment of Romantic "brooding."

Though his "suspended blood" recalls Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey," the crucial difference is that Shelley's is not "a living soul," but a "listening soul."

In the Naples ode, Shelley no longer speaks as a supplicant but listens as a visionary. The second epode, in its real-time narration of Shelley's Aeolian transport, realizes that moment of inspiration, which in the West Wind ode was only the object of "prayer." Shelley begins to hear again:

> Louder & louder gathering round, there wandered
>   Over the oracular woods & divine sea
>   Prophesyings which grew articulate;
>   They seize me,—I must speak them!—be they fate!
> (ll. 48-51)

This "transport" is not just that of an enraptured visionary; Shelley must also make his way from Pompeii to Naples. He does so right after this line: the next stanza, Strophe I, begins "Naples!" Shelley's Pindaric strategy begins to emerge, in that the defining characteristic of the Pindaric is its sudden transition between topics. This dynamic, announced by the ode's strophe-antistrophe-epode format, simultaneously respects and collapses the distance between ideas. While the particular abiding concern of the Pindaric (from Pindar on) has been the fusion of occasion and eternity, the form powerfully lends itself to any kind of thematic division and resolve. Shelley uses the Naples ode to wonder about not just occasion and eternity, but death and life, natural and divine, speaking and hearing, lyric and prophecy, and – at this moment – Pompeii and Naples.

In leaping from Pompeii to Naples, Shelley is delivered into the present, jolted out of the timelessness of the first two epodes. In *beginning* with epodes, Shelley is tinkering with the idea of synthesis intimated by the "stand" or stasis that the epode has come to

represent in English odic tradition. He questions the notion of resolution and pushes the poem instead into another round. The occasion is Naples' political nothingness: "Thou which wert once & then did cease to be" (l. 62). Shelley questions the reversibility of this: "[Thou] Now art & henceforth ever shalt be, free;/ If Hope & Truth & Justice can avail" (ll. 63-64). Though the subsequent strophes and antistrophes detail the advance of "Hope & Truth & Justice" as they make their way through other countries and cities in recent political history, the Naples ode is still not quite a progress poem, as Shelley consistently calls attention to the reversibility of occasion, simply through time's onward march. The subsequent section of strophes and antistrophes ritually enacts the dialectical struggle between good and evil. To conclude the strophe/antistrophe section, Shelley considers the example of Rome: "As then Hope Truth & Justice did avail/ So now may Fraud & Wrong! All Hail!" (l. 125-126).

This strange juxtaposition announces the direction of the concluding epodes, which seem to stall the confident advance of "Hope Truth & Justice." Chaos, the antagonistic, dissonant force absent from Shelley's earlier poetry, enters:

> See ye the banners blazoned to the day
>   Inwrought with emblems of barbaric pride?
> Their dissonant threats kill Silence far away!
>   The innocent Heaven which wraps our Eden wide
>   With iron light is dyed!
> The Anarchs of the North lead forth their legions
>   Like Chaos o'er Creation, uncreating;
>   ……………………………………….
> Blotting the glowing footsteps of lost glory,
> Trampling our columned cities into dust,
>   Their dull & savage lust
> On Beauty's corse to sickness satiating,

> They come; the fields they tread look black & hoary
> With fire—from their red feet the streams run gory.
> (ll. 132-138, 143-148)

Chaos works through a kind of marking or writing: banners, blazons, emblems, dye, blots. Like any good visionary, Shelley will try to stain the water clear. The final epode launches into a bitter curse:

> Spirit of Beauty! at whose soft command
> The sunbeams & the showers distil its foizon
> From the Earth's bosom chill!
> O bid those beams be each a blinding brand
> Of Lightning! bid those showers be dews of poison
> Bid the Earth's plenty kill!
> Bid thy bright Heaven above
> Whilst Light & Darkness bound it
> Be *their* tomb, who planned
> To make it our's & thine!
> (ll. 155-164)

The beginning language resembles that of the Spanish ode: figuratively mitigated, an effete metaphysical conjuring. But "Bid the Earth's plenty kill!" is atypically direct for Shelley, in that it is realizable in several ways – the explosion of a volcano or of an angry mob; a flood – catastrophes that have been and could be again.

Remarkably, the curse turns again by turning optional:

> Or, with thine harmonizing ardours fill
> And raise thy sons
> (ll. 165-166)

And finally, as the ode concludes, the curse builds into a prophetic release:

> Whatever, Spirit! from thy starry shrine
> Thou yieldest or withholdest, oh let be
> This City of thy worship, ever free!
> (ll. 174-176)

Shelley surrenders here to the interpretive infinite: "Whatever, Spirit!" Even as it ends, the Pindaric does not recognize closure, and so perfectly suits Shelley's intricate, difficult idea of progress. In essence this is an *artistic* progress, upon which all other forms of progress – political, spiritual, or (in the Wordsworthian sense Abrams insists upon) lyrical – must model themselves. Even Chaos in its march must nourish itself on beauty (l. 146).

In the *Defence*, Shelley says that "All high poetry is infinite … Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed."[77] Through his manuscript elimination of the introductory epodes, Shelley attempts such an undrawing, but the "o'er-Creation" of his ode still stands: strophe, strophe, antistrophe, antistrophe, antistrophe, antistrophe, epode, epode. As Shelley's ody questions the relationship between poetry's beauty and its body ("Beauty's corse"), as well as what this relationship means for poetry's "course" through the literary future, he predicts his odes' standing in the literary corpus. As the "Be thou me" of Shelley's first ode becomes the "be they fate!" of his last, he turns aside from High Romantic individualism, as well as from the canonicity thereof. The "Ode to Naples" is the most overdone of all Romantic odes, yet somehow also the most obscure, unexposed. As it culminates in its own silencing,

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[77] *SPP*, 528.

Shelley has achieved a being "ever free" that is born of his return to and deepening into form. This poet of hope thus reveals the tremendous potential energy of the ode.

CHAPTER 2. TENNYSON'S SUBLIMED ODES

> **He does not like to have his few lines called an Ode. An ode must be a free song and not written because asked for and as asked for and besides the fact of his having written the lines was not to be mentioned.**
> **—Emily Tennyson, December 10, 1861**[78]

2.1 Introduction

Tennyson was about as likely to strike "ode" from a poem's title as he was to include it. In draft, "The Fall of Jerusalem" and "The Progress of Spring" were labeled odes, but the poems lost the designation by the time they were printed. More than thirty years after these were composed, Emily Tennyson records her husband's objection to having the "Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition" classified as such, a circumstance that seems related to the fact that Tennyson never considered that poem finished. A still later poem, though first printed in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1887 as "Carmen Saeculare. An Ode In Honour of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria," was simply entitled "On the Jubilee of Queen Victoria" in Tennyson's final edition. While the early "Ode: O Bosky Brook" got to keep its title, it was doubly abandoned: unfinished and unpublished. The same fate awaited the aptly titled "Ode to Reticence" of 1857/1869. Odes-in-title that did see the light of day were few and far between: "Time: An Ode" (1827), "Ode to Memory" (1830), and "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"

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[78] *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1987), II: 288n. Hereafter cited as *Letters*.

(1852). The first of these was not reprinted in the final edition; the second was classified

there among "Juvenilia." Effectively, then, Tennyson only ever wrote one ode – a fact

that bespeaks an esteem for the form as high as the Victorian nation's esteem for the

Duke, at the same time that it seals the ode's doom in the received critical history of the

form's rarefaction into the later nineteenth century and beyond.

The quotation from Emily offers a tantalizing glimpse of Tennyson's problematic

algorithm for the form he barely wrote. With its peculiar insistence that odes are *not* to be

"written because asked for and as asked for," the comment seems squarely to

misunderstand how the ode form has functioned historically, at the same time that it

misrepresents the compositional circumstance, nine years earlier, of *The* Ode, as well as

that poem's consummate trope – i.e., laureate transaction. Though the Queen did not in

fact ask for the Wellington ode, Tennyson once confessed, "I wrote it because it was

expected of me."[79] He revised the poem for similar reasons,[80] and the poem itself figures

his utterance as "a voice, with which to pay the debt" (l. 156).[81] "Wellington," by all

accounts then, was one owed ode, and if this fact effaces it from Tennyson's ode canon

according to his own criteria, the count dwindles to zero – a number that Tennyson might

very well have been comfortable with, given his high standards for the form, and a

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[79] *Letters* II: 50.

[80] Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., "The History of a Poem: Tennyson's Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," *Studies in Bibliography* 13 (1960): 149–177.

[81] *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Tennyson's poetry are taken from this edition, hereafter cited as *Poems*.

number at which literary critics in his century and in the last have been content to rest. Thomas Carlyle, for example, weighed in on the Wellington ode by saying, "Tennyson's verses are naught. Silence alone is respectable on such an occasion."[82] Fry cognizantly omits the Wellington ode.[83] Critical figurations such as these – which posit the ode's nonbeing, which make it a present absence – complement Tennyson's general caginess about the form: "I dare not write an Ode," begins an unpublished early poem of his.

If England's most successful Poet Laureate dared not write an ode, who could or ought? The rhetorical question has prevailed, in that Tennyson's resistance to the form has served as a convenient chapter-closer in a variety of critical contexts. For Tennyson scholars, the ode belongs neatly to his apprentice phase, but it is not the form to bear his individual talent beyond the tradition.[84] When in later decades he dusts off the form to memorialize Wellington or to deliver other Laureate pieces, it more emphatically marks

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[82] Quoted in Charles Richard Sanders, "Carlyle and Tennyson," *PMLA* 76, no. 1 (March 1961): 90.

[83] "I have no sufficient excuse for not having extended my study to include the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,' which, together with Marvell's Cromwell Ode, I most regret having omitted" (*Poet's Calling*, 322n.).

[84] J. F. A. Pyre notes Tennyson's "irregular" tendency; in evaluating it, his peppering of other choice adjectives ("unsystematic," "wild," "capricious," "irresponsible," "very imperfect") reveals he felt Tennyson had a lot to learn, prosodically (*The Formation of Tennyson's Style: A Study, Primarily, of the Versification of the Early Poems*, University of Wisconsin Studies 12 [Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1921], 23–34). Alicia Ostriker argues that from 1830 to 1842 Tennyson "composed in three distinct modes ... 'irregular' or 'ode,' 'stanzaic,' and 'sustained'" (273), and that he developed between these formal divisions chronologically ("The Three Modes in Tennyson's Prosody," *PMLA* 82, no. 2 [May 1, 1967]: 273–284). Robert Pattison says, "Tennyson was willing to tackle the classical forms even while he pondered how to get beyond the tradition. But the ode was not to be the formal vehicle for this leap" (*Tennyson and Tradition*, 41).

his oft-lamented reversion to old values, both poetic and political. For genre theorists, Tennyson fundamentally misunderstands the ode, and his work within it tends to deaden the form's inherent lyricism by replacing it with moralizing and political argument.[85] For ode historians, Tennyson is the outer edge of their scope. Usually no poet after Shelley or Keats is treated at all,[86] and if a Patmore or a Swinburne does make the cut, his ode use is deemed "intolerably stilted and portentous."[87]

Throughout much of this criticism there runs a common theme, that the ode is a poetic embarrassment by the time – or perhaps because – Tennyson gets his hands on it. Dusty diction and formal heft that are not sustained by imagination betray the fresh gains of the Romantics, while the ode's flaccidity is ill-fated given the imminent precision of the Modernists. Still in our collective critical memory is Jonathan Culler's confession about the "genuine embarrassment" of apostrophe, that trademark mechanism of the ode

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[85] Andrew Fichter contends that "The Progress of Spring" (composed 1833, revised 1889) "weigh[s] its language with a moralistic sentiment that seems alien to visionary aesthetics," and that the poem "ultimately represents a challenge to the aesthetics of the ode by allowing moral and political argument to displace lyricism" ("Ode and Elegy: Idea and Form in Tennyson's Early Poetry," *ELH* 40, no. 3 [Autumn 1973]: 410–411).

[86] As in Fry, and also in Kurt Schlüter (*Die englische Ode: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung unter dem Einfluss der antiken Hymne* [Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1964]). Though Robert Eisenhauer does bring the ode into the twenty-first century, he deals with Tennyson as negative illumination for more sustained discussions of Dickinson or Yeats. When he does manage to glance at what Tennyson formally bestows upon "Ode Consciousness," Eisenhauer finds it more relevant to give honorable mentions to elegy, dramatic monologue, and (of all things) the *qasida* (*Ode Consciousness*).

[87] Jump, *The Ode*, 52. John Heath-Stubbs calls the Victorian-era ode a "purely formal" "survival" with "no further room for development" (*The Ode*, 98).

(and a device Tennyson used in many poems, ode or not).[88] Even Fry, the ode's most

thorough advocate, notes that

> [t]o write an ode is to honor the company of fools: court hacks, windy curates,
> triflers with nature, versifiers upon milady's fan – laureates, in short. The very
> word "ode" … has been enough to call down journalistic ridicule from antiquity
> to the present.[89]

Fry's point is readily taken when we read, for example, these lines from Tennyson's

Jubilee ode –

> Fifty years of ever-broadening Commerce!
> Fifty years of ever-brightening Science!
> Fifty years of ever-widening Empire!
> (ll. 52-54)

– and recognize in them not rapt celebration of Victorian success, but drab collusion with

Victorian excess.

It is this kind of collusion that Anna Barton confronts in her revaluation of the

Wellington ode, as she reads its "massive surface" alongside the other materialist

pageantry of the Victorian funereal-industrial complex. Barton too calls the ode

embarrassing, though she registers the observation with two major differences: that

Tennyson shares in the sentiment, and that this is a function of its modernity rather than

its archaism. "Wellington," she says, is "a poem painfully aware of its newness,

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[88] "Apostrophe," *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 1977): 60.

[89] *Poet's Calling*, 9–10.

embarrassed by, and with little confidence in, its magnificent surfaces."[90] By framing "embarrassment" as the self-critical reaction of the poet, instead of as a critical reaction to him, Barton redirects the discussion in productive ways. Embarrassment, as an intended affect, aligns better with the critically axiomatic Tennysonian self-consciousness, the cultural resonance of which authorizes Barton to read Tennyson's ode not as outmoded hearkening, but as an attempt to express the zeitgeist with a formal correlative.

In this light, it becomes possible to discuss a poetry of embarrassment that is quite apart from embarrassing poetry. Given embarrassment's etymological origins as *encumbrance*, we might say that a poetry of embarrassment works precisely because it is "too much." The excess of the Wellington ode, critics from Carlyle to Barton would agree, has to do with the poem's surpluses of sonority and of stanza. I would add that Tennyson not only commits this excess, but commits to it. In its method, the poem outdoes the values of the man it praises, a man who was "greatest yet with least pretence" (l. 29) and "In his simplicity sublime" (l. 34). Neither simple nor unpretentious, Tennyson's verses modify the Wordsworthian aesthetic by amplifying it: a man speaking stentoriously to men. A pageantry about pageantry, the poem is not merely burdensome, but burden-summoning. This feature is consummately odic and, Barton suggests, modern: "the embarrassment with which Tennyson's ode resonates is our own" (8).

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[90] "'Eternal Honour to His Name': Tennyson's Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington and Victorian Memorial Aesthetics," *Victorian Newsletter* no. 106 (2004): 6.

A similar intuition about the ode's modern promise (that is, as a function of its abashed formal extravagance) informs Fry's study of the entire genre:

> It is not least the purpose of this book to show how poetic forms overburden what might be called the conscience of discourse. The strain is most apparent where the forms chosen are most extravagant, and it is from this correlation that the special nature of the ode appears. One reason why I shall not carry this study beyond the Romantic period (to include, for example, some consideration of Tennyson) is that increasingly during the nineteenth century, as doubt and self-consciousness more and more openly marked the artistic intelligence in general, so also the element of form in poetry came to be more and more openly experimental, more self-justifying than hitherto, and hence the form of all poetry came to serve the subversive function that it had once served … most notably in the ode.[91]

In the dominant critical narrative, the ode becomes nothing, because it's too much. Fry intimates that, for the same reason (its "overburdens," its "self-consciousness"), the ode becomes "*all* poetry." Surely a compromise is in order. Otherwise we are left having to account for a paradoxical process whereby a poetic form – by virtue of its flexibility and capaciousness, and at the height of its aptitude for representing a cultural and "artistic intelligence" – simply vanishes. For, as we have seen, that "self-justifying" ode has not spoken for itself, and the new poetic subtending it has proven powerless to be born.

One aim of this chapter therefore will be to specify Fry's sweeping pronouncement, to demonstrate just how it is that the ode – against the backdrop of the nineteenth century's generic disarray – does not simply disperse, but becomes elemental.

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[91] *Poet's Calling*, 36.

Fry's *en passant* reference to Tennyson as he signals this process is no coincidence. The ode, as Shelley and Keats leave it in 1820, is formally perfect, highly personal, and sublime in tone and content. Tennyson, resuming the form in the same decade, increasingly contravenes these cues, and by 1830 his production is precisely opposed to each of these three Romantic developments: his forms are irregular and asymmetric, his perspectives deflect a sense of self, and his imagination is directed earthward. That these descriptions apply to much of Tennyson's poetry from 1830 onward – ode and otherwise – complicates the business of a Tennyson ode study, but it begins to demonstrate Fry's point. Whereas Shelley, as we saw in the last chapter, transacts with the ode all inside of twelve months, Tennyson makes a career of it. The specific truth of this claim is evident in the vocational silver bullet that is the Wellington ode and in all the laureate mother-loding to which that poem gives rise; and it is operative in Tennyson's ambitious apprentice indulgence in the form – viz. the copyist sublime-speak pervading *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), in which he outodes even the eighteenth-century odes. However, the general truth of the claim faces a great divide in the two decades separating these phases, during which there is not only Tennyson's express moratorium on the form, but also the heady lyricism – the entirely different mode of poetry – that emerges in its stead, that supplants it without appearing to have evolved from it.

I propose that this break is not so clean, that the ode for Tennyson is a form neither abruptly shed in 1830 nor facilely resuscitated in 1852, and that his great lyrical poiesis of the meantime is more richly understood as a complementary function of his "countergeneric" attack on the ode. I take this term from Stuart Curran who, in *Poetic*

Form and British Romanticism, uses the notion to convey the complex dynamics of the generic component of poetic influence:

> We have inherited the myth of a radical generic breakdown in European Romanticism that in fact never happened ... an entrenched belief that Romanticism was inherently suspicious of, even hostile to, traditional literary forms, thus divorcing itself from history, from continuities of Western literature, and from the conceptual syntax that encodes them. ... In a countergenre the received generic tradition is subjected to such a radical deconstruction that the result constitutes virtually a new form, its attributes soon claiming the integrity of generic conventions for subsequent writers.[92]

We have seen in the last chapter how Shelley's engagement with the ode in fact succeeds this "divorce," and how his irreconcilable differences with the genre (evident in the multiform convergence/generic smokescreen of "Ode to the West Wind") have him quickly building into poems that are – increasingly and intractably – odes. Curran's claim is thus tested and proven in the literary era around which it is framed (and, we assume, from which it evolved).[93] Poets of the Victorian era would insist – less mythically and more strenuously – on that divorce. We can see Tennyson anticipating this even before

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[92] *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 4–6.

[93] Though not exactly in the way Curran does it in the "Hymn and Ode" chapter of his study. The "received generic tradition" against which Shelley works is, he argues, by and large the hymn. Curran does make some fascinating formulations about the "virtual novelty" achieved through/in spite of the odic gravitational well – as he says, for example, that in the Romantic ode "a Horatian voice was invested in a Pindaric form" (71), and "strophe and antistrophe become almost indistinguishable" (79) – but the credit for these accomplishments goes to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron.

England becomes officially Victorian in 1837; in "Ode to Memory" he figures his arranged marriage to the ode in Keatsian terms –

> Large dowries doth the raptured eye
>   To the young spirit present
>   When first she is wed;
>   And like a bride of old
>   In triumph led,
>   With music and sweet showers
>   Of festal flowers,
>   Unto the dwelling she must sway.
> (ll. 72-79)

– while also fooling around with the Wordsworthian (i.e. irregular) form of the genre. As Tennyson leaves the safe intimacy with Keats to take on the Intimations of Wordsworth, it is clear that, while his "deconstruction" of the ode is without doubt a function of his anxiety about Romantic formal influence, it must also be seen in all its refluence – that is, the talking-back to past forms even as he accommodates them – or they him, as "Unto the dwelling []he must sway."

Tennyson's particular reason for fretting about his odic doom is based not in narrow-room formal issues – the irregular ode is a veritable free-for-all by his time – but rather the voice invested therein, "the raptured [I]" of Romantic subjectivity. The ode would remain a monumental structure in Tennyson's poetryscape, but all fundamentally mystical ambitions that it heretofore served – those of the Romantics and of Tennyson himself – would have to be checked at the door.[94] Thus Tennyson would put asunder

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[94] As we will see in the next chapter, Pound too will confess the artifice of Longinian communion, the direct access to the divine vision, the being called-upon by "the swirlers out of the mist of my soul,/ They

what Ode had joined together – voice that was its own occasion, lyrical solipsism

indistinct from dramatic outwardness – and this riving would result in two kinds of

"virtually new forms." First are the vaunted lyrics of 1830 and 1832, the *ex nihilo* poiesis

of which it is expedient to assume, especially given Tennyson's own apocryphal claim

about their origins: "evolved, like the camel, from my own consciousness."[95] I will argue

that the ode's "conceptual syntax" leaves its imprint on the lyrics, which are often erected

upon Pindaric ruins. The second "virtually new form" sees Tennyson unabashedly return

to the hypertrophic (and hyper-strophic) version of the ode, to amplify the voices cast

from within the lyrics (or cast aside by them) – the ruptured not raptured I's – and to

contain them within the same ostensibly single text.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

This longest of my chapters owes its expansiveness to the ode's immensity within

as well as its apparitional plaguing throughout Tennyson's poetic career. Its general

chronological arc will trace the principal phases of Tennyson's ode practice: apprentice

indulgence in, journeyman antagonisms of and by, laureate mastery of. I treat almost all

of Tennyson's named (and de-named/re-named) odes, but I also dare to read his unnamed

odes, even as I involve still other poems that name odes – that objectify the genre that he

could not bring himself to inhabit subjectively. May the following précis of the five

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that come me-wards bearing old magic" (*In Durance*, ll. 21-22). The purities of the ode will be encased but preserved by its excesses.

[95] *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Hallam Tennyson, Eversley ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1908), I: 663n.

sections serve as a primer to these various major ideas that will be put into play and variously reconfigured throughout this chapter.

Shelley's discrete foray into the ode presupposed that the form was a tidy subgenre of lyric, or perhaps that they were the same thing. As Tennyson arrives on the poetic scene – as one of Shelley's "subsequent writers," perhaps[96] – he doesn't seem to be making much of a distinction either: the overdrive of *Poems by Two Brothers*, itself a volume-long ode to the ode, signals that the ode had indeed already become "all poetry," in that nearly all Tennyson's poetic impulses were getting channeled through and into odes and odic poems. In the first section of this chapter ("Ody/O.D."), I demonstrate that Tennyson's engagement with the ode is not at all as scarce as his title-grooming and anthological gerrymandering would have us believe, and that Tennyson's grounding in the ode is profound enough always to figure in his grounding of it. Essentially Tennysonian effects of voice and structure may be traced not only to his early encounters with pre-Romantic and Romantic odes, but to the more fundamental formal stratum of irregularity, a property whose powerful poetic dynamics Tennyson even as a boy recognized: massive yet immaterial, overdone yet vanishing.

Every ode that Tennyson entitles such, no matter the decade, is irregular, and this bespeaks a strong correspondence between the genre and this formal feature. Irregularity could produce more than just odes; much of Tennyson's lyrical output also negotiates this

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[96] Tennyson's 1827 poems "Exhortation to the Greeks" and "Written During the Convulsions in Spain" are based on events which Shelley had oded in the very same decade. The Spanish odes are remarkably similar in form.

irregular and thus odic burden. In the second section, "Mel-ody," I demonstrate that Tennyson's lyrics are actually spin-offs, by and large the product of – if not an odic core – an odic centrifuge. As Pindaric stance is converted to stanza, and as the ecstatic odic subject is muted, it becomes clear that Tennyson discovers his lyrics through a precise dismantling of the ode (rather than after an abandonment of it). Tennyson's achievement in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* is that he makes good on the generic announcement of the title, begins to pry apart lyric and odic modes, and so effects a sea change between 1827 and 1830 – or, as many critics would have it, between 1827 and everything after. Indeed, odic and lyric dichotomize so readily in discussions of the usual Tennysonian thematics – surface and depth, decorum and sincerity, public and private, civic and solitary – that it's tempting to read Tennyson's valuation of the latter poetry over the former (or to share the general critical exasperation when he, in laureate years, prefers the former over the latter).

Yet, in walking back the ode, Tennyson still must tread the same ground, and this is where the counter-turn comes in his countergenre. In the third section, "Palinody," I study how Tennyson turns the entanglement with the poetic past to his advantage. The most systematic and sustained dismantling comes in the "Ode to Memory," which is not only a takedown of Wordsworth's sublime Intimations ode, but a mild retraction of the subliminal poetic Tennyson was simultaneously perfecting in "Mariana." I will argue that "Ode to Memory" and "Mariana" are companion poems, and that the "Ode" neglects its generic charge while "Mariana" becomes a third-person ode.

In the fourth section, "Para-ody," I examine Tennyson's refashioning of the ode, as he resumes unfinished business with it. The ode has always served as an opportunity to partake culturally and become its own poetic occasion. To use the ode in this way, Tennyson reclaims the visibility that had been lost through his melodic and palinodic diversions of the form. Because irregularity had become the poetic idiom through Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, Tennyson had to find other ways of producing abnormality, in order to signal the ode's excessiveness. J. Culler, discussing apostrophe and, metonymically, the ode, notes the paradoxical tension here: "to the Romantics apostrophe was natural and insignificant; to us it is wholly artificial and insignificant."[97] The ode's insignificance is inevitable at either extreme of the poetic cycle: the crest of prosodic pluralism, the trough of prosodic essentialism. Tennyson is caught in the middle, between the Romantics and "us," though it is his role as a middleman that teaches him to extract his equivocational poetic. Seeing himself in and out of the ode, Tennyson's antagonisms both of and by the form become a poetic circumstance that has consequences for the lyric subject.

Tennyson presupposes the poet's estrangement from his expression, posits it as a circumstance of his composition and as a fact or theme of the poems themselves. This dynamic has been understood before more generally as his frame technique, or as Isobel Armstrong phrases it, the "lyric within the lyric."[98] I want to adapt this critical concept for specific connection to the ode, but instead of thinking of a lyric as "within" another –

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[97] "Apostrophe," 60.

[98] *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 84.

instead of thinking that one lyrical subject is more central or essential to a Tennysonian

self – I suggest that Tennyson is producing lyric above and beyond lyric, or "para-ody."

Tennyson's ultralyricism is not confined to the ode, but it is a poetic born of and

developed through Tennyson's arbitrations with the genre. "The Lotos-Eaters" is the

ultimate in a series of "island poems" that sail around the odic mainland while still taking

their bearings from it. The island poems mark Tennyson's developing confidence in a

larger-level formal irregularity, which through his program of odic variegation and

mutation he distances himself from Romantic organicism and ideals about unities of

form. *The Princess*, more famous for the lyrics "within" than for the blank-verse

narrative that it is, represents an obverse case study. Formally, the poem is

undifferentiated, which makes it all the more interesting that the poem brandishes an

anxiety about odes, but harbors them nonetheless.

By the time of the Wellington ode, the ultralyrical stance is a well-formed and

well-informed consequence of a lifelong study of the ode, an all-in dare through which

Tennyson could prove himself not free *of* the ode but free *within* it. In this light, I will

reassess his insistence that the Wellington ode was "nothing of the kind" of poem the

Victorian nation would expect from its Laureate. "[I]t was written from genuine

admiration of the man"[99] and thus was more in line with the ideal notion of the ode, as

articulated by *The Illustrated London News*: "not hurried by the pressure of

circumstances, but a free offering from the soul of the poet."[100] Tennyson's own

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[99] Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son* (London: Macmillan, 1905), 756.
[100] Quoted in Barton, "Eternal Honour," 5.

statement about the ode, ten years into the laureateship, echoes this language of freedom: "An ode must be a free song." But naïve ideals about the ode's (or any poem's) spontaneity and autonomy are laced with the wry skepticism typical of Tennyson's critical apologias. Any form that "must be … free" is, of course, already overdetermined. In a final section, "The Free Ode," I explore the ode's transformation in Tennyson's hands as – against fading notions of a transhistorical genre – he turns the overdetermined and overconspicuous form into a largely unrecognizable – that is to say, new – poetry. Tennyson's free offering comes not in the ode as such, but in the form (literally) of *Maud*, a poem that – though itself a frenzied mixture of odic passion, recanting, melody, para-ody –neither lives nor dies by its odic conceit. Irregular at points throughout, and also wholly or macroscopically irregular, *Maud* achieves a high visibility, which is the consequence of having a largely invisible form, which is perhaps a vanishing act all great (i.e., canonical) poems must pull off.

2.2 Ody (O.D.)

For the man who said that he'd "over-dosed" on Horace,[101] a poetics of excess invites understanding in odic terms. But about Horace, and Horace's English avatar Keats, Tennyson said they were "great masters, not my masters."[102] Not having to pledge poetic allegiance to any master was important to Tennyson, especially in his formative

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[101] *Memoir*, 13.

[102] *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 407.

years. Touchy about imitation,[103] he needed only to turn to the other main branch of the

ode – the irregular, or Pindaric – in order to find accommodation in its pluralism,

liminality, and anonymity. The irregular ode had so many masters – Cowley, Gray,

Joseph Warton, Thomson, Collins, Wordsworth, and Shelley – that it belonged to no one,

and so the irregular ode was initially a voice with which to escape debts, long before it

became a voice with which to pay them.

At the same time, the ode – especially in the hands of Gray, Warton, and Collins –

was the quintessential medium for figuring poetic inheritance, and Tennyson was,

seemingly, heir apparent. In the 1827 volume and before, Tennyson's phrasings and

topics are so often gleaned from their odes, and there is generally such a great deal of

vatic pronunciation about greater themes, that it is difficult to see beyond the copyist

sublime-speak and recognize Tennyson making an ode of his own. Yet his ode workshop

wasn't just a way to prove himself poetically, but more particularly served as a poetic

proving ground. There are glimmers of innovation throughout *Poems by Two Brothers*,

and practices that will become essentially Tennysonian are being worked out through the

ode: he diverts the visionary mode into the phenomenal or descriptive; he disperses the

unilateral origins of voice by refusing his poems a personal center; he hits upon some

prototypes of the frame technique; and he cultivates a rich tension between regular and

irregular forms.

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[103] Pattison, in his first chapter, "Tennyson and the Uses of Tradition," details the poet's sensitivity to
critical estimations that labeled him imitative, or even merely allusive (*Tennyson and Tradition*).

2.2.1 "Time: An Ode"

We observe Tennyson cutting his teeth on the form in "Time: An Ode." Despite a first-person send-off of "I see … I see …" (ll. 1, 5), Tennyson soon abandons the personal perspective, so that the poem becomes simply a blazon of the personified Time, without a word from the speaker about what he wants from the entity he invokes. For the final strophe, the speaker falls entirely silent, as the apostrophized Time speaks back. This is despite the fact that earlier epithets peg Time as "voiceless" (l. 6), "noiseless" (l. 14), and inaudible (l. 30). There are other technical inconsistencies involving voice and perspective: Time refers to himself in the third person (l. 71),[104] and the poem's speaker says "Ye" when he probably means "We" (l. 30). These glitches are no doubt simply a function of Tennyson's juvenile poetic exercise, but we might recognize the lack of a perspectival center as an accident of technique that he will eventually embrace and stylize.

In a note to "Time," Tennyson says that he is "indebted for the idea of Death's Armour to that famous Chorus in *Caractacus*,"[105] William Mason's "Dramatic Poem" of 1759. Tennyson's comment obscures the extent of his debt, which consists less in the borrowed image than in the dramatic context from which he extracts the ode. In *Caractacus*, which is written in blank verse, Pindaric odes come in at four points as lyrical interludes and, according to Mason's direction in the front matter, are a special type of chorus to be sung by the Bard characters. Generally, the songs are dream visions

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[104] Either this, or Fame is speaking in the last strophe, in which case she is mis-gendered at line 61.

[105] *Poems*, I: 132n.

or prophecies about the eventual political and poetic supremacy of Britain. As such, they run counter to the momentum of the play's dramatic action, which depicts the British chieftain's noble but failed attempts to stave off Roman conquest. It is the lyrical, sung quality of Mason's odes that attracts Tennyson to them, but it is the recalcitrance of the lyric – the way that lyricism insists on being there, despite what is going on around it dramatically – that promises most for Tennyson to come.

"Dramatic Poem" was the same subtitle Milton had given *Samson Agonistes*, the choruses of which provided Tennyson another precedent for irregularity (not, by Milton's own account, of Pindaric origins). Sharing his impressions with an aunt in what his son called his earliest "literary epistle," Tennyson, at the age of 12, says, "To an English reader the metre of the Chorus may seem unusual, but the difficulty will vanish, when I inform him that it is taken from the Greek."[106] Tennyson's ideas about irregular verse follow Milton's own foreword about it:

> The measure of Verse us'd in the Chorus is of all sorts, call'd by the Greeks *Monostrophic*, or rather *Apolelymenon*, without regard had to *Strophe*, *Antistrophe* or *Epod*, which were a kind of Stanza's fram'd only for the Music, then us'd with the Chorus that sung; not essential to the Poem, and therefore not material.[107]

Tennyson's comment about the "vanishing" irregular meter parallels Milton's, that it is inessential or immaterial to the dramatic action. Alert early to poetic range and

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[106] *Memoir*, 6.

[107] *The Works of John Milton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), I.2: 332.

possibility, Tennyson demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to lyrical space and dramatic space, as well as a Shelleyan fascination that keeps pitting them against one another anyway. The result is a voice of poetic defiance that becomes marked in a historical space of deference, "a survival of the lyric voice within forms that erode its autonomy."[108] In ventriloquizing powerless bards whose singing is a function of defeat, Tennyson repeatedly has the lyric voice undermined by the historical or scriptural context. Yet such frameworks are the only thing keeping the rookie poetic voice aloft. The fear that his lyrics, and his poetic utterances at large, are immaterial never dissipates, but the fact that their authorizing contexts – the props of the "dramatic poem" – fall away by the next volume indicates Tennyson's growing confidence in the potency and potential of irregularity. His poetics in the next volume will aggrandize the irregularity, even as the poems become more ostensibly and purely "lyrical."

This framed lyricism will of course become a quintessential Tennysonian poetic. Its first explicit manifestation, the dissenting choral voice in "The Lotos-Eaters," is still five years away, and his ultimate manifestation of it (*Maud*) is almost thirty years away. For now, his interest is in inhabiting forceful, assured utterance, and this he does primarily in the form of the prophetic curse. Throughout the 1827 volume, Tennyson (monotonously dramatic, if not quite yet "monodramatic") repeatedly returns to a situation, in which a singer sings out on the verge of catastrophic cultural transition or collapse: "Persia," "The Druid's Prophecies," "God's Denunciations Against Pharaoh-

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[108] Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," 206.

Hophra," "The Fall of Jerusalem," "Lamentation of the Peruvians," "The High-Priest to

Alexander," "Babylon," and "Exhortation to the Greeks." These poems are meticulously

differentiated in form and historical subject, but Tennyson was taking such pains perhaps

to cover for the fact that the poetic voice behind them was the same, i.e., merely his – and

not much more than the abstracted non-voice behind "Time: An Ode." Tennyson homes

in on these historical and scriptural situations, because he is more comfortable with their

tried outcomes, and because there isn't room in these greater themes for a personal

perspective. Deferred, deflected voice is an intuitive if not intentional project of *Poems*

by Two Brothers, a collaborative volume that was published anonymously. Tennyson

proves poetic vocation not by standing out or up against poetic history, but by happily

colluding with it, ventriloquizing through its forms – the ode foremost among them,

especially as its apostrophism allows Tennyson to defer the issue of voice formation.

This impersonality will, in the next volume, evolve into his more successful

Keatsian impersonation – i.e., "his power," as Arthur Hallam describes it, "of embodying

himself in ideal characters."[109] For now, however, Tennyson deflects that embodiment,

thematizing the fragility of perspective, burnishing a lyrical texture that makes for a

brittle poem. Lyrical attention (and attenuation) is additionally afoot in this volume as

ode trumps episode. Remarkably, the catastrophe that urges the utterance never occurs

within the space of the poem. In a volume that is thoroughly odic, that even writes odes

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[109] "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," in *The Writings of Arthur Hallam*, ed. T. H. Vail Motter (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1943), 191. Hereafter cited as "On Modern Poetry."

to the odic feeling in "On Sublimity," one wonders how the one ode so-called garners the title. "Time: An Ode" commits to no occasion, equivocates about the very fabric of occasion: time is everything and nothing. Time literally has the last word in this ode, but his last word promises that he won't have the last word against the perpetuity of Fame:

> "Live ye!" to these he crieth; "live!
> "To ye eternity I give –
> ....
> "Live, when imperial Time and Death himself shall die!"
> (ll. 61-62, 71)

The ode is purged of historical content, and the resulting abstracted odeness pervades the volume, despite all the historical specification of the other poems.

Taken together, six of the woe-to-the-conquerors poems might have formed a neatly transitive progress sequence. Egypt falls to Babylon ("Denunciations"); Babylon falls to Persia ("Babylon"); Persia falls to Alexander ("Persia"); Alexander is instructed not to destroy Jerusalem ("High-Priest"); nonetheless, Jerusalem falls to Rome ("Jerusalem"); and finally Rome falls to the Goths ("The Druid's Prophecies"). For the first five of these poems, Tennyson's source material was *Ancient History*, the work by eighteenth-century French historian Charles Rollin.[110] Rollin's general premise, faithfully paraphrased by the High Priest in his memo to Alexander,[111] is that "nations developed

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[110] See notes on Chapter III, W. D. Paden, *Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery in His Earlier Work* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1942), 121ff.

[111] For the God of gods, which liveth
    Through all eternity,
  'Tis he alone which giveth
    And taketh victory
  (ll. 9-12, 25-28)

because God 'conducted their enterprises … till they had executed their commission.'"

One critic labels this a "naïve and fervid faith" in "providential history," which Tennyson

was extrapolating into his own time.[112] Because it addresses itself to "Mona" and

"Albyn," "The Druid's Prophecies" (though not informed by Rollin's work) indeed

suggests that the subtext of the entire sequence is Britain's ultimate political and cultural

dominance.

Tennyson's progress sequence meanders, however. The non-chronological, non-

adjacent placement of the poems throughout the volume disperses any sense of forward

movement, and any commentary on the kinetics of world history is consigned to the

spaces between one poem's end and another's beginning. Throughout this volume,

Tennyson appears quite aware of the zero-sum nature of conquest, and, though he is

working closely with Gray's two nationalist odes "The Progress of Poesy" and "The

Bard," he sidesteps the overt teleology they demonstrate. Historical providence gives way

to poetic design as Tennyson differentiates the forms of these poems meticulously.

Though "Denunciations" and "Babylon" feature the same anapestic tetrameter stanzas,

"Persia" is in stichic tetrameter, "High-Priest" in trimeter strophes, "Jerusalem" in

Pindarics, and "Druid's Prophecies" in ballad stanzas.

Momentum stalls so that something else can take over. The certainty of prophecy

is pitted against a lyrical impulse to re-form and rearrange. As Tennyson privileges

pattern over narrative, he produces an anthology instead of a chronicle. Dumbly

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[112] Henry Kozicki, "Philosophy of History in Tennyson's Poetry to the 1842 Poems," *ELH* 42, no. 1 (April 1, 1975): 88–106.

unilateral, Time is the process by which these civilizations fall. History is the shape Time

takes, and on the whole (given the volume's macrostructure), it is irregular. The ensemble

evinces irregularity, even as the constituents are obediently regular. These punctual yet

pointless denunciating poems constitute a scattered "Time" ode – or deconstitute "Time:

An Ode" which stood at the center of the volume, as Tennyson was more interested in

lyrical creation than calling out odically/rhetorically to Time, the most impassive entity

imaginable.

Tennyson consistently derails his denunciations through a lyrical dalliance.

Apostrophe – beyond an affectation in diction – becomes a formal tactic and is converted

into either separate strophes or strophic sidelonging. These are anything but parenthetical

asides; rather, they are side shows, as Tennyson drifts away from the curse proper, with

its enumerations of divine vindication, to dwell in scenic description. It is hardly

believable, for example, that the gorgeous opening tableau from the opening section of

"Persia" –

> In bower untrod by foot of man,
> Clasps round the green and fragrant stem
>   Of lotos, fair and fresh and blue,
> And crowns it with a diadem
>   Of blossoms, ever young and new
> (ll. 8-12)

– is about to be "trod" (or trounced) by Alexander. But the poet departs this ode to

"Persia" ("Oh! Iran! Iran!" (l. 24)), hopping instead onto the conqueror's caravan, after

which the poem becomes a rather delighted travelogue as Alexander trudges across the

known world.

Andrew Fichter interprets this going-afield as Tennyson's inept straying from typical ode dynamics:

> Tennyson seems to have understood the distinguishing features of the ode in at least a general sense to be apostrophe and epiphany. Yet his reading of Collins and Gray perhaps led him to confuse apostrophe with personification and to regard epiphany loosely as a sudden reversal in argument, not necessarily an instant of transcendent perception on the part of the poet.[113]

Similarly, John Hollander calls the volume "an unsuccessful lode of exultant sound rendering."[114] This unsuccess might be reconsidered if we rearticulate Tennyson's project as one that consistently delivers "unsuccessful []odes" – through his unerring errancy he does not get carried away by transcendence or exultance, but nor does he get caught up in these. Rather, Tennyson desires objectivity in this volume, both in the historically verifiable statement and in the poetic equivalent of historical verity, descriptive rendering of the natural scene. As seen earlier, the prophecies align with established historical or scriptural outcomes, but then these in turn are meticulously annotated – "The Druid's Prophecies," for example is buttressed by no fewer than fifteen footnotes.

Thus, in *Poems by Two Brothers*, Tennyson explores how a lyrical attention (or odic, ecstatic soul) fares within episodic, sequential histories. Tennyson's project is nearly contemporaneous to Shelley's "other" odes with their dramatic touchstone, though the Romantic of course was using his own persona rather than ventriloquized ones to

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[113] "Ode and Elegy," 403.

[114] "Tennyson's Melody," in *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 105.

objectify the odic subject. Again, this awareness that there is an activating or fulfilling world outside the poem will become the domain of *Maud*. But, as we will see in the next major section, there will be a more immediate yield, as Tennyson has his lyrics truculently ignore that world to stunning effect, as in "Mariana."

Objective – or at least objectified – lyric, by definition, renegotiates subjectivity. The "conceptual syntax" of the ode becomes operative as Tennyson renders all of his stand-taking without a stance and delivers all this perspective without a person. Curran observes that the Romantics had already achieved a fusion of Pindar and Horace:

> [A] Horatian voice was invested in a Pindaric form. To reduce that complex to its logical components, the Horatian meditative presence, its contemplations built through a sequential and associational logic, becomes a mediating presence standing above sequence, forced to impose, or to create within itself, a synthesizing order – an epode – upon the universal strophe and antistrophe of experience.[115]

Tennyson, by contrast, exorcizes Horace from this process, and is left with an open, Pindaric form – a "virtually new" form that he will be free to bury within the lyrics of the next volume, where a tremendous prosodic movement will be launched on the road to nowhere. Tennyson approved of Horace when he behaved unHoratianly: "What a relief it is ... when he *does* allow himself irregularity."[116] This is in line with his estimation of Keats, whom he deemed "the greatest of us all" while in the same breath criticizing his

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[115] *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 71.

[116] Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson and His Friends* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 216.

blank verse for lacking "originality in movement."[117] Metrical "movement" was high

praise coming from Tennyson, and he associated "greatness of movement" with

Pindar.[118]

In the coming sections, we will see how Tennyson would continue to use irregular

verse to get somewhere, but his formal techniques have been understood largely as

Pindaric spendthriftiness. David Shaw, for example, says that Tennyson is "too

mesmerized by the throb of the Pindaric ode,"[119] while Ricks consistently points out that

the structurally experimental poems of this time (always irregular on some level) rarely

get re-published. The fascination with Pindar, even as it is of juvenile origin, only makes

the fascination lifelong, rather than childish. Moreover, the supposedly dead-end irregular

experimentation is not haphazardly innovative, but disciplined and precise. Tennyson

splits the genre into its constituent elements; he drops odic subject matter and keeps odic

form. The next volume will become less odic, but more thoroughly irregular, and the

mass of the great Pindaric – its inertia – will continue across the volume boundary and

into the impenetrable lyrics. Milton's comment that the strophes are "only for music"

follows Tennyson there. After converting apostrophe and antistrophe into strophe, he

refuses to consummate the epode and instead dwells in double stanzaic baroqueness.

Tennyson has thus been positioning the ode to be precisely dismantled, and this suggests

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[117] *Memoir*, 127.

[118] Ibid., 756–757.

[119] *Tennyson's Style* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 18.

that his ody wasn't a tired resumption of the ode in the progress of poesy, but rather the
first stage of a transformation from within.

2.2.2 "Ode: O Bosky Brook"

"Ode: O Bosky Brook" demonstrates that Tennyson could perform the Romantic
ode even while expressing misgivings about it, as he sounds the form's tremendous
potential through its runaway formal kinesis. "Bosky" is one of the rare odes that isn't
stripped of its title, though it was not published during Tennyson's lifetime. Written as
early as 1824 and revisited as late as 1830, it stands apart from most of the poetic
production of this career phase. Though it has a proto-Mariana moment ("In the deep
yellow Eventide,/ I wept sweet tears" (ll. 13-14)), and also elaborates upon "the brook
that loves/ To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand" of "Ode to Memory" (ll. 58-59),
the poem otherwise exhibits a disconnect from these two voices. As the unpublished
status suggests, Tennyson was given serious pause by how or whether to cast this
particular voice, squarely issuing as it did from within a Romantic register. Particularly,
the brook is Shelley's from "Mont Blanc," which assumes "a sound but half its own" (l.
6),[120] as Tennyson's ideas in this poem are also about the give-and-take relationship
between human thought and the world around.

Shelley opens "Mont Blanc" with a metaphor about the mind: it is a feeble brook
that takes on characteristics from surrounding, more powerful bodies of water. Feeble

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[120] Quotes from Shelley are taken from *SPP*.

though it is, the brook is ultimately tributary in its action; it "springs from" yet also "brings tribute" to the waterfalls around it, and this marvelous circularity will build throughout the poem into a fervent conclusion about the covalent bond between mind and world. To strengthen this bond, Shelley points beyond his metaphor: the more powerful bodies of water do also exist, they are not just expedient vehicles for his tenors; they are objects, not just objects of address. And it is this independence that validates the paradoxical sense of interdependence that builds throughout the poem, a circularity that Shelley perfects even grammatically. The opening line of the second strophe, "Thus thou, Ravine of Arve" will eight lines later eventually predicate – while in the meantime seeming (via "Thus") also to have been predicated. Simultaneously premise and conclusion, the Arve is the Arve. It is what it is, yet, there is a "Power in likeness of the Arve" that is not quite its own, and is in fact underwritten and perpetuated ultimately by the human mind, particularly its metaphorizing faculty (Power *in likeness*). The world flows through the mind, but only because the mind allows the metaphor in the first place. The mind flows through the world, then.

Tennyson's brook is real – or rather, merely real:

> O bosky brook, which I have loved to trace
> Through all thy green and winding ways,
> Wandering in the pure light of youthful days
> (*Poems* ll. 1-3)

It is a memory from boyhood, colored plainly rather than with Shelley's dark, glittering, gloomy splendor (ll. 3-4). Tennyson is a tracer of its "winding ways" and a follower of its "tangled rills" (l. 10). From such description it's clear that this is a tributary body of water, and so it has the trappings of Shelley's brook, but Tennyson isn't forthcoming

about what it is contributing to, nor what it draws from. The brook is thus a figure for

Tennyson's own fluent but aimless voice, without agenda or itinerary.

Even the brook's "voiceful influx" turns out to be mum, as Tennyson's

aposiopesis – at the very moment that we, too, might hear a voice that's speaking in the

water[121] – reveals that the brook is just a placeholder:

> Following, through many a windy grove of pines,
> White undergrowth of hemlocks and hoar lines
> Of sallows, whitening to the fitful breeze,
>   The voiceful influx of thy tangled rills—
> How happy were the fresh and dewy years
>   When by thy damp and rushy side,
>   In the deep yellow Eventide,
> I wept sweet tears
> (*Poems* ll. 7-14)

The brook, which is merely in the world and not a symbol of the mind's interaction with

it, is a coincidental marker of the spot where Tennyson was wont to get down to the vatic

business of feeling his "mind dilate/ With solemn uncontrollable pleasure" (ll. 16-17).

"Influx" is not quite influence, and it falls well short of Shelley's parallel scene with its

more dynamic notion of "influencings":

> …when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate phantasy,
> My own, my human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around
> (*SPP* ll.34-40)

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[121] Channeling the haughty visionary mode in Tennyson also means unchanneling it – i.e., letting it loose. In "Timbuctoo," the Spirit of vision proudly confounds elements through its "winds which tell of waters" (l. 204).

Shelley confesses the fantasy of the "separate phantasy," while Tennyson is cultivating a

disconnect between his own, his human mind and the universe of things. Even as he

sheds a tear, he seems indifferent to what he is gazing upon: the setting sun (l.15), the

moon (l. 18), the sun at the height of noon (l. 25). These images replace rather than

succeed each other; "when … when … when" punctuates the strophe but does not denote

the natural passage of time. *Whenever*, Tennyson is saying; *whatever* ("whatsoe'er" as he

says, at the beginning of the second strophe).

His indefiniteness is an attenuated version of Shelley's "deep eternity" (l. 29), and

both poets are interested in Platonic realism, a topic Tennyson more directly takes up as

he fixes on the mountain tarn:

> And full of lovely light
> Appeared the mountain-tarn's unbroken sleep,
> Which never felt the dewy sweep
> Of oars, but blackly lay
> Beneath the sunny living noon,
> Most like an insulated part of night,
> Though fair by night as day
> (*Poems* ll. 21-27)

Its "unbroken sleep," from which "wonderful gleams/ Of thrilling and mysterious beauty"

shine out, alludes to Shelley's "mightier world of sleep" (l. 55) with its access to the

"gleams of a remoter world" (l. 49). The tarn (by definition a body of water with no

tributaries) is above the fray. As such it is the Mont Blanc of this poem. Imperturbable as

it seems – as deep and eternal as it seems – the tarn is problematic, because it turns out to

be a blank slate, proving a little too accommodating of Platonic Forms: "So deep, that

when day's manhood wears his crown … The abiding eyes of Space … Shine out" (ll. 28,

33, 35). If those eyes of space are stars, then the tarn gives us an image of night in the

height of day. This goes beyond being "fair by night as day" – that is, eternally beautiful. Instead, the tarn perpetuates an indifference to the difference between night and day, between starlight and daylight.

This inherence of multiple Forms in a single particular contrasts with the imposing singularity and integrity of Mont Blanc, different from and indifferent to the human mind's imaginings. As for the sights and sounds of that mountain, "none beholds them there" (l. 132), but this does not prevent them from being knowable; they are, in Plato's terms, intelligible but not perceptible. In Shelley, the "power" is "inaccessible" but it is imaginable, and this action substantiates it, in at least one sense. That is, in Shelley, to signify is to impart significance. But Tennyson isn't so sure, fearing the insignificance of his poem after its imaginings have ebbed. Shelley riddles about the vagaries of the mind ("do I lie/ In dream...?" (ll. 54-55) but never about the truth of the matter. The thing is always the thing even as it is undergirded by and interdependent with the mind. The mind, even – perhaps especially – as it ebbs, can recognize the power of that thing. Questioning the reality of his brook only strengthens Shelley's intended exercise of the power of the mind. In Tennyson, the "gloom of dreams" (l. 37) is repurposed into an ambiguity about the nature of the thing itself rather than the mind that perceives it. Consequently, Tennyson's mind overflows – it "dilate[s] ... uncontrollabl[y]" (ll. 16-17).

The poem's form enacts this dilation even as it attempts to contain it. As the poet reminisces on the brook, the form of the poem is reminiscent too. The irregular verse evokes the brook's "winding ways" and its "tangled rills," whereas Shelley's iambic

pentameter doesn't concern itself with the entanglements of evocation and instead goes

right for invocation, summoning the water and the universe to break on the verse.[122]

Tennyson, obversely, has his verse ebb and flow, and his ode is used for evocation and

"likeness" rather than invocation and "Power." Eventually, in the "Ode to Memory,"

Tennyson will acknowledge his evocative mode and celebrate its distance from Romantic

invocation. It will not function as what Fry calls an "Ode of Presentation," but will

confidently exist as an Ode of Representation, and its particular interest will be to explore

the separation of mind from mind (later from earlier), rather than mind from world.

"O Bosky Brook," somewhere between Shelley's poem and Tennyson's future

poem, struggles to re-present its topic. In delaying the immediacy of Shelley's

apostrophic poem, Tennyson renders a poem merely strophic. In the second strophe,

Tennyson delivers an apostrophe in its fullest sense, as he turns aside from the previous

object of address, in order to address the moon. It is a hard transition, a Pindaric exercise

that is countered by the Platonic exercise of the poem's theme and its concern with how

celestial bodies are reflected in physical bodies. "Well have I known thee, whatsoe'er thy

phase" (l. 38). His well-knowing perceptivity does itself no favors, as it attempts to

describe the essence of an object that has no essence:

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[122] "[T]hings/ Flows," as the poem's first enjambment has always curiously insisted.

> …within the eddying tide
> Of some tumultuous mountain-rill,
> Like some delusive charm
> Thy mimic form,
> Full opposite to thy reality,
>   Broken and flashing and playing
> In tremulous darts of slender light,
> Beguiled the sight
> (*Poems* ll. 46-53)

The moon, even in its acknowledged phasefulness, is betrayed by its reflections in water – its metaphorical liquidity (the "flood" of its rays) deluded by the actual liquidity of "some tumultuous mountain-rill." Even a "mimic form" opposes the "reality" of the object it reflects, and so the rill turns out to be the tarn all over again. Never mind that the tarn is "unbroken" while the rill is "broken": the distinctive Tennysonian use of the prefix does not denote negation, but rather potentiality. As the tarn becomes the rill (but not the "real"), it functions as the Platonic form of antiplatonic realism, where one form inheres in multiple particulars. *Tarn-ness*, that is to say, is the deformation inevitable in all perception and description.

Everything, then, is kaleidoscopic: the moon, the paysage on which its rays fall, the fitful irregularity of Tennyson's description of it all. On this third count, the poem itself is revealed to be a "mimic form" that changes the reality it reflects – primarily by not committing to which aspect of reality it is reflecting – dwelling instead on the moonlight's potential to manifest. This potential is dramatized by the ode's formal kinetics, as Tennyson calls attention to the material surface of the words, which is broken with its own sweep of "Or"s:

> Whether thy flood of mournful rays,
> Parted by dewless point of conic hill,
> Adown its richer side
>   Fell straying
> Into the varied valley underneath;
> Or where, within the eddying tide
> …………………………………
> Or on the screaming waste of desolate heath
> …………………………………
> Or in close pastures soft as dewy sleep,
> Or in the hollow deep
> Of woods, whose counterchanged embroidery
> Of light and darkness chequered the old moss
> On the damp ground;
> Or whether thou becamest the bright boss
>   Of thine own Halo's dusky shield,
>   Or when thou burnest beaconlike…
> …………………………………
>   Or when the loud sea gambols and the spray
> Of its confliction shoots and spreads and falls
> (*Poems* ll. 41-71)[123]

Definitively indefinite, the poem continues to insist on still more "opposed realities": day

is night, land is water (the "deep/ Of woods", the "field/ Of vagrant waves"). The

admixtures aren't without consequence: light and dark produce a "grey Night" (l. 40);

land and water average into a mossy "damp ground" (l. 60). Bogged down in all the

description, Tennyson will soon confess his and his poem's problem – distraction, by the

changing physical world of the senses, from the eternal world accessible to thought:

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[123] Note too how "Of" and "On" start to look like alternative "Or"s – and they all recall, even as they differ

decisively from, the apostrophic "Oh."

> ...thought
> Which wells not freely from the mind's recess
> When the sharp sunlight occupies the sense
> With this fair world's exceeding comeliness,
> The goodly show and varied excellence
> Of lithe tall trees, the languor of sweet flowers
> Into the universal herbage woven [etc.]
> (*Poems* ll. 92-98)

This isn't a weakness *of* description but *for* it – and it is a weakness Tennyson cultivates. We sympathize with the sentiment concluding in line 95; but we see, from the descriptive lines that run on and on afterward, where to place the blame. Even as the exceeding comeliness of the world is rendered in the formal and descriptive excesses of this poem, this still isn't fitting; Tennyson prefers a poem that proceeds essentially rather than excessively, even if he can't make that happen.

Things aren't what they are,[124] until midway through the second strophe, where things uncannily return to what they have always been. The moon becomes the sign of itself ("thou becamest the bright boss/ Of thine own Halo's dusky shield"), and at the conclusion of the second strophe, through a tortuous sentence, one reads that "the sea spray … plumes … the seabird" (ll. 70, 80, 82). The poem manages to feather the bird; the bird is the same as it ever was. There would be an elegance to this, had the poem not gone to such great lengths to convey it.[125] Without its syntactical entanglements, and as the afterthought that it seems in that moment to be, "The seabird piping on the wild salt

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[124] "Varied ... steadfast shades" (l. 20), or "full of lovely light/ ... but blackly lay" (ll. 21, 24), seem systematically self-contradictory.

[125] This might have also already happened in the first strophe. As the sun is reflected in the tarn, it becomes one of the "abiding eyes of Space" – or that which it already is: a star.

waste" is a startling image. We cautiously note its proto-imagism – it is what it is – but only after so much that is what it isn't. The erraticism of the irregular lines attempts to fling off the syntax; the possibility of this pure symbol exists only until the grammar catches up with it. Something about it gave Tennyson reason to quit while ahead (the strophe ends here), but also to begin again (the next strophe commences, almost inexplicably).

The poem betrays itself as extraneous, but not before it achieves a forceful demonstration of a theory of forms, as well as of poetry's place in that theory. Language and poetry attempt to refer to the world but ultimately defer it; the poem is a relay between mind and world, but also a delay. In Shelley (and most Romantic poetry generally), the poem is a fluid meeting point between mind and nature; the universe of things rolls through the mind. Or the mind rolls through the universe of things. The point is that it doesn't matter, as attested to by the short-shrift of Shelley's ars-poetical moment in his poem. Shelley's winged, "wild thoughts" do come to rest "In the still cave of the witch Poesy" where the Power is also resting – but no sooner does this "one legion" alight than it is off again (ll. 41-48). Tennyson, to whom the poem is – and is "like"! – a "delusive charm" (l. 48) remains in the dark, as the third and final strophe makes clear:

> I savour of the Egyptian and adore
> Thee, venerable dark! august obscure!
>   Sublimest Athor!
> (*Poems* ll. 83-85)

Tennyson is careful to specify that the dark is not a metaphor for mind:

> It is not that I doat upon
>   Thy glooms, because the weary mind is fraught
> With fond comparison

> Of thy deep shadow to its inward strife
> (*Poems* ll. 86-89)

Rather, it is a condition in which the mind thrives, a Plato's cave where the reality is a darker darkness rather than a brighter light. "I dote *within* thy glooms," Tennyson wants to say.

In his 1829 poem "Timbuctoo," Tennyson seems at home from within a similar "abyss/ Of radiance":

> Each [Pyramid] aloft
> Upon his narrowed Eminence bore globes
> Of wheeling Suns, or Stars, or semblances
> Of either, showering circular abyss
> Of radiance.
> (*Poems* ll. 166-170)

Though probably composed later than "Bosky," "Timbuctoo" assuredly assumes an earlier Romantic stance, one which was achieved by reworking the Hebraic-prophetic mode of "Armageddon," a poem composed no later than 1824, into a Romantic-visionary one.[126] Matthew Rowlinson argues that Tennyson "abandon[s] the mode of 'Armageddon,' [and thus "Timbuctoo"] a poem that from its very inception seemed to mark for him as a dead end the totalizing gestures that resolve the High Romantic sublime."[127] Indeed, we note that the "Suns, or Stars, or semblances/ Of either" are coolly registered from within this vision, rather than anxiously troped and strophed as they are

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[126] Culler observes Tennyson's revision in these terms (*The Poetry of Tennyson*, 20–21). The date of composition for "Armageddon" is deduced from Ricks' headnote (*The Poems of Tennyson*, 2nd ed. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 73n.).

[127] Matthew Charles Rowlinson, *Tennyson's Fixations: Psychoanalysis and the Topics of the Early Poetry* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 57.

in "Bosky." Tennyson's own sense of his *too*-totalizing gesture can be read into the

"dome on dome" and the "Canopy o'ercanopied" (ll. 160, 163) of "Timbuctoo," the

visionary spaces of which seem never to fill out even as they flow "o'er." Coleridge is the

architect of this space, and Shelley and Keats its occupants, and it figures centrally into

the Romantic project: "it is in the absence of sensory experience that one pours forth

one's soul in ... ecstasy."[128] But Tennyson has already begun a different poetic, not of

imaginatively illuminating this darkness, but meditatively perpetuating it: "to attain/ By

shadowing forth the Unattainable" (ll. 192-193).

"Bosky" is an unattained ode that continues to "shadow forth." Asymptotic – the

poem does not fall together ("Fell straying" (l.44) in Tennyson's knowing phrase) – this

ode goes and goes nowhere. By the radical shift of addressee in the third strophe, "or" has

become the dominating syntax of the poem, as the address, which is to say the subject, of

this ode shifts from brook, to moon, to darkness. The poem concludes, "Rare sound,

spare light will best address/ The soul for awful muse and solemn watchfulness" (ll. 111-

112). Tennyson, with the emphasis on "*best* address," confesses the problematic

condition of a poem with multiple addressees. If we, as J. Culler argues, are incredulous

at the apostrophic gesture of an ode, as it tropes its own fictionality through addressing

absent presences, this ode operates somewhat differently as it seems to correct its object

of address and to chase the metaphor away. However, in the process, it leaves itself with

very little visionary purchase. Apostrophe "makes its point by troping not on the meaning

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[128] A. D. Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 33.

of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself."[129] Tennyson's apostrophes aim to establish and sustain a relationship, to commune even if there's nothing communicable.

"Bosky Brook" proves too circuitous to be its own event, and this is a shame because Tennyson ultimately intends for it to "address/ The soul." Shelley, in a note about the composition of "Mont Blanc," noted that the soul is poetry's overflowing source, not its goal.[130] But Tennyson's has been an ode to or toward itself, and this is so both inaudibly and too audibly. As the everlasting universe of things steamrolls through Tennyson's mind, he works furiously to clear it out. Nature abhors a vacuum, though, and Tennyson's apostrophic gestures manage only to overflow it – in the act of purging it. The poem, even as it ends with a visionary vigil or "watchfulness" for something yet to be, still cannot escape the sonic "-fulness" of the very conclusion, and so Tennyson is faced with the apparently lamentable condition that his poem is merely a sound but all its own.

"Tennyson does not attempt the difficult feat [in his early apocalyptic poems] of what we, in the space age, have come to call reentry."[131] Indeed, "O Bosky Brook" launches and never comes back down. In trying to emulate Shelley's powerful circularity,

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[129] J. Culler, "Apostrophe," 59.

[130] "'Mont Blanc' ... was composed under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe; and as an undisciplined overflowing of the soul, rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprang" (*History of a Six Weeks' Tour, 1817* [Oxford: Woodstock, 1989], vi).

[131] A. D. Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 31.

or orbit, Tennyson's poem instead achieves escape velocity, its different trajectory taking it beyond the gravitational pull of subjectivity. The imaginative refractions of the early poem cool off – as does the "solemn uncontrollable pleasure," itself already a diminution of Shelley's "O Uncontroulable!" west wind – and the poem finds itself at home in cold, efficient intellection. "Reentry" isn't possible anyhow without entry, and Tennyson's own entry into this poem is uncertain. Though his speaker feels "buxom gales" (l. 102), the parenthetical aside in which they are registered – "(As my glowing brows they fan)" – falls well short of the "unremitting interchange" (l. 39) by Shelley's person in "Mont Blanc." Instead of ecstasy, then, Tennyson is more simply out of place – an effect of form and imagery that also extends to his poem's publication status. Unpublished, its poetic nothingness nonetheless speaks to its poetic potential. It is fitting that this ode to darkness never saw the light of day.

2.2.3   "I dare not write an Ode…"

"Bosky Brook" demonstrates that Tennyson could unwrite odes from within. But he could also do so from without, as in "I dare not write an Ode," a playfully plaintive (and yet again unpublished) poem from 1827, in which he describes his poetic paralysis as a function both of malicious reviewers and of his own "misgiving conscience" (l. 20). This poetic balking, it turns out, isn't particular to the ode. Tennyson says he "dares not" the other literary genres as well: sonnet, essay, epic. Throughout the stanzas, Tennyson consistently figures his fear in terms of limitation and entrapment: a "minor bard" risks being clipped, hemmed in, tagged, enrolled, wrapped up, environed. Since some of these

terms also belong to a lexicon of categorization, it seems that Tennyson's real fear of the

reviewers consists in being mislabeled by them ("Tagged at the wrong end of the

Month's Review" (l. 10)). At poem's end, Tennyson considers how this fault of being

"deemed" – judged, but also simply named – might lie in himself:

> And loath I should be to be deemed as weak as
> The tribe of imitators 'Servum pecus'!
>
> But ah! my hopes are all as dead as mutton,
> As vain as Cath[oli]ck Em[anci]p[atio]n,
> E'en now my conscience pulls me by the button
> And bids me cease to prate of imitation.
> What countless ills a minor bard environ –
> '*You're imitating Whistlecraft and Byron*'.
> (ll. 29-36)

The reviewer's quip that is the last line suggests that the real limitation is imitation – one

kind of mimicry that will be served by another. The different voice suggests that the poet,

in flexing his imitative muscles, loses himself and ends up as another poet altogether.

The repeated references to imitation, with its notion of duplication, tie into the

poem's conceit of printing and publication. Once the reviewers have flattened the poet's

work in – and into – their periodicals, the public may then use "that same dread page" to

wrap their market-place "sundries," namely butchered meat ("mutton").[132] The poetry

thus takes on a form it wasn't meant to, which is a strange outcome to a process that

begins as a decision in form, and is especially strange because the trinity of poetic genres

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[132] Of the Wellington ode, T. H. Huxley would say, "I send Tennyson's ode by way of packing – it is not worth much more" (quoted in Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* [New York: Collier Books, 1972], 238).

mentioned (sonnet, ode, epic) might otherwise rather firmly insist on poetry's formal and modal ranges.

Tennyson's allegory binds his critical and popular reception to his selection of genre. A poet writing in an established genre (which, in this case, as Tennyson concedes in the last line, is the mock-heroics of Lord Byron or J. H. Frere ("Whistlecraft")) will be abused by the critics for being unoriginal, as he will be misprized by the reading public (or misused by an unreading public). Written a few years before Hallam would praise Tennyson for resisting feelings of social impetus in his poetic production, the poem is easy to understand in terms of the usual critical dichotomy that pits Tennyson against the nineteenth century. The reference to in-vain Catholic Emancipation evokes a prevailing culture of forced conformity (i.e., "Uniformity"), a single genre for spiritual decision. As well, Tennyson seems to align with his classical sources about the "servum pecus" – the plebeian throngs who have no hope of ascertaining his poetry, rival poets who have no hope for originality. For any poet this is a timeless predicament: to be a casualty of the times. Tennyson is less at odds with the public, though, than with the traditions. The poem's ultimate claim is that the generic contract is in shambles, and that a misprizing readership is a symptom of inert genres. The very instrument that should ensure correct usage (genre) is to blame for the abuse the poet suffers from his readers.

Tennyson's fear is of being poetically shaped by outside force: "Lest in that same dread page I be enrolled" (l. 14). His own literary product is subordinate to cultural forces; in turn these are subject to appetite and need. Tennyson approved of Hartley

Coleridge's jibe at Pindar as "the New-market Poet"[133] – thus a thoroughly Horatian pose is struck in "I dare not write an Ode…" Yet Tennyson, over the course of his career, becomes less uncomfortable with poetry as a commodity, and this becomes an opportunity, once he can concede that there are no private genres. To write a poem is to presuppose its dissemination and reception; to think of its use beyond the poet or the person, and for the people; to objectify it. He will come to accept the economics of the ode – a plenteousness and progress embodied formally – and he will invite his audience to dig in. The elite Horatianism of "I dare not write an Ode…" does not extend that invitation, but it does reveal Tennyson's dawning sense of his audience, and of his poetry's obligations to it.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

While Tennyson writes, the attention-getting abilities of poetry are changing. One no longer has to stage an oracular spectacular like Shelley, because there is already a reading public at the gates (one that Shelley only dreamed of having), and Tennyson would eventually know that however softly he spoke, there would be thousands listening. "A man speaking to men" was a stylistic discovery and decree for Wordsworth. For Tennyson, it was not just a laureatic inheritance (which began long before 1850), but also a transformation of the poet's circumstance into the poetic structure itself. Wordsworth largely ignored what has always been the dual audience of an ode; instead he figured himself in conversation with himself, with auditors neither mundane nor supreme.

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[133] Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson and His Friends*, 217.

Tennyson too stops booming at the heavens, but he is more willing to turn aside in civic apostrophe. It will take decades, though, for the conversational feint in "Ode to Memory" to convert more genuinely to "the voice of the human race speaking through" him of *In Memoriam*.

But, by the end of the 1820s, it's clear that Tennyson's demiurgency is spent, and that he is outgrowing the sense of poetry epitomized in his legendary childhood vaunt, "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind."[134] Seeing this for what it is – that he is hearing his own voice aloud – deflates the odic afflatus, as its vatic communiqué is short-circuited. The ode, as I have tried to demonstrate, looms large in this realization. His happy collusions with the ode in *Poems by Two Brothers* allow a voice-throwing. "O Bosky Brook" has him outrunning a voice merely his own. In "I dare not write an Ode…" he contends with voices not his (predecessors, generic mandates, unpoetic noise from the real world). In the great lyrics to come, Tennyson will seek some reprieve from the ode by being more simply subjective, but the ode will continue to frustrate the lyric's interiority, and subjectivity will never be a poetic stance but rather a technique through which to exploit generic differentials: *I* dare not write an ode, but some other persona of my creation might.

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[134] *Memoir*, 9.

2.3 Mel-ody

The nervous generic alertness of a title like *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) invites

multivalent and interrelated readings. First, we might sense a kind of confession by

Tennyson of his distaste for the chiefly odic poems of his first volume: he has heard

himself composing at the top of his lungs and now plans to atone by toning it down.

Second, "chiefly lyrical" announces his ambition to revise Wordsworth and Coleridge's

volume of a third-century before. Unlike the ambition trumpeted throughout *Poems by*

Two Brothers – a gunning for the laurel wreath, a desire to possess poetic authority by

force – the ambition in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* is to forgo all the precocious, imitative

savoir faire, and instead attempt to experiment at the risk of being unrecognizable,

indirect, errant. The tenor of that experimentation we locate in still another sense of his

title – i.e., in the coy qualification of "*chiefly* lyrical," by which Tennyson intends not

simply that some poems in the volume will be lyrics while others will not, but that the

lyrics will not be entirely lyrical. Arthur Hallam, in his 1831 review of the volume,

broached this possibility of a hybrid poetry when he praised Tennyson's "new species of

poetry, a graft of the lyric on the dramatic."[135] Though Hallam's instinct about

Tennyson's recombinant poetics is on-target, his observation is overshadowed by an

opposing idea in the essay, which has since become its dominant critical legacy:

Tennyson's "fairy fineness" of ear, "his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his

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[135] "On Modern Poetry," 197.

impassioned song," his "rich lyrical impressions," his "unalloyed" art – in short, the exceedingly celebrated poetry of sensation.

Hallam's essay thus inaugurates a venerable critical dialogue about the purity of Tennyson's lyricism, which, in turn, operates as metonym for all lyricism, as that literary category goes forth unto the breach of Modernism and of critical modernity – an opening that an ensuing chapter on Pound will also seek to scale. Hallam's ideas about the lyric – that it is musical, autonomous, unified, subjective, originary – have persisted as the ideal, no matter the critical season. In these very terms, Tennyson's lyrical purity has been alternately championed (New Criticism) and pilloried (New Historicism), though the indivisibility of these concepts has gone less questioned. In that the lyrical values just named had enjoyed aggrandizement through the Romantic ode, Hallam himself is only a spokesperson – albeit a cynosural one – for the unassailability of the lyrical aesthetic. Tennyson, though, doesn't presume this aesthetic, and so the values of the lyric will come, severally, into the reticule of his experiment.

The odic momentum with which Tennyson begins his poetic career runs into the sound barrier that is "Claribel," the first poem of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. The generic pronouncement of the poem's subtitle – "A Melody" – commences the volume with a promise of the charming, impassioned song that Hallam would soon argue for in his essay, a song that trembles forth from nature into language via the Poet of Sensation, through "simple exertions of eye and ear" that are "mingled [with] active thought."[136]

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[136] Ibid., 186.

This scheme almost works in "Claribel," as the metaphysical melody of the "solemn oak-tree" seems about to be realized in a human voice given to "an ancient melody/ Of an inward agony" (ll. 4, 6-7). This unheard melody manifests as a sigh – is "*over*heard," in John Stuart Mill's roughly contemporaneous phrase[137] – but rapidly becomes overheard in a different sense, as the natural sounds mount into a monotone chorus:

> At eve the beetle boometh
>   Athwart the thicket lone:
> At noon the wild bee hummeth
>   About the mossed headstone:
> At midnight the moon cometh,
>   And looketh down alone.
> Her song the lintwhite swelleth,
> The clear-voiced mavis dwelleth,
>   The callow throstle lispeth,
> The slumbrous wave outwelleth,
>   The babbling runnel crispeth,
> The hollow grot replieth
>   Where Claribel low-lieth.
> (ll. 9-21)

The droning, terminal "-eth" threatens melody. All natural activity – motion as well as sound – is flattened into a single sonic surface. Hallam's ideal – "absorb[ing] [his] whole being into the energy of sense"[138] – is taken too far. This "energy of sense," as the natural sounds are instinct, reflex, and echo, doesn't "absorb a being" so much as it deflects any and all perspective. There is no Poet of Sensation – just sensation without a poet.

"No poet," even in a volume published anonymously, might be overstatement, but suffice it to say that Tennyson is attempting a division of poet from subject. He did not

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[137] "What Is Poetry?," in *Essays on Poetry*, ed. F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 12. The essay was first published in the *Monthly Repository* in 1833.
[138] "On Modern Poetry," 186.

quite achieve this in all the ventriloquy of *Poems by Two Brothers*, but, as befits a poem

that is poised between two radically different volumes of poetry, "Claribel" exhibits an

extreme development: poetic voice is thrown clear of the poem altogether. This

disembodied voice was ghostly enough for A. D. Culler to claim, impossibly, that "these

sounds of the churchyard are really sung by Claribel herself,"[139] but the point is that the

natural scene (not the supernatural unseen) takes over the poem from the poet. This

reverses Wordsworth's overt insertion of the poet into "A slumber did my spirit seal," the

churchyard tradition to which "Claribel" does belong, but only somewhat. Carol Christ

says the poem exemplifies a characteristically Romantic tension "between the power

objects possess to evoke emotion and the power subjects possess to bestow emotion."[140]

But without a subject such reciprocity cannot exist. Tennyson evokes the sealed spirit of

Wordsworth, to one-up him, to deliver a poem sealed altogether from subjectivity.

    Mill, contra his famous instinct that poetry was "feeling confessing itself to

itself,"[141] was not comfortable with just how hermetically sealed this poem is from

human subjectivity (or its culmination, Wordsworthian spirit). He complained that

Tennyson's "nominal subject … lies buried in a heap of ... sensuous imagery."[142] Mill

wanted to situate the poem so that he could nail down its feeling, and be better assured

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[139] *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 41.

[140] *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 62.

[141] "What Is Poetry?," 12.

[142] "Tennyson's Poems," in *Essays on Poetry*, ed. F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia: University of South
Carolina Press, 1976), 69. The essay was first published in the *London Review* in 1835.

that Tennyson was harmonizing his sensuousness with his intellect and his moral sense, as Hallam claimed he was doing already. But re-titling the poem "A solitary Place in a Wood," as Mill suggests,[143] would neglect the way Tennyson has vacated this poem. The recurring "where" acts more like a question than a demarcation of place, and even then it is the least pressing of the many other questions that still loom at poem's end: who? how? why? Claribel is named, but functionally anonymous, and is as much use to the reader as the mossed-over headstone is to the unheeding bee. Her proper name clarifies only its own resonance and, like the headstone, does not signify, and as such compounds the fate of language in this poem, that it is sound without signification.

"Where Claribel low-lieth" is the first and last line of the poem, which serves as an elaborated tautology – she lies where she lies – a double insistence on a single fact. "Melody," as a generic designation, is a similar kind of insistence. Melody is not a pure song but already a double, overdone song: $μέλος$ $ᾠδή$, or song song. Hollander, in his essay "Tennyson's Melody," notes "the absolutely awful sound texture" of "Claribel": "the worst … lines he ever wrote."[144] Hollander, though, has been taken in by the poem's *mala fides*. "A Monody," of course, would have perfectly suited the elegiac aspect of the poem; even "A Melic Poem" might have worked. But neither phrase captures the tonal doubleness (which is conveyed yet again – redoubled, as it were – in the name "Claribel"), which also serves Tennyson's project of poetic duplicitousness ("lieth").

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[143] Ibid., 70.

[144] "Tennyson's Melody," 105.

The excessiveness of the poet's "Melody" will ultimately distinguish it from the neutral dronings of an amoral nature, but not before they are suggestively aligned through this mel-odic doubleness. The throstle, or thrush, was known for singing "each song twice over" (as Browning would later put it); moreover, the mavis and throstle are the same bird.[145] In another poem from the volume, "Song [The lintwhite and the throstlecock]," the birds, like the poet, are singing to a year that does not hear: "Fair year, fair year, thy children call,/ But thou art deaf as death" (ll. 10-11). Their insistence implies its own tone-deafness about nature's receptivity to such requests, and about, more generally, the efficacy of singing. For Wordsworth, the lintwhite (linnet) and throstle were symbols of natural pedagogy. In "The Tables Turned," in which Wordsworth counsels fellow bookworms, lest they "grow double," to get outdoors and "Let Nature be your teacher," the linnet offers "wisdom" and the throstle is "no mean preacher." Wordsworth's poem (even though it would presumably be printed in one of those "quit … books") still manages to function as the meeting place of mind and nature, finds a harmonious part within the consistency and continuity of nature.

Natural sound is instinct, reflex, and echo; if it is a symbol of poetry, then poetry is merely these things. To escape this poetic lot, Tennyson emphasizes the lopsidedness of poetic transaction; the poet and the bird are not interchangeable, mutual symbols, but are separate. Shelley says "bird thou never wert"; Tennyson revises, 'bird is all it is,' thus aligning himself with the Keatsian warning, in "Ode on Melancholy," for poets not to

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[145] *Turdus philomelos*; the song thrush nominate subspecies is, pertinaciously, *Turdus philomelos philomelos*.

"drown the wakeful anguish of the soul" by letting natural symbols suffice in the

expression thereof:

> Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
> Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
> A partner in your sorrow's mysteries
> (ll. 6-8)[146]

Tennyson doubles-down on this Keatsian lesson with two owl poems of his own. "Song –

The Owl" seems a simple nature lyric:

> When merry milkmaids click the latch,
> And rarely smells the new-mown hay,
> And the cock hath sung beneath the thatch
> Twice or thrice his roundelay,
> Twice or thrice his roundelay;
>   Alone and warming his five wits,
>   The white owl in the belfry sits.
> (*Poems* ll. 8-14)

But note the owl's silence (as some other bird sings its song); the silence continues into

the poem immediately following, "Second Song: To the Same":

> Thy tuwhits are lulled, I wot,
> Thy tuwhoos of yesternight,
> Which upon the dark afloat,
> So took echo with delight,
> So took echo with delight,
>   That her voice untuneful grown,
>   Wears all day a fainter tone.
>
> I would mock thy chaunt anew;
> But I cannot mimick it;
> Not a whit of thy tuwhoo,
> Thee to woo to thy tuwhit,
> Thee to woo to thy tuwhit,

> With a lengthened loud halloo,
> Tuwho, tuwhit, tuwhit, tuwhoo-o-o.
> (ll. 1-14)

We still have not heard the voice of the owl, nor will we. As the first-person subject imposes, the poem becomes a little ode "To the Same" – not to the owl nor to the poet's identification with it, but to the secondary nature of his own song (and also its doubleness). The first "So took echo with delight" implies hooting by a blithe spirit, but this sense meets its match in the second instance of the line, which (with its subsequent line) reveals that "Echo" is meant as a personification, and that she represents the futility of trying to echo nature, but also a being-taken with delight at the unheard melody.

Like the poet's confession in "O Bosky Brook" that poetry even as a "mimic form" opposes the reality it depicts, this poem's poet also says, "I cannot mimick it." Thus, despite the mimic forms with which these two poems are presented, their symmetry reveals a deeper imbalance between the poetic subject and his subject. While Mill supposed "the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener,"[147] Tennyson assumes his hyper-consciousness. Whereas the poem to Wordsworth is a middle ground that belongs equally to poet and to nature, in Tennyson the poem is a middle ground that belongs equally to poet and to audience, with whom the poet is trying to forge a transaction in unrealized sound.

Thus the melodious plot of "Claribel": to obscure the fact that its other melodious plot sits buzzingly though ultimately dumbly atop odic ruins. This deafening little lyric

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[147] "What Is Poetry?," 12.

announces its own conflict with the "ancient melodies" that haunt it. Tennyson no doubt

has in mind these passages from Collins' "Ode to Evening" and Gray's "Elegy Written in

a Country Church Yard":

> Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat
> With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
>   Or where the Beetle winds
>   His small but sullen horn
> As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
> Against the pilgrim born in heedless hum (ll. 9-14)
>
> Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
> And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
> Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
> And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds (ll. 5-8)[148]

Gray and Collins achieve a balance of poet and scene, "save where" the insect interrupts.

But the "heedless hum" overtakes in Tennyson; "the beetle boometh." Hollander

observes that the music Tennyson hears is not "from the music of nature" but "is the

voice of poetry itself," as he stages an

> encounter with poetic tradition after which never again would birds' song be the
> same. The representation of that voice in the body of Tennyson's poetry would
> evolve from the extremely skillful handling of the received devices for the poetic
> treatment of sound.[149]

"Claribel" is a deft neutralization of "that voice" or any voice. The extraction of the poet

from the scene first attempted in "O Bosky Brook" is here effected; the distilled lyrical

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[148] Both quoted from *Eighteenth-Century Poetry*. Tennyson thought "And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds" was "among the most liquid lines in any language" (*Memoir*, 660).

[149] "Tennyson's Melody," 106.

extract results, though this has proven too potent for some critics (Hollander among them).

In vacating the poet, Tennyson is flexing serious poetic muscle, but this isn't the way it has played out critically. Fry says the "continuous weakness" of Tennyson is his "fetish of mellifluousness" – that is, his "undialectical fixation on the phonic-scriptive element of language":

> Tennyson himself appears to have viewed poeticality as a kind of mantra inducing trancelike states; and traditionally this indifference on his part to the representational function of language has been viewed as a defect.[150]

The verdict is similar from Carol Christ, who indicts "Claribel" directly: "Tennyson's impressionism … involves a distrust of the cognitive element of language, but implies an enormous faith in the representational power of sound."[151] Their terms are analogous if not identical: "the representational function/power of language/sound." Not all language is sound,[152] just as not all sound is language, and so what it comes down to is whether sound *is* or whether it *represents*. Leave it to Tennyson to blur the line.

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[150] *A Defense of Poetry*, 64–65.

[151] *Victorian and Modern Poetics*, 61.

[152] Regarding the other half of Fry's phrase, "phonic-*scriptive*," as the element which Tennyson is allegedly ignoring, "Adeline" is an interesting case. The poem is about the inaccessibility of natural language, which is figured much differently from "Claribel" – i.e., quiet as words on a page. Adeline is conversant with nature, but also versed in its silent orthography: "And ye talk together still,/ In the language wherewith Spring/ Letters cowslips on the hill" (ll. 60-62). Hyacinthine natural expression extends to the poem on the page, as the diphthong "AI" occurs with above-average frequency in A*del*I*ne*: "aery" "Naiad" "maiden" "airs arise" "aileth" "waitest" "airs" "against"—and in "faint" or "faintly" four times, itself something of a faint insistence.

As is often the case with Tennyson, critics accuse him of what he himself is studying, or they parse similar effects to different ends. For example, Hollander's displeasure with "Claribel" and its "onomatopoeic thickening of archaic third-person-singular verb forms" becomes a source of great pleasure to the critic, once it finds a place in "Mariana," where he can ooze over the

> stultifying *thickness* … of the onomatopoeic music of the opening stanza, playing in the key of a conventional fiction of English verse which distinguishes between consonantal clusters and vowels as between noise and musical tone.[153]

It is difficult to imagine that Tennyson does not fathom song's disconnect from the world even as it tries to realize it. We are alerted, everywhere, by those conspicuous verbs that do not predicate, replies that are intransitive, conjugation that never joins up, sonority that finds no resonance, only indifference.

The nature sounds in "Claribel" – undifferentiated from one another – are indifferent to the human loss that has transpired. In "The Ballad of Oriana," the sounds are entirely human and cannot but mark loss. The effect in both poems is numbing, as "Oriana" continues the sonic booming.

> O breaking heart that will not break,
> > Oriana!
> O pale, pale face so sweet and meek,
> > Oriana!
> Thou smilest, but thou doest not speak,
> And then the tears run down my cheek,
> > Oriana:
> What wantest thou? whom dost thou seek,
> > Oriana?

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[153] "Tennyson's Melody," 109.

> I cry aloud: none hear my cries,
> > Oriana.
> (ll. 64-74)

"[N]one hear my cries" – an intriguing assertion for such a loud poem. Tennyson has loaded every rift with "Oriana"; her name recurs just about every other line, so that reading between the lines becomes impossible (or inevitable). This poem makes it hard to think, which is Tennyson's intent. "I dare not think of thee, Oriana" (l. 93) is a coherent statement inasmuch as we understand thought and memory to function differently from song and poetry. This is a separation which Tennyson's designation of "Oriana" as a "ballad" – with that genre's connections to historical account and its literary counterpart, narrative – challenges. Singing is not a cognitive function, as all the singers-in-nature of the volume at large attest. But this doesn't propel it necessarily into its opposite, the unthinking. "Oriana" is not an unliterary ballad, but perhaps Tennyson's accomplishment is in his ability to make it seem that way.

On its power to purify and reduce – "melody is more than merely that of verse; it is a very basic rhythm of active life" – Hollander puts the high stakes of Tennyson's melody: "It represents the limits of a certain kind of fulfillment, both in and of poetry," in that the "poetic achievement" is to "authenticate … the less accessible presentations of the eternal."[154] This makes the goal of these lyrics very much odic, as in Fry's concept of the "Ode of Presentation." Tennyson attempts in this volume this making-present of the spirit, though in doing so from the lyric thicket, he falls precisely short. As one "Song"

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[154] Ibid., 125–126.

tells (rather than shows) us, "A spirit haunts the year's last hours"– and in two twelve-line irregular strophes (an unconsummated Pindaric triad) to boot. In the "Song [I' the glooming light]" just before this one, a personified Sorrow is unmoving and unmoved:

> Ever alone
> She maketh her moan:
> She cannot speak: she can only weep,
> For she will not hope.
> The thick snow falls on her flake by flake,
> The dull wave mourns down the slope,
> The world will not change, and her heart will not break.
> (ll. 16-22)

Her obstinacy is conveyed similarly, in matched irregular strophes. In many of the lyrics of this volume (many of which are simply called "Song"), the doubleness of Tennyson's Mel-ody – rather, its onerous one-sidedness – is an odic inheritance. A materialized ghost, the ode swells many of the lyrics in this volume with irregularities of line and rhyme, while also affording their antistrophic coupling to one another as companion pieces. The erudite joke of "The Poet's Mind" is that it takes the shape of a Pindaric – or nearly, as it surges to a whimper with two-thirds of its triad. "The Dying Swan" is more perfectly Pindaric (two ten-line strophes followed by a longer epode), but then again, it is a swan song.

It's clear that Sorrow is a version of Mariana, who in all her moaning/mourning occupies an eternal present, a simple being in the moment. For all the melodic conjury in that poem, "Mariana" does not bear odic fruit but only odic burden. Though her stanzas are largely regular, Tennyson has other ways of imbuing "Mariana" with a mel-odic doubleness that starts to come apart at the seams. In the next section, I will return to

"Mariana" as a companion piece to the overtly palinodic "Ode to Memory," as Tennyson reconciles his lyrical cant with an equally strong urge to recant.

2.4 Palinody

In his essay, Hallam elides the fact that Tennyson, even as early as his sophomore publication, is profoundly entangled with poetic pasts. Though Hallam does knowingly play the Coleridge to Tennyson's Wordsworth, he figures his friend's poetic innovations not as a studied reworking of the values of *Lyrical Ballads*, but as an outright transcendence of them. In Hallam's view, Tennyson will "enrapture" rather than "convince," and his belated poetry of sensation will prevent (in the Miltonic sense) the earlier poetry of reflection:

> With the close of the last century came an era of reaction, an era of painful struggle to bring our over-civilised condition of thought into union with the fresh productive spirit that brightened the morning of our literature. But repentance is unlike innocence; the laborious endeavor to restore has more complicated methods of action than the freedom of untainted nature. Those different powers of poetic disposition, the energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion, which in former times were intermingled, and derived from mutual support an extensive empire over the feelings of men, were now restrained within separate spheres of agency. The whole system no longer worked harmoniously, and by intrinsic harmony acquired external freedom; but there arose a violent and unusual action in the several component functions, each for itself, all striving to reproduce the regular power which the whole had once enjoyed.

> Hence the melancholy which so evidently characterises the spirit of
> modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking
> relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest.[155]

The last two sentences of this excerpt would be a prescient diagnosis of Tennyson's poetics (even more telling, in my opinion, than the "five distinctive excellencies" later enumerated), had Hallam intended them to apply to him. Instead, Hallam aligns Tennyson with a poetics of "innocence" that is unlike Wordsworth's poetics of "repentance." Hallam thus makes the case that Tennyson's lyricism is originary. In line with this mythmaking, there is no mention by Hallam of Tennyson's first volume. Yet Tennyson is reworking this immediate poetic past just as assiduously as he is his Romantic forebears. Furthermore, he finds it more poetically productive to repent these pasts than to transcend them.

Tennyson's lyrics recall odic pasts: they remember and recant them simultaneously. As such, Tennyson's lyricism is not originary, but profoundly palinodic. He is not daring not to write odes, but daring to unwrite them – dismantling them in order to lay bare Romantic mechanisms of redemption and transcendence. Once denuded, odic structures have a way of modulating into and thus interrogating lyric constructs. Tennyson, for example, does learn to mute that "genuine embarrassment" of apostrophe, but instead of excising it altogether, he diverts it, ventriloquizes it, delays it – until it finds a more stunning effect in an "Oh God, that I were dead!" "Mariana" is a third-person ode; in juxtaposing her monody with his melody, Tennyson cracks the lyrical

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[155] "On Modern Poetry," 190.

veneer that is primacy of subjectivity and explores doubts about the efficacy of the lyric voice and its rapport with absent presences. Tennyson intuits that Romantic apostrophe marks a too-easy access to divine realms. No matter how many casements Mariana flings open – itself an empty apostrophic gesture, a turning aside done too routinely or mechanically[156] – her access to aspects (or prospects) more sublime is denied. There is abundant recompense, however, in the world of the subliminal that Tennyson consequently lets loose: a world below sensation that is navigated through a poetry of sensation. Tennyson stages an impasse between the fairy fineness of his lyrical surface and faery lands forlorn (the past, the unconscious), rather than putting transcendent distance between them. Mariana's incanting does not work for her, and enchanting though we readers find it, we have to ask whether it works for us. If yes, then we must locate our pleasure in her fallen world, and Tennyson's musicality then functions less as the sign of lyrical power than as an embarrassment of (and about) that power. His poetry of sensation thus renegotiates the poetry of reflection, but comes into its own as a poetry of repression.

Even as Tennyson reins in his odic libido, the values, mechanisms, and structures of the ode do not yield to those of the lyric, but yield them up. "Mariana" and Tennyson's other 1830 songs are, just like Mariana's song, a substitute formation – a renegotiation of impulse – whose first forms still have the power to haunt, to take shape. Though the lyrics, in their meticulous differentiation, tend to resist formal taxonomy (another aspect

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[156] Keats does this in not one but two odes at prominent points: "Ode to a Nightingale" (l. 69) and "Ode to Psyche" (l. 66).

of their seeming originality), they are broadly indebted to the irregular verse that so

occupied Tennyson in his first volume. When formal irregularity is imported from where

it historically occurs (in the vast expanses of the greater odes) to the more confined

spaces of the lyrics, it behaves differently. The massive Pindaric strophe, when it has

nowhere to go, displays tremendous inertia, which Tennyson exploits to great effect.[157]

By breaking down the structural logic of strophe, antistrophe, and epode, he cultivates an

obstinacy of form that lends itself to thematic stasis and stifling. Deprived of the odic

syntax of progress, Tennyson's speakers instead languish in baroque stanzas that reiterate

but never resolve. Whether this is understood as a vacillation between strophe and

antistrophe wherein speakers are denied the synthesis of the epode, or as all epode (in the

term's sense of "after-song") wherein speakers find themselves being somewhere without

having gotten there, this irregularity (of character, as well as of form) is not answered,

complemented, or balanced – the very feature that makes the lyrics such intense

explorations into subjectivity.

Stillness, stasis, stance (Ben Jonson called the epode the "stand") are all-

important to the embowered consciousnesses of the lyrics. If they had to move, they

would "fall to the ground" (l. 23), as Tennyson confesses in "The Poet's Mind." This

same poem's anti-invocation of "Come not here" (l. 11) is typical of the stand-offishness

that pervades the 1830 lyrics, which are a function of all that is left or kept out. Of all the

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[157] Rather than having nowhere to go, the Pindaric strophes of "O Bosky Brook," in a slightly different configuration of the ode's conceptual syntax, go nowhere. They spend their odic potential through unfurled, undirected odic kinetics. They are obversely "inert," and an ody in motion tends to remain in motion.

presences not quite called in or upon in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, the ode itself is foremost. Even the volume's one ode-in-title, the "Ode to Memory," neglects its generic charge and is in a way the most lyrical of the lyrics, in that it is the one poem that seems most to issue from Alfred Tennyson. This is its problem, however: subjectivity was for Tennyson not the solution it was to his Romantic forebears. As Alfred cries out for dialogue, for "converse with all forms/ Of the many-sided mind" (ll. 115-116), he expresses an aversion to the many one-sided minds in the volume, while also confessing his status as one. Fixated on his earlier self, unable to escape memory or to reconnect with it, the ode's speaker contrasts with that species of consolidated subjectivity that is a hallmark of the greater Romantic lyric.

"Tintern Abbey" sits uneasily on the outskirts of *Lyrical Ballads*; "Ode to Memory" stands in the middle of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*.[158] Yet even in a volume of lighter lyrics, the ode stands down rather than out, and Tennyson intends its soughing failure to suggest a relation between second-rate odes and first-rate lyrics. The formal likeness between the "Ode to Memory" and the lyrical précis surrounding it emphasizes the ode's tendency to protract and reiterate, rather than to distill and intensify. In the ode, Tennyson indulges his instinct toward a formal expansiveness but simultaneously regrets that it goes unmatched by a thematic or perspectival magnitude. This weakness of perspective is shared by the lyrics in this volume, yet in poems such as "Mariana," the weakness makes for a stronger, or newer, poetry, as it manifests in an oblique positioning

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[158] Wordsworth almost called his poem an ode; Tennyson would soon take up the strategy of not calling his poems odes.

of subject relative to the poem: in Mariana's foreshortened song, subjectivity is a surface, and a changed perspective liberates us from her illusion. The "Ode to Memory" tries to outlast this phenomenon, but ends up caught in its obverse: subjectivity is an inevitability, from which there is no reprieve. As a reaction to Wordsworth's egotistical sublime, Tennyson's general project at this time is to write poems that lack subjects, or barely intimate them, or dispose of them. He is setting and springing the traps of subjectivity; that the ode does not escape this trap is its point. It is the rare poem in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in which subject and speaker align, and this becomes its sub-Wordsworthian lament: that an earlier self and a later self are the same, or at least are determinate, inevitable functions of one another. Memory (a "dewy dawn," an "obscurity") doesn't generate enough emotional, psychological, or artistic differential to qualify for Romantic "recollection," and so instead Tennyson's ode languishes in recall.

2.4.1 "Ode to Memory"

The Romantic ode spans the distance between the poet as a young man (or child) and the present-day poet, the poem itself understood as a natural expression by the latter entity as he meditates upon a personal crisis. Memory, as it brings about a sense of change, introduces the crisis but also presents a manner of solution: to accept and incorporate the irrevocability of the past. "I cannot paint what then I was," concedes Wordsworth. In Tennyson, however, memory is (and remains) the crisis. Memory is the deity "who stealest fire,/ From the fountains of the past,/ To glorify the present" (ll. 1-3), though the poem's thesis bears out the obverse phenomenon – i.e., that memory seems to

steal from the present to glorify the past. In either case, these are ultimately indistinct processes, largely because memory (a "dewy dawn," an "obscurity") doesn't generate enough emotional, psychological, or artistic differential to qualify for Romantic recollection or continuity.

Wordsworth was content to have his days lead on "each to each," this natural continuity in turn becoming poetic continuity, as the lines of "My Heart Leaps Up" become the epigraph of the Intimations ode. However, Tennyson's split, if that, is between an earlier poet and a later poet – and, perhaps, a still later poet: the "Ode to Memory" is itself a memory, even by the time of its first appearance in 1830, when the twenty-something was claiming that the poem was "Written Very Early in Life." When the 80-year-old filed the poem away among Juvenilia, it still confirmed that the poem was one which Tennyson could not put at enough distance. While Wordsworth cannot paint what then he was because, presumably, he wasn't then a painter, Tennyson cannot *not* paint what then he was, because he was never not a poet. Tennyson's ode is his portrait of the artist as a young artist:

> Well hast thou done, great artist Memory,
> In setting round thy first experiment
> With royal frame-work of wrought gold;
> Needs must thou dearly love thy first essay,
> And foremost in thy various gallery
> Place it, where sweetest sunlight falls
> Upon the storied walls;
> For the discovery
> And newness of thine art so pleasèd thee,
> That all which thou hast drawn of fairest
> Or boldest since, but lightly weighs
> With thee unto the love thou bearest
> The first-born of thy genius. Artist-like,
> Ever retiring thou dost gaze

On the prime labour of thine early days:
No matter what the sketch might be
(ll. 80-95)

In this description, art precedes memory. The assumed artlessness of the early Romantic

odes is not an option for Tennyson, and the "Ode to Memory" enlarges the crisis of

personal memory into one of collective poetic memory. A fear of sameness of self

transfers into a fear of sameness of art and poetry. Memory accommodates an artistic

ease or sloth ("ever retiring" on the merits of a "first essay"), as if the poet's whole

vocation were endless imitation of himself. The contentment with which the artist looks

back upon first works is belied by the incongruity of the "sketch" that is framed in gold.

Art's permanence and stability – its immovability – contrast with memory's failings in

Wordsworth, which in his scheme are opportunities: "The things which I have seen I

now can see no more" (l. 9); "a sleep and a forgetting" (l. 58); "Not in entire

forgetfulness" (l. 62); "Fallings from us, vanishings" (l. 146).[159] For Wordsworth,

forgetting is an opportunity to remember – that is, imaginatively fill in what it was like to

be the celestial infant.

For Tennyson, it's not that memory fails him, it's that it won't go away. Even in

eschewing the landscape images of that Romantic ode, "Ode to Memory" nonetheless

populates itself with them. Hollander singles out one such image as a "received device"

in the lineage of "the voice of poetry itself":[160]

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[159] Quoted from *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). All Wordsworth
quotations are taken from this edition.

[160] "Tennyson's Melody," 106.

> ...the waterfall
> Which ever sounds and shines
>   A pillar of white light upon the wall
> Of purple cliffs, aloof descried
> (ll. 51-54)

This is the beginning of a Tennysonian "mode of visualization" for Hollander, who delights in the "doubled 'sounds and shines'" as "sound … pictorialized" (106-107). Yet he passes over the "aloof descried" of the quote, which has its own doubleness in "descried." Whether this is a sight or a sound, a scrying- or a crying-out, the point is that Tennyson is aloof from it – and is putting a great distance between himself and the very literary – i.e. overly "descri[b]ed" – waterfall.

As the waterfall modulates, sonically and topographically, to more modest wattles (l. 66), Tennyson takes to task the showiness of sublime communing. "Thou comest not with shows of flaunting vines/ Unto mine inner eye" (ll. 48-49). Wordsworth's "inward eye/ Which is the bliss of solitude" ("Daffodils," ll. 15-16) will be converted by poem's end to more modest communications: "converse with all forms/ Of the many-sided mind" (ll. 115-116). While the Romantics defamiliarize the natural, Tennyson refamiliarizes – even familializes – it:

> Come forth, I charge thee, arise,
> ....
> Come from the woods that belt the gray hill-side,
> The seven elms, the poplars four
> That stand beside my father's door
> (ll. 46, 55-57)

This is a marked change from Tennyson's earlier "On Sublimity" (1827), in which he forswears the poplar ("O tell me not of vales of tenderest green,/ The poplar's shade, the

plantane's graceful tree" (ll. 1-2)), on his way toward feeling "the genuine force of high Sublimity" (l. 110).[161]

While the fantasia of sublimity is easier to target in Shelley ("To muse on my own separate phantasy,/ My own, my human mind"[162]), Wordsworth intimates a time when he was not subjected to subjectivity:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.
> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
>   Hath had elsewhere its setting
> (ll. 59-61)

Thus Wordsworth's ode affords him an anodyne fall into metaphysical amnesia, from which he can deduce immortality. "Ode to Memory" lays bare this Wordsworthian mechanism of redemption (his waterfallenness, so to speak) and qualifies subjectivity as an inevitability, an unqualified fallenness, from which there is no reprieve. Tennyson's subjectivity is constituted by memory; he does not have Wordsworth's "recognitions dim and faint" ("Tintern Abbey" l. 60). Rather, Tennyson's Memory is a "dawn" that throws light not on but chiaroscurically against "this obscurity" – i.e., this present-day obscurity.

The "Ode to Memory" resembles the Intimations ode in its irregular strophic form, but, even though it is more studied and restrained than the irregular strophes of "O Bosky Brook," it still does not accomplish the cognitive telescoping of its Romantic

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[161] Later versions of "Ode to Memory" continue Tennyson's mitigation of the sublime, as the original "Emblems or glimpses of eternity" are changed in 1842 to "Like emblems of infinity" (l. 103). It is the literary, rather than actual, encounters with waterfalls, etc., through which he feels sublimity, and "Ode to Memory" is Tennyson being honest with himself about this less than "genuine" feeling.
[162] *SPP*, ll. 36-37.

predecessor. This is evident as the ode runs on, and on, while its speaker is stuck –

untranscending and unforgetting – as dramatized in the poem's refrain:

> O strengthen me, enlighten me!
> I faint in this obscurity,
> Thou dewy dawn of memory.
> (ll. 5-7, 43-5, 122-4)

Fichter calls the refrain a "mistake,"[163] and to be sure its lyric eddying is at odds with the

typical progressive leaps and bounds of the ode. Gerard Manley Hopkins noted about the

poem "a mysterious stress of feeling, especially in the refrain."[164] The refrain, as it calls

again and again, dramatizes the difference between recalling and the more redemptive

Wordsworthian recollection.

This ode is grounded by memory in cognition rather than imagination, as its post-

Romantic call for enlightenment makes clear: "O strengthen me, enlighten me!" "The

Palace of Art" in the next volume will flirt with Romantic internal combustion ("I am on

fire within"), but this ode remains epimethean, its best hope is for a rekindling of "fire,/

From the fountains of the past" (ll. 1-2). Unable to achieve Romantic continuity, nor

quite ready to deliver unto the Victorian era (which anyhow hadn't officially

commenced) the formal instrument of progress made expressly for it, Tennyson seems to

fail the ode. Some critics have understood this by characterizing Tennyson's as an

essentially lyrical voice that couldn't but falter within the ode. I maintain, however, that

Tennyson remains an essentially odic voice who needs a way out of the ode for a while.

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[163] "Ode and Elegy," 408.

[164] Quoted in Robert Preyer, "Tennyson as an Oracular Poet," *Modern Philology* 55, no. 4 (May 1, 1958): 239.

2.4.2 "Mariana"

Bloom says that "Mariana … is a poetess, and she sings a Dejection ode that Tennyson scarcely ventured to write in his own person."[165] Bloom is right that "Mariana" is a third-person ode, as Tennyson indeed elides the "dejected" of Shakespeare's quote. But she is not a poetess. Seamus Perry observes that Mariana's extrication from the plot of *Measure for Measure* "consign[s] her instead to the immobilised perpetuity of a state of mind," which is consummately realized in the refrain:

> "He cometh not"; but the refrain saying so comes again and again, the poem returning with sad inevitability to a burden, within which the words return upon themselves, as though the hope of verbal innovation had disappeared with other hope, and all inventiveness were spent.[166]

Indeed, her monody is monotonous, the refrain ever qualifying that "she *only said*." Though surrounded by the contrived, beautiful texture of Tennyson's lyricism, the plainness of Mariana's utterance is its feature. Mariana herself cannot cant; "Mariana" recants lyricism's purity. Even in Bloom's description, such palinodic dynamics are clear enough: "the poet creates a consciousness narrower and purer than his own and measures his own malady of self-concern by its distance from that pure intensity."[167]

Mariana's plainspeak is just one of many points of contact with "Ode to Memory." In both poems, auditors who might bring fulfillment, though intimated, are

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[165] "Introduction," in *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 4.

[166] *Alfred Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), 33.

[167] "Introduction," 4.

kept out: "He cometh not," "Thou comest not" (ll. 48). A blank day breaks on the speakers of both poems; nights are equally unfulfilling, as Mariana's waking dream parallels Alfred's visionlessness. "I faint in this obscurity" resonates with "I am aweary." Alfred looks out upon "the waste enormous marsh" (l. 101), Mariana the "marishmosses" and "[t]he level waste" (ll. 40, 44). Poplars loom. The lack of vista (or prospect, as Wordsworth calls it) correlates to a lack of perspective. Both speakers are doomed to memory, to remember the past and repeat it. The unadorned refrain thus figures largely in both poems.

Subjectivity – whether in the form of Mariana's bare sentience or Alfred's paralyzing self-consciousness – is a fallenness. "Visit my low desire!" (l. 4), Alfred exclaims, managing to say the one thing Mariana needs to and the one thing no ode ever has. Alfred and Mariana both might moan forever on, and while Alfred in effect does, Mariana's poem has an arbiter. "Ode to Memory," for all its metrical mobility, stalls in immovability as an artistically static Ode of Representation. But once the ode's kinetics are cut away, and the Pindaric "throb" (Shaw) subsides to an ache, Mariana's "immobilised perpetuity" is achieved; thus emerges her Ode of uneasy Presentiment. Perry too intuits an unconsummated antistrophism in "Mariana," an "interminable recurrence [that] evokes the plight of a crisis that will not reach a catastrophe."[168]

Ultimately, Alfred and Mariana are similar subjects occupying very different poems – though, perhaps in a more profound similarity, they both occupy poems that

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[168] *Alfred Tennyson*, 34.

seem alien to them. While "Ode to Memory" does achieve an alignment of speaker with poet more strongly than any of Tennyson's poems to this point, the ode in which he finds himself generates more of the same. Thus Tennyson must for a space answer the call of his lyrics, which afford him a poetic authority through their discharged or estranged subjects. This estrangement, as we will explore in the next major section, Tennyson will direct back into the ode, as he returns to reclaim its formal strangeness. By the time of this "Para-ody," transcendence and enlightenment must be pieced together through objectivity and meta-subjectivity.

2.5 Sublimed

Tennyson situates the ode midway between Wordsworth's egotistical sublime (it opts out of sounding cataracts and other Romantic memes) and Mariana's subliminal (the Lincolnshire marshland both poems share is not subsumed to his psyche as it is to hers). As such, the ode is simply an ego: a voice that, if mundane, is at least practical, honest, modest, rational. The poem registers neither sublimely high nor subliminally deep, but instead breaks even. Tennyson treads this middle ground in other poems in the volume. Instead of redressing the shortcomings of single perspectives with a singular perspective (that is, a powerful, Romantic one), Tennyson turns to multiple perspectives. Poem pairs like "Nothing Will Die" and "All Things Will Die" continue in the ode's vein of recall, equivocation, stand-off, and standstill.

Bloom laments this kind of poetic self-consciousness in Tennyson, suggestive as it is of a halving of his visionary self. The discursiveness of poems like "Dualisms," "[All

thoughts, all creeds]," and "Supposed Confessions…" works against the subliminal modes of "Mariana" and "A spirit haunts…". For Bloom this "vice" earns Tennyson expulsion from the visionary company, symptomatic as it is of a lack of "faith in the autonomy of his own imagination."[169] The "Ode to Memory," however – as the volume's linchpin between the overstatement of the discursive lyrics and the understatement of the subliminal ones – takes as its very topic the conditionality of imagination, and so reveals Tennyson's burgeoning ideas about a poetic reality principle: that there is an external (unpoetic, real) world that a poet must negotiate, rather than rebuff, evade, or ignore. In the ode, this world (qua landscape: "the poplars four/ That stand beside my father's door") writes Tennyson at least as much as he writes it. If this invokes the Wordsworthian half-create / half-perceive poetic, it also exposes it – as even-handed as it sounds – as a too-radically imaginative encounter with the external worlds of nature, form, and politics. Bloom would say that Tennyson only rarely surmounts an imbalance in the half-create/half-perceive ratio, and that otherwise the world as-perceived takes too much space within his poetry. The ode does bear out this thesis, as its plainness prevails and Alfred prefers observation over imagination. Yet even as Tennyson perceives the natural world as-is, he is simultaneously refusing to perceive the literary world as is (i.e., the world according to Wordsworth), rejecting as he does a distinctly Romantic landscape, which, though imaginative, is also imaginary.

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[169] "Introduction," 3.

Tennyson's positioning of his poetry outside other literary worlds is a misreading to which Bloom should be attuned, and is archetypical to his positioning his poetry outside of itself. Bloom, however, is still operating on a pleasure principle (a critical praxis that owes as much to Wordsworth as to Freud) that has Tennyson perpetually self-inflected. Bloom argues that "unpleasure in one's own images becomes a burden for the poetic ego,"[170] and that Tennyson was always furiously overwriting against the sense that it was impossible to have a stanza of "one's own." For what Tennyson lacks in "priority of stance," he compensates with a "priority of style" (149), the "magnificence" of which is the result of a "constant renewal of repression" (135), an ongoing struggle with a poetic anteriority he had all but absorbed. To Bloom, Tennyson's fate, or fortune, consists of being re-ensconced within his own consciousness – to repress Keats and his ideal of the "camelion Poet" and so to achieve the "solipsistic glory" of Wordsworth.

Bloom locates the Romantic ode at the center of this psychopoetic scheme, with "Mariana" at the forefront of this poetic project of creating "hyperbolic version[s] of Coleridge's *Dejection* or Keats's *Nightingale*":

> The catachresis here is the hothouse-forcing of the crisis-situation, since it would be difficult to image a more extreme state of self-consciousness than the one that Mariana so dialectically enjoys. (135-6)

But Bloom does not elaborate upon the ode *as* the vehicle for this "magnificence," even though it is ready-made for the "hyperbole" and "exaggeration" that recur in his assessments. Tennyson "never stops giving pleasure by his leaps beyond limits" (135),

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[170] "Tennyson: In the Shadow of Keats," 128.

and while that leaping is an odic aesthetic, it yields effects that aim beyond pleasure. The ode's excessiveness, its sheer materiality, becomes the sign of Tennyson's conflict as he shifts up from personal and psychological poetic milieus, to the levels of culture and genre. Through the ode, Tennyson transcends what in Bloom's scheme is an eternal opposition between his poetic id and his poetic ego, and – if the psychoanalytic model is allowed full sway – sublimates the solipsistic Romantic drive.

Tennyson's discursive poetry, as it attempts to be excursive, is thus bound to considerations about where it stands in relation to the real world. While Hallam's observation that Tennyson "imitates nobody" sounds mostly right, he considers this originality as a function of his friend's escapism: "It is exquisitely beautiful to see … how the feeling of art is kept ascendant in our minds over distressful realities."[171] But this simplifies Tennyson's own feelings about "the feeling of art." "Small thought was there of life's distress" (l. 37) is more wistful than wishful, and the "Ode to Memory" bears the mordant ars-poetical view that if art takes its cues from nature and infancy (or from other art that does so), then like them it becomes an anchor not of purest thoughts, but of easiest feeling.

An art of feeling, a poetry of sensation: Tennyson was rightly congratulated by his friend on achieving these through the dark beauty of the 1830 lyrics. And yet the project of Tennyson's volume is located less in the "worship" of this beauty, as Hallam would have it, than in the diagnosis of it. Tennyson's judgment about the beauty of his

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[171] "On Modern Poetry," 196.

lyrical textures insinuates in all the curious nature poems, where human subjects are absorbed into the natural scene, where subjectivity is never quite more than sentience, and where the sounds of a poem and the sounds within a poem overlie one another. Counter to the Wordsworthian scheme of sensations that refine into thoughts, thought gets diverted to sense. The irony of the "Ode to Memory" is that even as it proclaims a withdrawal into the mind, it is undermined by a bleeding-out of intellection into sensation, particularly through its refrain, which sensuously (i.e., by virtue of its being a refrain) renders his insensateness ("O strengthen me, enlighten me!/ I faint in this obscurity").

Tellingly, Tennyson considered this ode "one of the best among his very early and peculiarly concentrated Nature-poems."[172] Even if that "concentrated" rings as imprecise for reasons of drifting excursiveness earlier discussed, the categorization of the ode as a nature poem puts it on a continuum with the lyrics. Just as the ode is an overgrown lyric, so the lyrics seem to be odes to no one – literally so in the lady poems, the ladies addressed being "evolved, like the camel, from [his] own consciousness."[173] The poet realizes that, like the rose that opens at night to "Adeline," he is "wasting odorous sighs" (l. 43)[174] on inscrutable addressees who are anyway his own invention – "[t]hose peerless flowers … rooted in the garden of the mind" confesses the "Ode to Memory" (ll. 24-26).

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[172] *Memoir*, 3n.

[173] *Works*, I: 663n.

[174] These "odorous sighs" are themselves the downshifted "odorous winds" (l. 45) of "Timbuctoo" and, before that, of Shelley. Ricks observes that "odorous winds" are "found four times in Shelley" (*Poems* I: 192n.).

Yet even poems about self-absorption never quite escape being self-absorbed poems, and the headiness, in one sense or another, of the volume's sick-rose atmosphere prevails. It will take until "The Lotos-Eaters" (itself a mutated, or highly variegated, ode) in the next volume for Tennyson to articulate more overtly his misgivings about beauty for its own sake, though he will never quite overcome his suspicion of odes as "pretty things."[175] As Herbert Tucker observes, "the hothouse beauties of the inbred Tennysonian imagination … are found wanting by Tennyson himself."[176] Tennyson indeed senses that his tropic lyrics are also entropic – that the intense energy spent at the lyrical surface is unavailable for the kind of work he knows poetry could be doing. The apocalypse-in-a-sonnet, "The Kraken," emblematizes the centripetalism of the lyrical surface, the inadequacy of lyric to contain revelation, as well as the impotence of revelation itself as a mode of knowledge and as a method of poetic practice. The sprawling "Ode to Memory" similarly dooms itself to one dimension – a mass dying on a surface of subjectivity. And, having kissed its lyrical cousins in the volume, the ode serves as a sounding-board for what Tennyson finds unsatisfactory about his lyrics' scope and reach, and so it remains a placeholder for the big, public poetry Tennyson idealized but was as yet wary of executing.

Ready to sound the depths for what beyond beauty imagination might yield, or for what beyond imagination might drive a poem, Tennyson does turn a blind eye to his

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[175] "As for writing court odes except upon express command from Headquarters, that I shall not do. Pretty things they are likely to be" (*Letters* I: 343n.).

[176] *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 134.

inward eye – but, contrary to Bloom's assessment, this represents not a compromise of vision but a doubling of visions. In addition to the flights of imagination of which Tennyson is so capable even in the juvenilia, there is an emerging critical voice that signals more to poetic creation than simply a poetics of creation. This critical voice is not that debilitating self-consciousness of Tennyson's, but the fruit of it: a voice from outside the poetry that is being woven back into it. As evident in all of the odd paratextual apparatus in *Poems by Two Brothers* (the copious footnotes, the meticulous historical legwork), this critical impulse is with Tennyson from the beginning. But because it develops from volume to volume – paratext in 1827 modulates into subtext by 1830, into context by 1832 – it shouldn't be understood merely as self-consciousness or self-criticism, but as a poetics thereof.

2.6 Para-ody

Self-critical perception becomes its own kind of creation in Tennyson, as he expresses his self-awareness as more poem. This is a specific understanding of Armstrong's simultaneously expressive and analytical "double poem," which "draws attention to the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the culture conditions in which those relationships are made."[177] "The Merman" and "The Mermaid," for example, demonstrate two points of view, which, because they are "slightly misaligned" (49), invite us to view gender and sexuality (and

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[177] *Victorian Poetry*, 13.

the economics of either) through different lenses. Armstrong is willing to grant that this is a fully developed technique ("as wayward and experimental as any avant-garde twentieth-century poetic experiment" (43)), in that Tennyson thereafter "retreats" to a more conservative, less "daring" poetics. But the Mer-poems and other pairs of 1830 represent only Tennyson's first stab at the double poem. Technically they are *doubled* poems, where the doubleness is a sign that Tennyson has yet to write his way out of Keats' chameleon shadow, which looms as long as he continues to deflect subjectivity by leaping from subject to subject.

Each Mer-poem is in three strophic movements, and there is the sense that they are together the same poem – a Pindaric ode reiterating its triads. This sameness of form points to the sameness of character that underlies merman and mermaid, despite all their differences: though the two subjects would seemingly predicate upon one another, they both ultimately sacrifice any sexual or ontological harmony in order to indulge in projections of self. "All looking up for the love of me… All looking down for the love of me" (ll. 51, 55), concludes the mermaid (the only one not looking is the merman), from her perch of self-sufficient immortality. As the mermaid looks up ("aloft") and finds her gaze returned by "things that are … soft" (ll. 52-53) (humans, probably, in a world full of scaly creatures), Tennyson gives us the mirror image of an earlier mirror image. Shelley's speaker, in "Ode to the West Wind," has already read his geocentrism into "The sapless foliage of the ocean" (with Shelley himself insisting from that poem's well-known footnote that the "vegetation at the bottom of the sea … sympathizes with that of

the land"[178]). Couched as they are within the parlor-game interrogative "Who would

be…?", the Mer-poems modulate Shelley's interjection into a rhetorical question. The

poems and their speakers ask "be thou me?" – though not of an absent deity, but rather of

the poem's reader, who has been transformed by imagination right back into herself (-

maid) or himself (-man).

Armstrong says that it is in the "slightly misaligned" nature of these poems that

produces a kaleidoscope of selves – the merman and mermaid are not "in neat

opposition" (49); the merman imagines a mermaid who is "precisely not" the singer of

the other poem. The misalignment might be too slight, however. Though Tennyson has

merman and mermaid differently inhabit parallel worlds, a larger parallel is being made:

that their world is really our own. The mer-people have misread one another, but the

humans who have initiated the "Who would be…" game must acknowledge a more

fundamental misreading of the fictional mer-persons. This misreading is an extension of

their own perceptual bias, or human anatomy to say the least. The mer-people "run" –

like salmon, but also like human beings – among "groves," "dells," and "wolds." As the

"woulds" come full circle to "wolds," it's clear that imaginative volition is circumscribed,

and that the free play of the parlor game hasn't been as free as it seems. As these selves

self-replicate, imagination – as opulent and dazzling as it is in these two poems – is

reproductive machinery. The machinery of form is similarly at work here, as merman and

mermaid also occupy the same poetic space: poems each in three strophic movements.

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[178] *SPP*, 300n.

The spritely irregularity of the first poem diminishes as it becomes the first of two Pindaric iterations. The line numbers and lengths aren't exact, but given Tennyson's entanglement with Pindaric forms in this volume at large, it's safe to say the mer-creatures are caught in a similar net, as Tennyson's misgivings about form and genre manifest as a difference that spites itself into sameness.

By making the double poems self-replicating, Tennyson seems to acknowledge that lyric poetry has difficulty being anything *other* than "a construction of the self," and this becomes a problem for the poet who would be public. "Nothing Will Die" and "All Things Will Die" (both also in a three-strophe format) similarly tip their hand in ways that reveal they are actually being generated by the same consciousness – an inevitable condition, admittedly, for all a poet's poetry, but nonetheless one Tennyson wants to mitigate. The doubled poems suggest the inadequacy of the *single* poem to escape the orbit of its own epistemology, its inability to transcend its own end. Like the critical apparatus in *Poems by Two Brothers*, the doubled poems are a heavy-handed grab at authoritativeness; they evince a desire not to be wrong, but they achieve this by granting rightness everywhere. "All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true" proclaims the last poem in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. And yet even this proclamation is undermined by a paratextual whimper about how relativity is relative, a last word about the impossibility of last words – delivering to the very end on the volume's palinodic ethos.

As self-awareness manifests as *more poems* rather than *more poem*, Tennyson senses he is capitalizing on the whim of a Keatsian poetic license, rather than delivering a durable poetic good. In the 1832 volume, knowing well the potential for double

subjectivity to implode, Tennyson displaces his "low desire" to be a supreme Romantic

subject. His strategy shifts from hedging poetic voice, to hedging it in. The driving motif

of the 1832 volume becomes a kind of museum exhibition – à la "The Palace of Art" – in

that his lyrics manage to be simultaneously enclosed and exposed. The result is not an

objective lyric but objectified lyric, wherein a poem's autonomy estranges it, and wherein

its materiality makes it powerful but also irrelevant – a fact but also an artifact.

Armstrong calls this "seeing utterance both as subject and as object," and says the

approach allows Tennyson "to explore expressive psychological forms simultaneously as

psychological conditions *and* as constructs, the phenomenology of a culture, projections

which indicate the structure of relationships" (13). As that emphatic *and* indicates, in the

double poem proper Tennyson gets to have his Keats and eat it too: he commits his

lyricism, while also suggesting that he has yielded to its inevitability, thus airing his

skepticism about it. Moving from the hot-house to the cold-frame, Tennyson begins to

figure an indifference to all richly-realized utterance, and the strange beauty of 1830

becomes in 1832 beautiful-but-strange, as in "The Lady of Shalott" with its inscrutable

utterance in plain sight.

  Poems, Chiefly Lyrical begins in "A Melody" and ends in palinody. In *Poems*

(1832), the palinody continues, although it is more severely self-inflicted – an unwriting

of his own poetry and not only that of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. This

palinody is unpalatable to Bloom, while to Armstrong it represents the limit of

Tennyson's subversive experiment. In either account, the critics have Tennyson beating a

retreat. Bloom solves Tennyson's palinody by returning him to his melody: his

"magnificent style" will continue to find itself most at home in "a vehement and highly

expressive selfhood,"[179] that intricate scheme of repression seeming at times more simply

a regression. Armstrong deems Tennyson "the retrospective poet"[180] and dooms him to a

poetic future of more conservative, less "daring" poetry. Tennyson too at this time is

reading the writing on the Shalottian gunwale. Unfulfilled by a poetry of, by, and for the

self, he estranges himself from the soul's "pleasurehouse," issuing a grim forecast for

poetry on the verge of his putative ten years' silence: "No voice breaks through the

stillness of this world:/ One deep, deep silence all!" ("Palace" ll. 259-260).

     I discern in this section a way forward for Tennyson, in both his odic career and

his career at large. Robert Langbaum says that "subjectivity was not the program but the

inescapable condition of romanticism."[181] Tennyson would have to reprogram this

Romantic inheritance to break through to the world, the culture at large. His project then,

according to Armstrong, "relates consciousness to the external forms of the culture in

which it exists,"[182] and to accomplish this Tennyson would have to delineate the mutual

exclusivity underpinning that relationship – or to relineate it, as it were, drawing a line

between his own prospects and the accomplishments of his most recent forebears. The

Romantics did not distinguish between "manifestations of consciousness" and "its

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[179] "Tennyson: In the Shadow of Keats," 137.

[180] *Victorian Poetry*, 46.

[181] *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 28.

[182] *Victorian Poetry*, 12.

internal condition,"[183] and the ode (irregular verse generally) satisfied for them – that is, made unproblematic or fluid – the relationships between form and content, history and consciousness, culture and self, world and mind.

To solve the problem of the hegemony of voice – an apostrophic voice both calling out and crowding out – Tennyson explores not "No voice" but more voices. In his para-ody, apostrophe reforms as strophe: voice meets with other voice (dissenting, indifferent), which gets re-encoded into separate structures while still remaining within the same ostensibly single text. These overdone poems derive their excess from being erected directly on top of generic fault lines. One kind of poetry does not become another; rather, poetic kinds are precisely unbecoming to one another. As the beauties of lyrical texture must contend with the demands of larger structures (generic as well as cultural), a chiefly irregular poetic persists in the para-odic poems.

2.6.1   The Island Poems

The poems of 1830 and 1832 generally feature Tennyson's intensive explorations into what Armstrong calls "consciousness in another place" (47), through which he seeks not only a different geography for his characters (Mariana relocates to the Mediterranean in "Mariana in the South"), but also a different poetic geography. That is, Tennyson is interested in not only how a consciousness sounds different in other places (this being an extension of his ideas about the conditionality of imagination), but also how poetic

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[183] Ibid.

consciousness can sound poetic territories – i.e., genres – differently. To generate

difference in poetic lands that seem always the same is a career-long project in Tennyson.

In the more sustained and concentrated experimentation that is the island poem sequence,

Tennyson discovers that the fix for the double poem isn't to revert to the unified poem,

but to cultivate asymmetry and irregularity. Each of the island poems will thus stage a

formal blowout, becoming less itself while still continuing as a single poem.

As we've seen, Tennyson began to figure the problems of the double poem

through the Mer-poems. Although the otherwise delightful, irregularly-rendered mer-

creatures were flattened by the tremendous inertia of the ode, Tennyson did not abandon

the form. Tennyson tried the poem again in the 1830 volume as "The Sea-Fairies," then,

in 1832, as "The Hesperides," and "The Lotos-Eaters" – the ultimate same place in a

different place, "where all things always seemed the same" (l. 24). Each of these island

poems has a formal precedent in the ode, in its irregular and choral strains, and so

Tennyson, like his mariners, takes his bearings from the odic mainland while also

managing to sail around it. The poems have other formal precedents (blank verse,

Spenserian stanza) that Tennyson puts into play with the ode; the resulting formal

disparity, A. D. Culler argues, serves to highlight the entry into as well as egress from

imaginative realms. Of "The Hesperides" he says, "It [the blank verse] is to this lyrical

medium [the "Song" that follows] as prose to poetry, history to myth, or reality to art."[184]

Culler describes the "Song" as "irregularly cadenced, intricately rhymed lines" (50), not

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[184] *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 50.

quite naming the ode, though it's clear elsewhere that he understands the particularly

Pindaric impetus of Tennyson's technical development: "In this and other poems

Tennyson has developed a method for mediating between history and myth, the visionary

and the real, but it is not the unitary method of the swift imaginative leap" (51).

Moreover, Tennyson is refiguring this Pindarism as it filters through the Romantics:

"unlike the romantic ode, the ascent into imaginative experience is by means of dialogue,

not monologue" (52).

Armstrong, as just seen, calls this dialogism "consciousness in another place."

Indeed, against the hazily Odyssean backdrop of this poem sequence, the center of

consciousness eventually transfers from the siren figures to the mariner figures, one

poem's subject becoming the next poem's periphery, auditors becoming speaking

subjects. In "The Sea-Fairies," the siren figures cajole "the weary mariners" (l. 1) to

"Leap ashore!"[185] With its heightened attention to place ("Whither away…?" ad

infinitum until it withers away), this direct address becomes, in "The Hesperides," a song

the sailor Hanno happens to hear on his way to "the outer sea." These drifting centers of

subjectivity are a function of genre, as the very heart of Homer's epic becomes but the

periphery of Tennyson's lyric. "Courage!" is Odysseus' first and nearly last word in "The

Lotos-Eaters," and that heroic "core"[186] is itself adrift from "The Hesperides," which

directly precedes it in the volume. Tennyson's course of studied indirection and

redirection can be charted as such: two consciousnesses that are the same though they

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[185] "Leap ashore!" in 1830 is softened to "Hither" in 1853.

[186] The "goldencored" (l. 102) apple, the object of Hercules' quest.

should be different (merman and mermaid), to two consciousnesses that are different

though they should be the same (mariners adrift vs. mariners aground). This attempt at

"consciousness in the *same* place," so to speak, is variously staged. The mer-poems enact

a fight for the same poetic space and suggest the inevitability of "ode consciousness,"

whereas the formal disparities of "The Hesperides" and "The Lotos-Eaters" intimate that

a consciousness will not inevitably find a form – and in this alienation, or emancipation,

from formal fixture, Tennyson and his subjects can, at least for a little space, exult.

In the first (1832) version of "The Lotos-Eaters," the mariners say, "We have had

enough of motion":

> Hark! how sweet the horned ewes bleat
> On the solitary steeps,
> And the merry lizard leaps,
> And the foamwhite waters pour;
> And the dark pine weeps,
> And the lithe vine creeps,
> And the heavy melon sleeps,
> On the level of the shore
> (ll. 29-36)[187]

The imagery wants to slow to a creeping, sleeping motionlessness, a being "On the

level." But for a passage that begins on the "steeps" just lines above, this will prove

difficult, as motion pervades everything: color is produced by movement ("foamwhite");

we are to "Hark!" how the lizard leaps; and in "the lithe vine creeps," one kind of motion

is itself a function of a more fundamental, if seemingly contrary, motion. Similarly, all

the mariners' stated even-keeling gives way to the more fundamental metrical movement

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[187] *Poems*, I: 475n.

of these odd-syllable lines.[188] And even though these will be replaced in 1842 – "We have had enough of action, and of motion we,/ Rolled to starboard, rolled to larboard, when the surge was seething free" (l. 150-151) – the vertigo remains in these still-larger epiplocean lines.

Having "had enough" of motion is motion-sickness, but like the mariners' curious strain of home-sickness (having "had enough" of home, or rather wanting no more of it), it will haunt them no matter how much they declare their stasis. In the phrase, "We will no longer roam," "roam" can mean both "go home" and "not go home," just as "we will not wander more" commits to a perpetual wandering. The 1842 revision has the mariners "swear[ing] an oath … to lie reclined" (l. 153-154). Their resolve to be irresolute is not simply dissolution, though this is where critical discussions tend to go, toward the moral implications of the mariners' vagrancy. If their complicated irresolve is understood as a function of the poem's haywire generic compass, it is articulated as a difference between

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[188] And oddly syllabled. The seven-syllable lines accommodate two scansions. The first is an anapest – iamb – iamb trimeter:

˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
And the mer | ry liz | ard leaps.

The second presents itself tetrametrically as the strophe goes "On" "And" "On" and it becomes difficult to demote the lines' first syllables from their repetitive insistence:

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
And the merry lizard leaps

This can be read as acephalous iambic or catalectic trochaic. This "epiplocean" line obliges either falling or rising rhythms, and – more to the point for these mariners – both at once. This metrical microcosm bears on the prosody and theme of the poem at large: self-division held together. The "epiploke" entry in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* gives an instructive account of this effect (Greene and Cushman, eds., *PEPP*, 450).

epic and lyric modes.[189] Such comparisons, I think, are certain but inevitable, and it is

just this sense of inevitability – about what claims may be staked by a genre on a

consciousness – that Tennyson is surveying. A more interesting generic differential

results when these poems are understood at lyrical cross-purposes, as lyric-against-lyric

or lyric-on-lyric.

Even if the kinetics of a trochaic incantation by the mariners in the 1832 poem do

shine through, this does not guarantee that they are actually going somewhere – it doesn't

ensure "movement" metrical or moral. Such rhythms might align them with the

Hesperides in their "Song," but the sisters' incantatory energy is perpetual, and its non-

finite nature is wearisome and enervating:

> Crocodiles in briny creeks
> Sleep and stir not: all is mute.
> If ye sing not, if ye make false measure,
> We shall lose eternal pleasure,
> Worth eternal want of rest.
> (ll. 21-25)

Line 25 knows itself; iambic and trochaic rhythms cleave to one another, making the

search for the "false measure" interminable. Their "Song" is a perpetual motion machine,

where restlessness is "worth" something. This circularity is a closed system but exhibits a

magnetism on the whole. In the blank-verse proem of "The Hesperides," "Zidonian

Hanno" is sailing away to "the outer sea" (l. 13), in no danger of alighting as in "The Sea-

Fairies" or the general "shoreward" direction of "The Lotos-Eaters." Yet Hanno,

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[189] As in A. D. Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 50–54.

according to the *Periplus* which Ricks gives as Tennyson's source,[190] accomplished less of a circumnavigation than a loop-the-loop. He did manage to glance off massive Africa, but only after he came full circle back around to it. Even though he sails "in the newstarrèd night," he can still sense the Dark Continent, making out its "bloombright" slopes through sound (ll. 1, 9). From the "voices … Continuous" (ll. 12-13), one gets the sense Hanno has been here before. In the epigraph from Milton's *Comus* ("Hesperus and his daughters three,/ That sing about the golden tree."), "about the golden tree" refers to the topic of sisters' song, as well as their position. Their weary fate is that they cannot escape their own song. A "golden chain," they are "Bound about the golden tree" (ll. 65-66); and for all their irregular Pindaric bounding they cannot escape their lyrical bind.

We return to the mariners of "The Lotos-Eaters" and the obverse metrical inertia that renders these bodies at rest. The 1832 version of "The Lotos-Eaters" concludes, "we will return no more."[191] If this is understood as "We will not return to Ithaca," which does happen to be true for any mariner not named Odysseus (whose voice is not allowed in this Choric Song, as it is in the Spenserian proem), then the mariners' irresolve passes for prophetic acceptance of their literary fate. Yet the "return *no more*" strangely implies that the return has already happened (they are experiencing the literary déjà vu of the scripted outcome of the Odyssey). It refers to the mental "return" that they keep playing out or imagining (fruitlessly). It takes Tennyson's own return to "The Lotos-Eaters" in 1842 to flesh this out:

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[190] *Poems*, 461n.

[191] Line 40 of the footnoted excerpt (*Poems* 475n.).

> Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
> And dear the last embraces of our wives
> And their warm tears.
> (ll. 114-116)

Yet even with this revision nothing changes, as memory turns out to be unheroic inaction. The 1842 version has the mariners doubling down on their stasis: "We have had *enough of action,* and of motion" makes clear a deeper divorce from epic momentum.

The lethargy of the mariners is mental in nature, and thus Lethean, itself a disingenuous position in a poetry that figures itself as scripted and scriptural. The sailors are lost; but if we follow the *Odyssey*'s heroic narrative the world finds them, and Odysseus succeeds in getting them back on board for more starboarding/ larboarding. Their generic destiny or metrical fate can be articulated in other than epic terms. "Men of Ithaca, this is me[]ter."[192] That line (whether or not it carries that wordplay) is dropped after 1832, along with the distinctive epiplocean meter that followed it. What this clears the way for is a different meeting-up, a more precisely-exacted lyrical *nostos* (one that still appropriately, or meetly, resists nostalgia). As the Spenserian stanzas of the poem's first half lose their intricate though tight way, they are found, located, situated in the "Choric Song," Tennyson's 1842 revisions to which consist of replacing the Hesperidean verse from 1832 with less nimble but still more deeply irregular lines, which overgrow/overshoot the heroic blank-verse decorum at which they seemed to have been aimed.

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[192] Line 11 of the footnoted excerpt (*Poems* 475n.).

Culler says that the Spenserian stanzas of the first half of "The Lotos-Eaters" are "quite as lazy and indolent as the long, loping strophes that follow."[193] What this observation almost says is that Tennyson succeeds by his 1842 expedients in making the Spenserian stanza more Spenserian. This intensification is a species of para-ody, of Tennyson's ultralyrical development due to the ode:

> To hear the dewy echoes calling
> From cave to cave through the thick-twinèd vine –
> To watch the emerald-coloured water falling
> Through many a woven acanthus-wreath divine!
> Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
> Only to hear were sweet, stretched out beneath the pine.
> (ll.139-144)

Indeed, that triple alexandrine is Spenser and then some. For 18 years, published versions of the poem would have that "To watch" as "To hear," but even Tennyson's revision cannot change the irrevocable lyricism of a poetry that has found its place. "To hear … To hear … Only to hear … only to hear" – "The Lotos-Eaters" becomes an ode to "here," the disputed place or topos of lyric.

Understandably, the island poems have always accommodated critical stances about Tennyson's aesthetic insularity.[194] Yet the reigning ethos is rather more archipelagic: all of these island hoppers take it and leave it, and the perforated, detachable aspect becomes a scheme for genre and form. Just as the environment shapes

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[193] *The Poetry of Tennyson*, 53.

[194] Angela Leighton discusses Tennyson's "strain of pure aestheticism" and its perfect settings: "islanded moments when beauty, for its own sake, becomes separated from the moral and narrative action of the poem" ("Touching Forms: Tennyson and Aestheticism," *Essays in Criticism* 52, no. 1 [January 1, 2002]: 65).

the individual consciousness, so might genre control a poetic imagination, and so

Tennyson reserved the right to weigh anchor. To sound any genre differently was

important to Tennyson, as it was his way of renegotiating his Coleridgean inheritance:

unified form, which, for all its self-sufficiency and autonomy, nonetheless presupposed

organic (that is, necessary or inevitable) connections to content. Tennyson's highly

mutated or variegated odes are a critique of an organicism that could go too far by

generating a connection more binding than superinduced form. "The Hesperides" are in

such a bind:

> ...Five and three
> (Let it not be preached abroad) make an awful mystery.
> For the blossom unto threefold music bloweth;
> Evermore it is born anew;
> And the sap to threefold music floweth,
> From the root
> Drawn in the dark,
> Up to the fruit,
> Creeping under the fragrant bark,
> Liquid gold, honeysweet, through and through.
> (28-37)

Not interested in a numerological "mystery" for his numbers, Tennyson, en route to

preaching abroad as Poet Laureate, supplants Coleridge's inherent formation with a kind

of coherent deformation. And so there is on Tennyson's horizon a mastery, rather than a

post-Romantic shirking, of the ode.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

Genre, with its persistence of style and form, offers a way out, beyond the limits

of the self. Generic concerns are thus at heart existential concerns about immortality,

which will only intensify with Hallam's death in 1833. At this time, Tennyson returns to

Odysseus, in and as "Ulysses," a dramatic monologue that will put us squarely back into a consciousness, as its potentially expansive blank verse is chastened to a lyric aperçu. The dramatic monologue is a byway from Tennyson's odic course, though the genres can negatively illuminate one another. "St. Simeon Stylites," "Ulysses," "Tithon," "Tiresias" – all were written in 1833 (but published, if at all, variously after the ten years' silence), and each offers a defining contrast to the ode. "Tiresias" ends with an image from Pindar.[195] "Tithon" makes a precisely anti-odic proposal: "take back thy gift" (l. 19). "St. Simeon Stylites," like the Hesperides, "cease[s] not to clamour and to cry" (l. 41); his self-aggrandizing prayer is no "secret penance," but rather a "Betrayed ... secret penance" (l. 67) – and thus a kind of ode undisguised but unseen. About this peculiar effect: the dramatic monologue delineates its poetic better than the ode, functioning as self-declaiming declamations of self, in which the speaker continues on his own terms, within a mythic or historically sequestrated world apart. Thus, as it goes for dramatic monologues, that which they are, they are. Odes, on the other hand, leave us ultimately with a skeptical consciousness in the real world, thus Tennyson's soft spot for the form that readily enacts a hard-fought continuity – both with other genres and the hard edge of the world itself.

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[195] Ricks, *Poems*, I: 630n.

2.6.2 *The Princess*

In *The Princess*, Tennyson's experimentations with para-ody continue into an unlikely poetic place. *The Princess* seems to make its stand against odes perfectly clear in the first book. King Gama describes his daughter's success in founding her all-female university, and this odious poetic form has something to do with the court's being abuzz directly prior to the upheaval:

> They fed her theories, in and out of place
> Maintaining that with equal husbandry
> The woman were an equal to the man.
> They harped on this; with this our banquets rang;
> Our dances broke and buzzed in knots of talk;
> Nothing but this; my very ears were hot
> To hear them: knowledge, so my daughter held,
> Was all in all: they had but been, she thought,
> As children; they must lose the child, assume
> The woman: then, Sir, awful odes she wrote,
> Too awful, sure, for what they treated of,
> But all she is and does is awful; odes
> About this losing of the child; and rhymes
> And dismal lyrics, prophesying change
> Beyond all reason
> (I.128-142)

As do its appositives "rhymes" and "lyrics," "ode" in this excerpt might simply, neutrally, innocently designate a "song." In fact, "The Losing of the Child" was the title of one of the so-called "Songs" written for *The Princess* after its initial 1847 publication. These Songs had the important charge of interpretive clarification in this lyrically layered narrative:

> Before the first edition came out, I deliberated with myself whether I should put songs between the separate divisions of the poem; again I thought that the poem would explain itself, but the public did not see the drift.[196]

Starting in 1850, Tennyson included the inter-book Songs, calling them "the best interpreters of the poem," perhaps owing to the focus they put on "the child" and child-rearing, a society's hope for continuity. However, "The Losing of the Child" was never included. Like most of Tennyson's odes it is, after genre-driven agonizing, ultimately stricken from the corpus. This process – a generic recking and reckoning – extends to the poem's broader considerations about the cultural utility of gender and whether it is inherent or arbitrary.

By Tennyson's own account, had he included the song, it might have brought some interpretive certainty to this issue: "You would be still more certain that the child was the true heroine."[197] This heroism would ring true to the balladic status Tennyson himself gave the song, but the generic framework that would undergird that correlation doesn't exist (though there are inklings of it, as we'll see), as attested by the basic confusions about this song. What Tennyson calls a ballad, he has Gama calling an ode. Furthermore, Gama has knowledge of a song that technically falls beyond his epistemological horizon.[198] Had it made the cut, "The Losing of the Child" would have been one of the six interpolated songs that exist on the plane of the narrative frame,

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[196] *Memoir*, 212.

[197] To Samuel Edward Dawson, November 21, 1882. *Letters*, 1990, III: 238.

[198] "The Losing of the Child," strictly speaking, doesn't exist in either of the poem's worlds.

which comprises and is dispensed by the Victorian attendees of Sir Walter Vivian's summer fête. While the men get the blustery blank-verse parts of the narrative, the women will provide them "breathing-space" with ballads and songs:

> the women sang
> Between the rougher voices of the men,
> Like linnets in the pauses of the wind
> (Prologue 236-238)

The modern Victorian women already know what Princess Ida must painfully learn: female and male parts can and should work together (anatomically, poetically, sociologically), with the stipulation that men and women must each know their place.

As Hallam Tennyson explains, this is a natural lesson that culture and cultural works should reinforce:

> In the end we see this lioness-like woman subduing the elements of her humanity to that which is highest within her, and recognizing the relation in which she stands towards the order of the world and toward God – "A greater than all knowledge beat her down."[199]

While Hallam was prepared for brutal clarity about this ideal "order of the world," his father was not. The division of poetic labor will suffer, like Ida, a beat-down, as poetry does not easily find or take place in *The Princess*. Subtitled "A Medley," the poem never generically drops anchor. Dramatic irony is played against lyric sincerity, though neither prevails; it is a narrative, but which kind – epic, balladic, or mock-heroic? The poem thus suffers from a generic overmining by which its motives and message are undermined.

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[199] *Memoir*, 206.

As dramatic ethos is brought to bear on lyrical truth-telling, what is being sung can at any time be subverted by who is singing or by what poetic mode is being evoked. If "The Losing of the Child" is an ode in Ida's scheme, it connotes a cultural maturation in the abstract ("they had but been, she thought,/ As children" (I.135-136)), but if it is a ballad in the outer scheme of *The Princess*, "The Losing of the Child" depicts a cultural decline, as a literal lost child symbolizes – from within the narrative authority of that genre[200] – the consequences of abandoning matronly duty. Similarly, in a preference for balladic lingering over epic thrust, Tennyson's nomination of the child to be the "heroine" of the poem pointedly puts Ida out of the running.

Gama's outrage at his child is figured in terms of both social and poetic indecency. To him the ode represents some benchmark of propriety, but Ida's odes disappoint generically: "Too awful, sure, for what they treated of" (I.138). Ida does employ the ode more typically – as a platform for treatise – but its mouth-piecing runs counter to what the king holds customary. While the recurring "awful … awful … awful" bears the father's judgment about his daughter's odes, the other sense of awful – sublime, awe-inspiring – also persists, and in a change of tone of his own (from indignant to doting), Gama clarifies that the tone of Ida's odes was indeed high, or at least over his head:

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[200] Reiterating T. S. Eliot on the matter, Perry calls attention to Tennyson's lack of storytelling gift, which nonetheless, through *The Princess* and more assuredly through *Maud*, becomes its own gift for "anti-narrative": "having no gift can sometimes be a kind of gift" (*Alfred Tennyson*, 17).

> And they that know such things – I sought but peace;
> No critic I – would call them masterpieces:
> They mastered *me*.
> (I.143-145)

Ultimately king-compelling and even impressive to literary critics, the ode boasts a certain efficacy. Gama soon explains that Ida's odic supplication gains her a castle-campus, and at the university "quoted odes" (II.355) enjoy continued functionality as a kind of lecture-currency, through which lessons are flashed onto the mind of the listener more efficiently than through plodding study (II.349-377).

The ode gets things done – though almost despite itself, as this strange line from Gama intimates: "But all she is and does is awful; odes" (I.139). The transposed *odes*/*does* is a typographical pyrotechnic that is out of place in the uncompressed atmosphere of a blank verse narrative. But it is precisely because blank verse is getting the lion's share of poetic space in this poem, that Tennyson is at pains to give other forms their say and to pay attention to how they say what they say. Opinionated but irresolute, Gama's own stop-and-start, harping patter is dramatic monologorrhea; his dotardly expressionism helps us get at the truth even if it's not his truth. Meaning flashes through, and this parallels how knowledge is transmitted at Ida U. This revelatory mode (prickly though Tennyson is about it elsewhere) seems preferable, as it additionally parallels the most cutting-edge scientific transmissions taking place in the frame world, the actual Victorian world. The science fair on Sir Walter's lawn features a hands-on exhibit, in which guests can learn about electricity by being mildly electrocuted: "a group of girls/ In circle waited, whom the electric shock/ Dislinked with shrieks and laughter" (Prologue 68-70). That circle, or circuit rather, is the same formation during the ode lectures, though

there is less gaggling/giggling as the "grave Professor" delivers "A Classic lecture" using "quoted odes, and jewels five-words-long/ That on the stretched forefinger of all Time/ Sparkle for ever" (II.349-357). Thus the ancient ode form, with its sparks and flashes, is figured as having something in common with this most current scientific development. That oding is a type of doing is a genuine advancement for Tennyson, and in *The Princess* the form is refitted (or found fitting once again) to figure progress.

Or, in contemporary parlance, progressiveness – which is why Tennyson soon counterturns against the absolute value of what the ode is accomplishing. By one account, Tennyson's goal for *The Princess* was for it to be a serious take on a current event, the founding of Queen's College, and the broader cultural issue of higher education for women. And yet, according to Hallam, the poem "may have arisen in its mock-heroic form from a Cambridge joke."[201] Tennyson was unable to divine whether the issue would prove to be merely a novelty (as suggested by the lawn-game application of electricity) or an abiding aspect of modernity, and so he hedges his generic bet by letting odic catastrophism ride on epic uniformity. As the narrative concludes, Tennyson seems reconciled to a more reactionary sentiment: "Nor equal, nor unequal" (VII.285). This is the Victorian version of "separate but equal," where men and women are qualitatively (physiologically and socially) different, and so quantitative comparisons are moot, "For woman is not undevelopt man,/ But diverse" (VII.259-260). Simply put, men and women have different roles to fulfill and parts to play. This moral seems to be borne out formally

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[201] *Memoir*, 205.

by the gendered poetic genres: songs for domestic comfort, truth, and ease, blank verse for heavy-lifting.

While Tennyson's changes to the poem between 1847 and 1850 emphasize this di-versification, the great lyrics of *The Princess* – "Tears, idle tears" and "Now sleeps the crimson petal" – allow a more subtle interpretation of "Nor equal, nor unequal." Unlike the inter-book songs, the lyrics belong entirely to the narrative proper. Some are sung, while some, it is noted, are read. The lyrics perform differently but not through formal differentiation, as – befitting their position within the uni-versity – they too are in blank verse. The lyrics are received, critiqued, and debated, as happens after one of the maids sings "Tears, idle tears…":

> She ended with such passion that the tear,
> She sang of, shook and fell, an erring pearl
> Lost in her bosom: but with some disdain
> Answered the Princess, 'If indeed there haunt
> About the mouldered lodges of the Past
> So sweet a voice and vague, fatal to men,
> Well needs it we should cram our ears with wool
> And so pace by: but thine are fancies hatched
> In silken-folded idleness; nor is it
> Wiser to weep a true occasion lost,
> But trim our sails, and let old bygones be …'
> (IV.41-51)

A melody is not quite a medley; it is too much itself, just as the lyric produces the very tear which it is about. While this is no small accomplishment for a work of art – to become that which it represents – Ida dismisses it, and with Odyssean resolve requests a different lyric and a different feeling:

> 'Know you no song of your own land,' she said,
> 'Not such as moans about the retrospect,

>   But deals with the other distance and the hues
>   Of promise …'
>   (IV.66-69)

The Prince replies with "O Swallow," a half-improvised lyric of his own creation:

>   O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South,
>   Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,
>   And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.
>   (IV.75-77)

Ida and her attendants laugh at the song – not, the Princess clarifies, for its croaking delivery, but for its "slight" subject.

The Princess, ever conveying adamantine preference for more epical content ("great is song/ Used to great ends" (IV.119-120)), is not particular about the outer form of the lyrics. This resonates with the gender-bending currently afoot in the story, as the Prince is presently disguised in drag. Tennyson calls attention to this by noting the Prince's misgivings just before he launches into his lyric: "I sang, and maidenlike as far/ As I could ape their treble, did I sing" (IV.73-74). The Prince's "trebling" hearkens to the "[s]hrill" voices in "The Sea-Fairies" (l. 6) and, in a different sense, to the "threefold music" of "The Hesperides" (l. 32). These poems, as we've seen, are also formal medleys, similarly concerning themselves with the transfer and reception of poetic utterance. As the Hesperides sing their "threefold music," this is understood as a lyrical intensification, as that poem announces a three-beat (five-syllable) metrical connection to irregular verse ("Five and three/ ...make an awful mystery"). In *The Princess*, Tennyson's concerns are similar, but lyrical intensity is not allowed to be a function of asymmetry, irregularity, oddness, or odeness – "nor-equalness," for short.

Another connection to the earlier poems is the Odyssean allusiveness, though in this episode of *The Princess*, the allusions effect a mock-heroicism, which falls entirely on the man here, not that he would know it. He takes great umbrage at the ladies' reactions, as they perceive the inevitable physiological differences in his vocal cord length, and "Like the Ithacensian suitors in old time,/ Stared with great eyes, and laughed with alien lips,/ And knew not what they meant" (IV.100-102). They know, that is to say, not him. Like Ulysses, he is not seen for who he is; but like "Ulysses," *The Princess* will not rectify its misunderstandings through unveiled identity. The Prince says, "for still my voice/ Rang false," by which he means not simply that he is out of tune but that he is keeping up the falsetto charade, though something is clearly wrong. The Prince believes the ladies should know a man when they hear him, but *The Princess* insists that that kind of knowledge (like the "false measure" that leads to overwisdom in "The Hesperides") is overrated. It will actually be a later song, delivered by its besotted male singer, that gives away the infiltrators. Even then, however, it is still not the form of the song (baritone vocal rendering, as suggested in the detail that Cyril "trolls" it) that gives them away, it's the content: "a careless, careless tavern-catch/ Of Moll and Meg, and strange experiences/ Unmeet for ladies" (IV.139-141).

The ode is a similar infiltrator. It para-odically enters *The Princess*, as a subject (something talked about) rather than a form.[202] When it is given space or breathing room in the poem, it does not feature its usual generic signals. It is not disguised, but rather

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[202] Pound will thus inherit this sense of form nearly ready-made.

undisclosed, perhaps because we should know an ode when we hear it, and its status as an

ode goes without saying, or needs no introduction. This is to say, Tennyson wrote "Tears,

idle tears" at Tintern Abbey, and like Wordsworth's poem of the same name, that it is an

ode – or at least extremely odic – nearly goes without saying.[203] Tennyson's own gloss on

his great lyric deals with "the passion of the past, the abiding in the transient,"[204] the

paradoxical tenor of the latter half of the phrase strongly correlating it with the "quoted

odes" of Book II that "Sparkle for ever" (II.357). When Graham Hough says that "Tears,

idle tears" "is not about a specific situation, or an emotion with clear boundaries; it is

about the great reservoir of undifferentiated regret and sorrow, which you can brush

away … but which nevertheless continues to exist,"[205] that would seem to endanger the

poem's odic status, given the ode's purpose to celebrate an occasion.

But taking on non-occasion seems a more relevant (purgatorial suspense of

unresolved social issues) and more modern (melancholic continuity) dare for an ode.

Thus the lyrics of *The Princess* are "undifferentiated" (but for their being "quoted") and

in this feature lies Tennyson's hope that when compared in function to the ode (or to

other poetic modes), we might find them "nor unequal" to the task of figuring vaster

cultural movement. Hough's comment is prompted by a formal consideration, that

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[203] Wordsworth about "Tintern Abbey": "I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition" (*Lyrical Ballads*, 289).

[204] *Memoir*, 211.

[205] "Tears, Idle Tears," in *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*, ed. John Killham (London: Routledge & Paul, 1960).

"Tears" is unrhymed, and this in turn evolves from Tennyson's own commentary about the lyrics. "O Swallow," Tennyson notes, was "first composed in rhyme,"[206] and so the poem is not simply unrhymed but rather has been de-rhymed. Such commentary, I believe, authorizes a similar attention to the macroscopic structures of the work, as Tennyson in his meddling/medleying was blurring generic boundaries or at least genre-bending. Tennyson would judge *The Princess* "truly original," and this despite the fact that the most staid, established, and regular of English meters was being made to bear all poetic burdens – whether the lyric of lyrics ("Tears, idle tears") or the odic of odic ("O Swallow…"). "O Swallow," in fact, strains orotundly to cough up its ten syllables: "O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South … And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee" (II.75,76). The song wants to plaster over its irregularity, but in doing so it reveals its odic tenor nonetheless.

For all this indistinction, the lyrics have gained a legendary amount of distinction – in Tennyson's era and in all since – and Tennyson himself seems to understand that the one is a function the other: "though truly original, it is, after all, only a medley." Despite the "ridiculous" repetitions in "Tintern Abbey," Tennyson considered Wordsworth's "Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns" "almost the grandest [line] in the English language." A similar modesty/immodesty accompanies Tennyson's commentary about *The Princess* generally, as in his estimation that "some of the blank verse … is among the best I ever wrote," and that "Come down, O Maid" is "amongst his most successful

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[206] *Memoir*, 477.

work" – with Hallam furthermore qualifying that "by this phrase he meant no more than that he felt he had done his best."[207]

Do these laurels come at Ida's expense? Does its feminist tenor get overwhelmed by Tennyson's baritone, dominant in the hypermasculine culture at large? A strong female poetic voice, Elizabeth Barrett, remarked, "Now isn't the world too old & fond of steam, for blank verse poems, in ever so many books, to be written on the fairies?"[208] Princess Ida expresses a similar sentiment about "bygone" songs that "moan[] about the retrospect." But as she gainsays "fancies hatched/ In silken-folded idleness" (ll. 48-49), her own Ida-ness – her steeliness or iron[209] resolve – would seem diminished into an irony, as the fabric of her own speech (iambic pentameter) is cut from the same silken-folded idleness as the songs themselves.

In Hallam's notes to *The Princess*, he gives full space to a letter from his father to the Canadian publisher of the poem, in which, in defending the poem's originality, Tennyson lets fly some pronouncements about poetic inevitability:

> It is scarcely possible for any one to say or write anything in this late time of the world to which, in the rest of the literature of the world, a parallel could not somewhere be found. But when you say that this passage or that was suggested by Wordsworth or Shelley or another, I demur; and more, I wholly disagree.[210]

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[207] All three quotes of this paragraph taken from *Memoir*: 477, 660, 210-211.

[208] Quoted in Ricks, *Poems*, II: 185n.

[209] "Nor would I fight with iron laws, in the end/ Found golden" (IV.57-58)

[210] *Memoir*, 214.

Though Shelley is forsworn as an influence in the direct sense, in the same passage

Tennyson mentions his own profound familiarity with "the *Prometheus*" (*Prometheus*

Unbound), which is itself a tête-à-tête between lyrical and dramatic modes – not a choric

blending of voices, but the medley Shelley wrote as the basso continuo of his odic

twelvemonth. Tennyson allows for other voices and gives them their space, on every

level of the poem. That he left the exclusion/inclusion of some of the lyrics to Emily[211]

suggests that the project of *The Princess* is Penelopean rather than Odyssean – a re-

raveling after unraveling, carrying with it some quite practical realizations about the

poetic-cultural tapestry. Just as the ode and other poetries are cut from the same cloth, so

might poetry and culture be successfully interwoven. After *The Princess* (a poem he

worked on both before and during his Laureateship),Tennyson is ready to let the ode re-

enter the poetic fold, and this just in time for the Wellington ode, which with its grand

melodies – an ultralyricism representing a still different species of Tennysonian para-ody

– was just a few years off.

2.6.3   "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"

In the Wellington ode Tennyson, having laboriously reinvented the generic wheel,

allows it to come full circle, elegizing upon a public event and reinstating an encomiastic

function not seen since Dryden. Like "Alexander's Feast," the Wellington ode is about

"The Power of Music," but now a tremendous musical/choral presence is dedicated, not

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[211] Ibid., 212.

to the emotional manipulation touted in the earlier poem, but to an earnest civic order that makes the end of *The Princess* sound like child's play. The "godlike hero" of Dryden's poem is no match for the "Godlike men" of Tennyson's, who are in the first place "Godlike" because they are first and foremost "men" who know their place.[212] Alexander sits "aloft in awful state" (l. 3), but his disregard for the Pindaric distinction in *Olympian 2* between gods, heroes, and men only sets him up to be "Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,/ Fallen from his high estate" (ll. 77-78).[213] Wellington will be "Something far advanced in State" because he was a duty-bound states*man* (ll. 23, 25, 160, 200, 222), and this will of course bring "honour, honour, honour, honour … Eternal honour to his name" (ll.149-150, ll. 230-231). The musician/poet/necromancer Timotheus "raised a mortal to the skies" (ll. 169, 179) but Alexander's "altered soul" (l. 85) doesn't bode well for the metaphysical plane he is about to enter. Tennyson, in a purer process, has "the mortal disappear" (l. 269) rather than become "Something" it is not.[214]

This studied reversal is the first indication that Tennyson's daring return to the ode is not a reversion, but a bravado(de) expression of poetic and national value – a

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[212] Thus the concern of *The Princess* odically evolves, "place" being a catch-all term for cultural and poetic order, as well as a this-worldly presence.

[213] Dryden quotations are taken from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Lawrence Lipking and James Noggle, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

[214] Herewith, the ventriloquies of 1830-1832 are ultimately developed. It takes nearly 200 lines for this poem to name its subject – "Truth-teller was our England's Alfred named" (l. 188) – as "Duke" only functions as a lieutenancy or place-holder. As this mortal disappears, so does that other species of poetic subject, the lyric "I," which is more properly functioning in this ode as a lyric "We."

public offering that acknowledges the made-ness of such value but also resoundingly

celebrates it. The poem has a presence that tests its odic behest – "central London's roar"

sports a remarkably modern, clamorous immediacy that troubles the eternity about which

this ode makes intimations – but that also ultimately attests it. The Wellington ode's

monolithic immediacy exposes Timothean conjury – or, more to the point, Shelleyan.

Romantic imagination was revelatory in nature, and its apostrophic summoning was a

laziness with which Tennyson was ever uneasy. Shelley's "Hear! O hear!" might have

worked back when poetry was "feeling confessing itself to itself," but Tennyson's ode

insists on carving out its own vast auditorium, a place for overhearing his ultralyrical

creation. In the Wellington ode, there are no "oblique listeners," as Hollander calls

them.[215] Rather, Tennyson unites the poet with his audience into "a people" with "voice";

the poem comes not from a lyric I, but a lyric We. Note, or rather let us note, the

correction of grammatical voice that begins the poem–

> Bury the Great Duke
>   With an empire's lamentation,
> Let us bury the Great Duke
>   To the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation
> (ll. 1-4)

– from the imperative to the jussive, and from the second to the first person plural. As

Hollander explains, this is a direction rather than a command, "designed not literally to

enact, but poetically to bring a fiction into being" (65). This reiterates J. Culler on

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[215] *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 65.

apostrophe as the ode's "central feature": "Apostrophe is not the representation of an event; if it works it produces a fictive, discursive event."[216]

Though the poem sports its fair share of apostrophes ("O friends," "O voice," "O civic muse"), Tennyson avoids the apostrophic circuity, particularly because this ode has a very real event to observe. With the insistent phrase "true occasion true" (l. 37), the ode goads us to consider its real occasion. First, the ode insists that it is "on the Death" rather than to the Duke. Tennyson comes to praise *and* to bury ("O friends"), and his chthonic intentions are made clear from the poem's first word. He continues to dramatize the earthly situation of the people who survive the Duke, who are untranscending and "Here" (l. 9). The poem's conclusion maintains this distinction:

> He is gone who seemed so great. –
> Gone; but nothing can bereave him
> Of the force he made his own
> Being here
> (ll. 271-274)

The modulation from "Here" to "Being here," refigures the fact that the Duke is "gone … Gone" into a hope for making the most of the material present, which is a prerequisite for a spiritual eternal. Elsewhere, Tennyson articulates Wellington's accomplishments in worldly terms: "World-victor's victor" (l. 42). Wellington and his survivors are Victorian; the worldly excess that typifies the age might be the closest a living Victorian can get to transcendence.[217] "Victor[ian] he must ever be" (l. 258) unites a people as they together become a name. Moreover, "Here … here" rewrites the Shelleyan "Hear! O

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[216] "Apostrophe," 59, 68.

[217] Barton gives a good account of the lavish excesses of the whole obsequy ("Eternal Honour").

hear!" by letting voice do what it does best – announce presence – rather than ineffectually lament heavenly absences. Long before the celestial imagery of the final strophe, the people's cry is figured as a kind of earthly eternity: "Let the sound of those he wrought for … Echo round his bones for evermore" (ll. 10, 12).

This clamor forms an ostentatious contrast with the Duke's renowned silence when he was alive – proof positive of a masculine cultural ideal whereby actions speak louder than words. What's more, the Duke's silence after death threatens to expose garish poetry: "our chief state-oracle is mute" (l. 23). The counter-sentiment evoked by such a line is Carlyle's comment that "silence alone" is appropriate on such an occasion. Yet this public poem refuses to obey a cultural decorum of silence – for a time being – so that it may dramatize a more profound obeisance as it ends. Tennyson, in his complex way of succeeding by excess and subverting lyricism by being more lyrical, achieves the poem's burden through lyricism:

> With honor, honor, honor, honor to him,
> Eternal honor to his name.

These remarkable lines occur twice in a stirring repetition, the unabashed acceleration of which avoids the lyrical eddying of refrain. Tennyson calls this poetic his "gorgeous rites" (what Wallace Stevens will call "essential gaudiness"), and the poem itself has become the event: an Ode to the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.

The acknowledgment of the poem's larger-scale repetitiveness, its cultural or occasional redundancy, is its odic burden, and once this is achieved, Tennyson can enact odic release. Ending the poem is also a gesture toward getting on with it in the here and now. Unlike Wordsworth in his Intimations ode, whose prolonged subject is the soul,

Tennyson's mention of the same will swiftly bring the wailing to a close: "What know we greater than the soul?" This needn't be an immortal soul (though it does keep a respectful, interrogative distance), but can instead be a center, a stable place – as when England is earlier referred to as the "the soul/ Of Europe" (ll. 160-161). Thus the poem's repeated attentions to the positioning of its hero – with Pindaric respect to his God and his fellow man: "Where shall we lay…?" "The last great Englishman is low" "Lo, the leader." This last phrase, in which the apostrophic O! is converted to Lo, continues the fusion of sound and place. And that place, verbally resonant, is not airy but grounded. Victorian steeliness and implacability, under the weight of the ode's moving metrics, at the very end must give way – "The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears" (l. 268) – though ultimately this is so that the mortal remains of the Duke may find their place.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Tennyson, too, is refiguring a place for his own "lo[w] desire." Two 1899 estimations by Frederic Harrison get at the paradox:

> *The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* [is] the least Tennysonian of
> Tennyson's poems. [....]
> This is true poetry, Pindaric, natural, and thrilling, in simple words and devoid of
> any prettiness of imagery or subtlety of phrase. [218]

The two statements together add up to a sort-of fruit-bearing of Tennyson's long-suffered odic impulse, the solution to which is a compromise, of course. He could be most

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[218] *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and Other Literary Estimates* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 33–34.

Pindaric if least himself, or most himself when least Pindaric. And occasionally both, if

we *do* allow some "subtlety of phrase":

> The treble works, the vast designs
> Of his labored rampart-lines,
> Where he greatly stood at bay,
> Whence he issued forth anew,
> And ever great and greater grew
> (ll. 104-108)

According to J. Culler, apostrophe's semantic vacancy calls out to other apostrophes, and

is thus a figure of poetic pedigree. As Tennyson discusses the "treble works" (triadic) and

"labor'd lines" he is making a last stand (at least a "great" one), a baying and a being at-

bay. His ode "calls to be calling,"[219] only so that its be-all can more decisively be an end-

all.

Or not. The imagery and wording of "Will," the Wellington ode's alternate

ending,[220] suggest that Tennyson hadn't quit the hard icono-clashing from "Ode: O

Bosky Brook," with its impasse of sea and rock:

> For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,
> Nor all Calamity's hugest waves confound,
> Who seems a promontory of rock,
> That, compassed round with turbulent sound,
> In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
> Tempest-buffeted, citadel-crowned.
> (ll. 4-9)

The allusion to Horace's *Ode* III.iii, Tennyson's schoolboy translation of which is one of

his earliest surviving poems, confirms that his long-suffering odic impulse still raged on.

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[219] Jonathan Culler, "Why Lyric?," *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (January 2008): 204.

[220] Ricks, *Poems*, II: 492n.

To Tennyson, the ode could be an immovable rock,[221] some of which he quarries in order to deliver the official monument to Wellington. The "true occasion" of the Wellington ode, however, is its ending. The poem itself is not the event, the absence of it is, and this was an occasion that Tennyson wanted badly to master, both poetically and metaphysically. The Wellington ode would not be Tennyson's last ode in name – the Laureate pieces aren't without interest; eternal honor to their names, or God rest their souls – but at this point Tennyson is prepared to write an ode not in name, and to undertake the real, if unofficial, odic work of generating the "turbulent sound" that puts cultural immovability to the test.

2.7 *Maud*: The Free Ode

As seen in the introduction, *The Illustrated London News*, in its assessment of all the Wellington ode was not, called for an ideal ode, a "free offering from the soul of the poet."[222] Tennyson's initial public offering was instead understood as a concession: "They call the 'Ode on the Duke of Wellington' a Laureate Ode; nothing of the kind! it was written from genuine admiration of the man."[223] Tennyson's own ideals about the form thus seem no different from those of his audience: "An ode must be a free song and not written because asked for and as asked for."[224] But Tennyson's odic ideal is

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[221] F. T. Palgrave recollected about the poet: "On Pindar he once said, 'He is a kind of Australian poet; has long tracts of gravel, with immensely large nuggets imbedded.'" Quoted in *Memoir*, 841.

[222] Quoted in Barton, "Eternal Honour," 5.

[223] *Memoir*, 756.

[224] *Letters*, 1987, II: 288n.

skeptically held; so even as it grows outward, the ideal is also allowed to grow up. "Free"

is a loaded term coming from a Victorian poet laureate (a post he'd held a good decade

by the time of the quote). We understand "free" primarily to mean not obligatory,

unbidden as it were, for the poet sensitive about being duty-bound to produce poems.

Tennyson was aware that his "poet's calling" (Fry's term) wasn't coming from above or

from within, but from the sides – collaterally, from the culture at large – and that the

forces of supply and demand were transforming his calling into a vocation. "Free" then

also connotes the poem as a commodity, a circumstance Tennyson becomes less

uncomfortable with over the course of his career. Tennyson, as seen earlier, thought of

Pindar as a "New-market Poet,"[225] and in his own words, "the taskwork ode has ever

failed."[226] But the other category of ode, the ideal of the "free" ode, stands: not a naïve

wish for autonomy in a context of cultural capital, but rather a recognition of the

necessity of the gift in exchange theory.

The social dimension of Tennyson's poetry is a well-worn critical topic and

manifests diversely, whether as Hallam's praise of his repudiation of it or Bloom's

disparagement of his concession to it. Tucker, noting the era-based critical interventions

of Tennyson's most publically-approved poem, observes that "the composite *In

Memoriam* underwent a scrutiny aimed at winnowing its lyrical essence from its

accidental cultural excrescences."[227] This scrutiny begins with Tennyson; that is to say he

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[225] *Tennyson and His Friends*, 217.

[226] Quoted in Ricks, *Tennyson*, 221.

[227] *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, 377.

anticipates it, and his attentions to a readerly perspective have been there from the beginning, as even in the barrage of footnotes in 1827 he can be seen engaging the reader with the voice of a poet-in-history rather than a timeless, lyrical poet. At the same time that Tennyson wanted to reach out to his public, he didn't quite trust its acumen, and his odic outreaches are often figured as exceeding his audience's grasp, as in his earlier comment about his audience not getting the "drift" of *The Princess*. His preemptive defense mechanism is a sort of "lyrical excrescence,"[228] a technique first most visibly explored in the "manifestly superfluous" strophe of "Rosalind" (1832), by which Tennyson challenges his reader to determine the end and beginning of his poem(s).[229]

The excrescent strophe reveals that Tennyson's own apostrophic leaning is in the direction of his reader. Generally, these strophic perforations serve to negotiate his anxieties about the odic task of bardic peroration. The technique continues more carefully into "The Lotos-Eaters," and regains a specifically odic impetus in the "Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition," the fourth strophe of which was published in 1862, removed in 1872, and included once again in 1874:[230]

> Is the goal so far away?
> Far, how far no tongue can say,
> Let us dream our dream today.
> (ll. 29-31)

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[228] This, as we'll shortly see, becomes the "lovely shell" in the second movement of *Maud*. Later, Pound will figure the effect as "encrustations."

[229] "Perhaps the following lines may be allowed to stand as a separate poem; originally they made part of the text, where they were manifestly superfluous." Tennyson's reason for withholding the strophe is elsewhere articulated in particularly odic terms, as he felt it was "not sufficiently marked by the rapidity of movement in the metre." Quoted in Ricks, *Poems*, I: 478n.

[230] *Poems*, II: 624n.

As this passage passes in and out of print, Tennyson has it enact that which it describes:

uncertainty about the visionary gleam, which by now has matured into an empire-wide

doubt. Striking the lyrically excrescent strophe from this ode leaves it without any lyrical

essence – without any doubt about whether England will achieve its object, and thus

without a platform (according to the Victorian logic Tennyson established through *In

Memoriam*) upon which to build a belief in England's progress.[231]

Even reinstated, these three lines from 1862 are a gleam of a gleam – short shrift

for a poem that wants to accomplish (or at least see through to) a reconciliation of "The

works of peace with works of war" (l. 28). This odic shorthand is well deserved, though,

not only after Tennyson's career of odic overreach, but because *Maud* – a severe and

sustained pushing of the lyric voice out into the open – had recently made its own vast

speculations about war and peace, as these emerge from the seemingly more narrow

lyrical purview of hate and love. *Maud* is not a "taskwork" ode; no one asked for it – and,

to judge from its history of compulsory after-dinner recitation chez Tennyson, no one *had*

to. But this makes it a free-ode candidate: an untasked and, what's more, overworked

poem, which proceeds (or not) through relentless turning and counterturning, a frenzied

mixture of lyric passion and chastened recanting, irregular at points throughout and also

wholly or macroscopically irregular. There is an ode in this "monodrama," somewhere

and ever between lyrical solipsism and dramatic outwardness. As the poem repeatedly

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[231] Shaw argues that the poems of state were essentially elegiac. "Ode on the Jubilee of Queen Victoria"
(1887), for example, "qualifies the empty indicatives of official faith with fearful interrogatives and
prayerful optatives of hope" (*Tennyson's Style*, 228).

stages collisions between these realms, the conflict does not obliterate lyrical essence but allows it obstinately to maintain its place.

Maud is a closet ode of sorts – not commissioned but decommissioned, a poem through which Tennyson could fulfill his Laureate duty even as he seemed to be shirking it. He insisted on reading this poem aloud (and often in full) to company, and these freely-offered recitations were a platform for the poet's brand of swarthy sociability. He went above and beyond for his guests, one of whom on repeated occasions was Jane Carlyle. She counseled: "for God's sake beware of becoming too caring about whether your gift is appreciated by the million of Jackasses."[232] Her exasperated comment carries both senses of the poetic "gift" (incoming afflatus, outgoing donation), while the "appreciated gift" adds still another layer to the transaction, as it implies that Tennyson wanted something in return: for his free ode to have a larger captive audience.

While the use of the Wellington ode (a captive ode[233]) is prescribed by and inscribed within the poem itself, *Maud* is a different story, in that it gives the public a poem that, through its difficult form, defies easy consumption. Georg Lukács says that "the truly social element in literature is the form,"[234] and *Maud*, as much as it is about a coming-to-terms with society at large, proves rather anti-social through mixed generic

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[232] Quoted in Sanders, "Carlyle and Tennyson," 92.

[233] "I wrote it because it was expected of me," he did eventually concede (*Letters* II: 50).

[234] Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

signals. In this story of an "accommodation of comedy,"[235] *Maud*'s narrator must

sacrifice his ego and his absolute ideals of purity – lyrical ideals, in short. Tennyson

traces this process of sublimation – styled at the conclusion as "the higher aims/ Of a

land" (III.VI.iv.38-39) – through a poetic logic, as the narrator wants to amplify the

"martial ... air" (I.V.ii.164-166) of Maud's song into a calling, to convert his propensity

for impulsive response into a more even-keeled responsibility, and to augment "The

passionate heart of the poet" (I.IV.vii.140; III.VI.iii.30,32) into "hearts in a cause"

(III.VI.v.55).

In 1850, Edward FitzGerald bemoaned the mere loveliness of *In Memoriam*: "the

Impetus, the Lyrical oestrus, is gone."[236] In *Maud* (at one point subtitled "Or the

Madness"), Tennyson more than restores this Pindaric conceit of the frenzied speaker.

This was done to the vexation of those readers who would dismiss the work simply as

Spasmody, nor was it quite fully comprehended by those who admired and defended the

poem. Dr. Robert James Mann, in a "vindicating" exegesis of which Tennyson approved,

misdiagnosed: "Every utterance … an impulsive outburst."[237] Mann's main objective

was to "distance the Poet Laureate from his splenetic speaker"[238] – to vindicate Tennyson

rather than *Maud* – and so even as he articulates the singular effect of *Maud*, he defends

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[235] James R. Kincaid, *Tennyson's Major Poems: The Comic and Ironic Patterns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

[236] Quoted in Matthew Campbell, *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 158.

[237] *Tennyson's "Maud" Vindicated* (New York: Garland, 1986).

[238] Gregory Tate, *The Poet's Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry 1830-1870* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 122.

Tennyson behind *In Memoriam*'s aesthetics. "Perfectly beautiful … icily regular" (I.II.80,82), as the narrator complains of Maud. Mann moreover reduces the singular effect of *Maud* to a single effect ("*Every* utterance"), which is to overlook the turns and counterturns between the calm, beautiful lyricism, and the wild, terrible outbursts.

In his outbursts, the narrator's words often don't quite keep pace with the thought: "And he struck me, madman, over the face" (II.I.i.18). Such psychological syncopation extends prosodically to the poem's greater structure. Sections of astonished rant are not just interspersed wholesale among the kinder, gentler lyrics; rather, the two lyrical types project and transfer onto one another. The narrator is struck and the blow makes him mad, but, read appositively, "madman" reveals that the narrator is already mad, and that he is projecting his anger and insanity onto this exchange (or that they have caused it even). It is similar with Maud (the narrator constantly projects onto her, chiding her for chiding, etc.) and with *Maud*, as the terrible lyrics work against but also with the beautiful lyrics, not merely waveringly but antistrophically. In section I.III, there seems to be a reprieve from the outbursting as the lines achieve calm and substance, but the regularity is swollen with irregularity, as Tennyson explores the inseparability of beautiful and terrible lyricisms:

> Cold and clear-cut face, why come you so cruelly meek,
> Breaking a slumber in which all spleenful folly was drowned,
> Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek,
> Passionless, pale, cold face, star-sweet on a gloom profound;
> Womanlike, taking revenge too deep for a transient wrong
> Done but in thought to your beauty, and ever as pale as before
> Growing and fading and growing upon me without a sound,
> Luminous, gemlike, ghostlike, deathlike, half the night long
> Growing and fading and growing, till I could bear it no more,
> But arose, and all by myself in my own dark garden ground,

> Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar,
> Now to the scream of a maddened beach dragged down by the wave,
> Walked in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found
> The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave.
> (I.III.88-101)

Here, the Maud-man is struck over *by* a face. The violence is transmuted, not allowed to manifest (as it was in "Rosalind"). The narrator runs cool rather than hot in this passage, as oestrus and oestrogen alike are gone, though the freezing yet seething lyricism marks new ground for Tennyson.

It is strange, then, when Shaw reverts to an outdated Tennysonian aesthetic in his own advice about how to read this passage:

> We are not to imagine the lover hearing the roar of the sea, then looking at the shining flower before gazing forlornly at the sinking star. We are meant to receive instead, in a single mounting impression, something like 'seabeachmadness, wintrygleam, daffodil-stardeath.'[239]

The compound words of this observation resemble those from the sensuous high lyricism of Tennyson's early poetry, which the poet ultimately forswore. "Growing and fading and growing" vacillates but does not self-annul; its repetition underscores an ultimately cumulative growth or excrescing. Shaw's reading of this passage's "mounting" momentum is thus correct, but not its "single" impressionistic moment, itself a holdover from Romantic, fading-coal modes.

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[239] *Alfred Lord Tennyson: The Poet in an Age of Theory* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 112.

Wise to Spasmodic outbursts and revelatory inbursts alike, Tennyson is here being very careful to avoid impulsive utterance of all stripes. This passage is a single sentence; though it begins as a question, it trades out the apostrophic/rhetorical parrying typical of the narrator to this point,[240] for a rhythm and grammar more mantric than manic. Nothing is "clear-cut" about the drifting triple meter of the hexameter lines, which ebb and flow between 12 and 15 syllables,[241] Tennyson doing "transient wrongs" to the lines in order to convey a disquiet ("without a sound") – a new species of disturbance for this narrator that needn't come through only in loudness and outburst. The narrator's earlier wish, "Long have I sighed for a calm" (I.II.76), is first given air in the long sighing of this passage (it will be allowed – not a fulfillment – but a fuller filling-out in the "Sighing for Lebanon" sequence to come). Elsewhere, the narrator is refusing to be rocked by love, pledging an icy heart and "a temperate brain" (I.IV.vii.142) to match Maud's.

The narrator resolves to take the high road, to be above it all: "And most of all would I flee from the cruel madness of love" (I.IV.x.156). But this kind of flight is not

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[240] "What! am I raging alone as my father raged in his mood?/ Must *I* too creep to the hollow […]? … Would there be sorrow for *me*?" (I.I.xiv-xv.53-54, 57).

[241] The acephalous anapestic line 93 gives way to the more unambiguously dactylic line 94 that it could have been. Line 96, as a repetition of line 94, scans dactylically again, though it resolves in iambs and anapests. These so-called rising meters come just in time for the "But arose" of line 97, which ends on the "ground." One might call the lines, loosely, fourteeners – what Samuel Johnson deemed "the most soft and pleasing of our lyric measures" – and be done with it. The lines do convey a soft pleasance (even as they treat a "gemlike, clear-cut" idea of Maud). But the rhymes are deferred for too great a length for any sense of common meter to emerge, and Tennyson is thus metrically free, through this careful carelessness, to do what he wants.

escape; it is gad-flight that is overtaken by Maud even as it attempts to outpace her.

"Madness" in this line connotes insanity or folly, but also a being-mad, and – through the

logic of the poem's first subtitle, "Maud, or the Madness" – a being-*Maud*. "Scorned, to

be scorned by one that I scorn" (I.XIII.i.444) nails down that particular reciprocity, while

it also converts a past (-tense) wrong into a perpetual (infinitive) one. Though the

"Scorned" line refers to Maud's brother, he is ever an object of transference and thus

figures just as readily into this scheme, in which dissolution begets intensification. The

smaller blow dealt to the interloping brother will enlarge – through the logic of "the

Christless code/ That must have life for a blow" (II.I.i.26-27) – into international conflict,

even though his prostrate foe offers the narrator an out through his pardon: "'The fault

was mine,' he whispered, 'fly!'" (II.I.i.30). Despite his resolve to be "aloof" from the

brother (I.VI.vi.235), the narrator is again wrongly aloft.

All of *Maud* is a futile balancing act, asymmetries intensifying even as they try to

find equilibrium.[242] *Maud* begins with "I hate" and concludes war-ward; between these

personal and institutionalized odia there is an odic interlude, the "Sighing for Lebanon"

sequence:

> O, art thou sighing for Lebanon
> In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,
> Sighing for Lebanon,
> Dark cedar, though thy limbs have here increased,
> Upon a pastoral slope as fair,
> And looking to the South, and fed
> With honeyed rain and delicate air,
> And haunted by the starry head

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[242] The "Christless code" line (its assymetrical life-for-a-blow logic) is ironized by the symmetry of the strong-stress meter that haunts it.

> Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,
> And made my life a perfumed altar-flame
> (I.XVIII.iii.613-622)

In the next strophe, the narrator declares, "Here will I lie" (I.XVIII.iv.627), and a reader

is for once not tempted to have that contented stasis be given the lie by his word choice.

The credibility of this sequence hinges on the fact that neither the narrator's love nor his

hate is being indulged here; he has walked Maud home and perhaps won a kiss:

> I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
> There is none like her, none.
> And never yet so warmly ran my blood
> And sweetly, on and on
> Calming itself to the long-wished-for-end,
> Full to the banks, close on the promised good.
> (I.XVIII.i.599-604)

His love is not consummated, but nor is it unrequited. In this "on and on/ Calming," the

narrator is exhibiting "the psyche's drive to reduce all excitation within itself … to the

zero-level … where desire shall vanish, the individual self fade away, and quietude

replace the strong poet's search for a stance and word of his own."[243] This is Bloom,

invoking Freud's Nirvana Principle, in order to describe Tennyson's Percivale as a

quester whose Holy Grail is to stop the quest (which for Tennyson translates into giving

in to repressing Keats, and thereby pushing his lyricism toward its utmost Keatsian

bound). But the description applies to *Maud*'s narrator as well, and is useful for its

inversely odic articulation of this achievement: a de-stancing or distancing from the odic

object by lying down on the path to it. Shaw, too, is zeroed in on the ode (at least in part)

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[243] "Tennyson: In the Shadow of Keats," 148–149.

for the special effect of the "Sighing for Lebanon" sequence, as he says it "hovers between an ode and a psalm."[244]

The narrator, against his usual impulsiveness, achieves a pulsingness – a heart beating with regularity and in deep correspondence with the world. The iambic pentameter, of which by the 1850s Tennyson was a past master, is peculiarly scarce in the prosodic grab-bag that is *Maud*, but it emerges here in force as the narrator measures his length on its ground:

> Is that enchanted moan only the swell
> Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?
> And hark the clock within, the silver knell
> Of twelve sweet hours that past in bridal white,
> And died to live, long as my pulses play …
> Dear heart, I feel with thee the drowsy spell.
> My bride to be, my evermore delight,
> My own heart's heart, my ownest own, farewell…
> Beat, happy stars, timing with things below,
> Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
> Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe
> That seems to draw – but it shall not be so:
> Let all be well, be well.
> (I.XVIII.vii.660-683)

For the first time in the poem, the narrator achieves the homeostasis of sustained blank verse – even his one moment of recanting ("but it shall not be so") is repurposed into the iambic pentameter, his affliction curbed by being drawn out. Instead of "drawing" from the well of "some dark undercurrent woe," he diverts the conceit into a simple being-well – an odic middle ground that Tennyson has been wanting to cultivate since "Mariana" and "Ode to Memory." Yet, as the Keatsian coming-to ("*that* enchanted moan") suggests,

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[244] *Alfred Lord Tennyson*.

the "drowsy" non-ecstasy won't last for long. *Maud* will resume the relentless process of pushing the narrator out of place; his longing will consummate only in a headlonging into the Crimean War, which the narrator convinces himself is a place-finding, a last stand:

> And I stood on a giant deck and mixed my breath
> With a loyal people shouting a battle cry
> (III.VI.iii.34-35)

The narrator goes to war for the love of Maud – "for the love of" not in the altruistic, unconditional sense of the phrase, but to collect on what is his, and in the only currency still available to him.

In pushing the narrator toward this solution, Tennyson develops something formally untoward. Tennyson's revisions of the poem's top-level structure went on for ten years. In 1859, he divided the poem into Parts I and II, and "the further division into a Part III was made in 1865."[245] Tennyson thus settled on a mega-triad of sorts, the two long Parts I and II giving way to the final epodic burst or stand-taking of Part III. This might seem too esoterically Pindaric; the antistrophic dynamic might remain better understood as a function of the poem's mid-level structures, as when Tennyson himself designates section I.XIII the "counter passion" of the section before it.[246] Yet the ode still figures structurally and significantly into *Maud*. In line with Shaw's reading about the "hovering" between ode and psalm, the "Sighing for Lebanon" sequence acts as an odic fulcrum to balance the personal and the cultural, even as it facilitates the narrator's deranging toward either extreme.

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[245] Ricks, *Poems*, II: 515n.

[246] Ibid., II: 546n.

The ode's power is therefore relative, but it can still perform with an absolute value of sorts, as evident in the stand-alone anthological prowess – i.e., the pure-lyric self-sufficiency – of "Come into the garden, Maud." Without a context that undermines it, this ode is unironic, brazen as Shelley's West-Wind trumpet, as it fuses lyric pining with odic longing for immortality, and melds prophecies both romantic and Romantic:

> There has fallen a splendid tear
> From the passion-flower at the gate.
> She is coming, my dove, my dear;
> She is coming, my life, my fate;
> The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near;'
> And the white rose weeps, 'She is late;'
> The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear;'
> And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'
>
> She is coming, my own, my sweet;
> Were it ever so airy a tread,
> My heart would hear her and beat,
> Were it earth in an earthy bed;
> My dust would hear her and beat,
> Had I lain for a century dead;
> Would start and tremble under her feet,
> And blossom in purple and red.
> (I.XXII.x-xi.908-923)

This was not the conclusion of the single-part *Maud* of 1855, though its purple-red blossom stakes a claim thereon: "flames/ The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire." In 1865, this line becomes the near-conclusion of *Maud* in its three-part final form, while the ode falls in that version farther back, where it becomes the very conclusion of Part I. In shifting the ode from near-finale of the whole to the finale of Part I, Tennyson has the form beat as the unseen heart of his poem.

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Emily Tennyson, souring to the seemingly perpetual critical apologetics her husband had to issue for *Maud*, said that the poem "must stand or fall of itself".[247] Indeed, the singularity of the poem must be understood in terms of the aversion to it: "None like her, none" (I.XVIII.ii.605). *Maud* neither lives nor dies (stands nor falls) by the ode, but the ode is the means by which Tennyson achieves the poem's take-it-or-leave-it lyrical excrescing, the laissez-faire freedom that is achieved through its cultural place rather than despite it. Touted ubiquitously by the poet and his coterie as "an entirely new form" and "sui generis,"[248] *Maud* could somehow boast novelty in the poetically belated latter half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this free ode did find a strange bedfellow in the unrecognizable verse form that was then hailing from across the Atlantic. An anonymous review in 1856 connects *Maud* to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in revealing terms: "All Tennyson's exquisite care over his lines produces no other impression than that which Whitman's carelessness arrives at; viz., nonchalance with regard to forms."[249] "The difficulty will vanish," the 12-year old Tennyson had prophesied. His careful carelessness is a fulfillment; his pained elision of poetic labor stands him powerfully before a new era, a last stand on the verge of that *vers libre* which the long history of the irregular ode in retrospect appears to anticipate.

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[247] *Letters*, 1987, II: 147n.

[248] Ricks, *Poems*, 515n.

[249] "Studies among the Leaves," *The Crayon* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1856): 30–32, doi:10.2307/25527371.

2.8 Coda: Into Modernity

The ode's continuity across Tennyson's career is the premise of a greater argument about the ode's continuity into the poetic future. Indeed, much about Tennyson's ode-based innovations would recommend them as poetic legacies, elements of "all poetry" to come. Yet the extent of his experimentation, and thus the modern viability of his poetic, has been critically understated. Though Tennyson would fulfill the many criteria for "being modern" – the acute sense of the present that invests his poems; voices without perspective; innovations that derive from an unwillingness to invest in the name-brand forms of yore – the count on which he falters is the element of auto-subversion. Tennyson doesn't pass muster, as his kind of subversion is to overload rather than undermine. Getting more Tennyson than you want, not less, is a critical complaint that has echoed down the decades: Whitman's comment about his "finest verbalism," Hopkins' designation of him as "Parnassian," Andrew Lang's quip that his lines read like "an imitation of Tennyson by Tennyson," Eliot's comment that Tennyson forces "too *poetical*" a diction, Auden's more barbed comment about his having "the finest ear [but being] undoubtedly the stupidest" of English poets. In short, the problem is that Tennyson's superlative lyricism also lends itself to being "too much."

Tennyson's continuity with the poetic future has been sought before, in terms of Modernism, and by way of *In Memoriam*, *Maud*, the early lyrics, or the dramatic monologues. The unsurprising but nonetheless frustrating realization that arises from the whole of these studies is that there are as many Tennysons as there are Modernisms. One

strain of criticism casts Tennyson, by virtue of his high lyricism or picturesque purity, as a proto-Imagist (Marshall McLuhan) or proto-Aesthete (Richard Aldington, Angela Leighton, Bloom). A different critical strain (à la Eliot or Carol Christ) focuses on Tennyson's composite poetry, and the difficulty it creates through allusive opacity, perspectival obliqueness, and structural parataxis. These two categories of Modernism rest on opposing conceptions about poetry. In Modernism #1, poems are self-contained verbal structures, impervious to society or history. In Modernism #2, poems engage social-historical processes by attempting to capture or express their structural principles – at the cost, however, of behaving unpoetically.

While it is encouraging that Tennyson might enter modernity, despite the opposed ways in which Modernism is defined, the accounts above yield up two Tennysons who are not in dialogue with one another. To reconcile them would be to reconcile pure poetry and mere poetry, extremes whose critical dialectic shapes modern literary history. Tennyson was born in high lyricism and was reborn in it. Hallam's inaugural remarks championed the purity of his poetry, and this feature eventually proved conducive to New Critical approaches and the renascence of Tennyson studies. But this version of Modern Tennyson is now dated, and this virtue becomes a vice in the New Historical landscape, where pure lyricism diminishes to mere lyricism. Hence proceed latter-day reconsiderations of Tennyson in light of the second variety of Modernism, which redeems the merely lyric by invoking the other-than-lyric. Epic, drama, and the novel are variously ushered in to explain those perspectival and structural frays that pique interest in a Modernist understanding of Tennyson. There is no doubt that this is a worthy

approach; Tennyson himself authorizes it, with his intuition that there was "something modern" about his framing devices.[250] But it's often done by ignoring, or even forswearing, Tennyson's lyricism. Christ, for instance, locates Tennyson at his most fluent and most Modern "[i]n the spaces between the lyrics" – i.e., in his silences. Again: "*In Memoriam* succeeds by what it does not say."[251]

Toward a new formulation of Tennyson's lyricism, which acknowledges his modernity without the muting that counterintuitively attends thereto, we must first grant that he, in his way, did as much thinking about poetic unity and autonomy as New Critics or New Historians. Tennyson would have critiqued the idea of "pure lyric" on the same grounds as a New Historicist would: self-contained verbal structures, solipsistically impervious to society or history. Lyricism is irrelevant, Carlyle was there to remind him. Yet, the Carlylean solution – swan-diving into culture ("he wants a task") – isn't the answer. It might be *an* answer, but we have our doubts about *Maud*'s narrator and his cultural solution/lyrical dissolution, as the "doom assigned" rings with as much arbitrariness as it does with destiny. The narrator thinks himself at the end of times, but really he's at the end of history (in a historical rather than an ahistorical present), a modernist who doesn't know it.

Tennyson had concerns about the value of poetry, and these included the nature and origins of that value. Haunted by the possibility that poetry was irrelevant and ineffectual, he had questions for the lyric about its place in the world. Unlike Arnold,

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[250] *Memoir*, 724.

[251] *Victorian and Modern Poetics*, 116, 117.

who would pose such questions only after forsaking the lyrical medium, and unlike

Wordsworth and Shelley, who did so through separate genres (prefatory essay, defense),

Tennyson is always asking from within the poetry. A Tennyson-authored *Defense of*

Poetry would have been a wonderful thing; we must settle for the lifelong defensiveness

of an embattled poet, a poet nonetheless. Rather than taking lyric for granted as a voice

that inevitably escapes a poet's throat, Tennyson objectifies it. That is, he takes the

component parts of lyricism – the givens of structure, perspective, and subject – and

overloads them in a kind of poetic stress test. Tennyson's poetry questions its status as

poetry by being exceedingly poetic.

Were Tennyson not so very serious about this poetic project of fighting lyre with

lyre, we might understand his method in terms of caricature or parody. Parody might

prove additionally useful, as Modernists certainly used it as a method of investigation

into ideas of the lyric. But the poetic that Tennyson forges hasn't the same lightness as

Eliot's in the para-ode *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. "The Miller's Daughter"

does end with "Let us go" and at least one line from the 1832 version of the poem seems

to have come right out of the Eliotic landscape, "A water-rat from off the bank/ Plunged

in the stream." But while the poem invites laughter at/with the songster-narrator, the

Miller's son-in-law, it becomes less funny over its revised life, sadly persisting in all

Tennyson's editions, even as his odes did not. Perry observes that Tennyson's "play

between the poetical and the unpoetical is always predisposed to become comic," though

Tennyson proves adept at employing "the heterogeneity of burlesque ... without

formalizing its sense of discrepancy into full-blown" mockery. [252] Frye too notes how

Tennyson is able to walk the fine line between a wittiness that "detaches the reader" and

the "hypnotic incantation [that] absorbs him."[253]

These divagations of literary mode are anyhow subsumed to Tennyson's greater

poetic, what Perry calls "his poetry of returning." Like Shelley's, these are progressive

returns. As Tennysonian lyric transcends enchantment with further enchantment, or

undoes incantation with still more incantation,[254] he produces an ultralyricism, in which

more of the same becomes difference. This is in line with Fry's understanding that the

ode is a poetry that stands both as lyric and against it, that objectifies lyric's effects even

as it intensifies them:

> [W]hereas the lyric that is not an ode seeks voice without fanfare, as if by a
> spontaneous course of thought, the ode denies itself the illusionism of full-
> throated ease and writes itself hoarse.[255]

Tennyson's ultralyricism is not confined to the ode, but it is a poetic born of and

developed through his arbitrations with the genre, what I have been calling his "para-

ody." At the heart of Tennyson's odic overhaul is a questioning of lyrical value that is

also a quest for it. Tennyson employs the ode not ideologically, but skeptically – a kind

of hypothetical "holding it true" even as the lyrics gesture at an exterior that casts doubt

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[252] *Alfred Tennyson*, 156, 158.

[253] *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 276–277.

[254] Tennyson does this thoroughly and brilliantly in "Boädicéa," as I explore in "Tennyson with the Net Down: His 'Freer' Verse," *Victorian Poetry* 51, no. 2 (2013): 177–200.

[255] *Poet's Calling*, 9.

on them. This putting poetry in (its) place anticipates the anthological conceit of Pound's

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and, once the Modernist decides on a less parodic, more genuine

quest for the form, the Confucian Odes.

CHAPTER 3. POUND'S "HID!" ODES

3.1 Odium: Tennyson vs. Pound

> **I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman –**
> **I have detested you long enough.**

Pound did not like Whitman's "crudity" – a lack of restraint or discernment in matters of poetic subject: "Lo, behold, I eat water melons."[256] "[H]e is content to be what he is."[257] Pound of course could not share in Whitman's contentedness or his content, but he did partake of his forefather's form: "I find myself using his rhythms" (145). In the passivity of that statement is Pound's grudging acceptance of his linguistic lot, and this in turn is linked to poetic destiny:

> Whitman is to my fatherland (*Patriam quam odi et amo* for no uncertain reasons) what Dante is to Italy. … Like Dante he wrote in the "vulgar tongue," in a new metric. The first great man to write in the language of his people. (146)

This was written in 1909, while Pound was estranged from the fatherland. But because the stepfatherland was proving increasingly hostile to Pound (Eliot said he was gaining the "odium" of his contemporaries), he conceives a lineage of unofficial poets laureate, to contrast with the Official Poet Laureate, in whose metrically-refined grip England's poets and readers still (contentedly) found themselves.

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[256] "Montcorbier, Alias Villon," in *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1910), 179.

[257] "What I Feel about Walt Whitman," in *Early Writings: Poems and Prose*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 187. Hereafter cited as "About Whitman."

For Tennyson, Pound reserved pure *odi*, with none of the mitigating *amo*: "no Tennysonianness of speech; nothing – nothing that you couldn't, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say."[258] Even Virgil gets downgraded in Pound's canon in terms of Tennyson: "Virgil is a second-rater, a Tennysonianized version of Homer."[259] Pound's slights mislead, however. This lyric from his 1909 volume *Exultations* sounds familiar:

> "Aux Belles de Londres"
>
> I am aweary with the utter and beautiful weariness
> And with the ultimate wisdom and with things terrene,
> I am aweary with your smiles and your laughter,
> And the sun and the winds again
> Reclaim their booty and the heart o' me.[260]

What seems a mere echo of Tennyson's echo soon becomes an echo chamber: the doubled "aweary"'s of "Mariana" appear in two other poems from the volume.[261] This is an allusion to Tennyson, not just the illusion of one. Even so, it turns out to be another dig at him. Pound described Tennyson as having a "lady-like attitude toward the printed page that … kept [him] out of his works,"[262] and "Aux Belles de Londres" is one of the

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[258] To Harriet Monroe, January 1915. *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), 49. Hereafter cited as *Letters*.

[259] To Iris Barry, July 20, 1916. *Letters*, 87.

[260] *Exultations of Ezra Pound* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1909).

[261] "The Eyes," originally printed in *A Lume Spento* as "The Cry of the Eyes," and "Greek Epigram," originally printed in *A Quinzaine for this Yule*.

[262] "The Rev. G. Crabbe, LL.B.," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 276. Essay originally appeared in 1917, entitled "The Future."

very few poems in the volume that comes seemingly unmediated from a lyric speaker. Thus Pound was doing for Tennyson what Tennyson couldn't do for himself.[263]

Still, though, Pound was "doing Tennyson" – i.e., impersonating him. This becomes the bald joke of the para-anthology *Alfred Venison's Poems* (1934), where "Alf's Bits" come one after the other. But the parody doesn't hit close to home, in any sense. Written nearly two decades after he left England, Pound's depiction of Tennyson is a distorted lampoon, not the subtle study of a Persona. For even if "Aux Belles de Londres" is about being tired, straightaway upon arrival to London, of the Tennysonian brand of beauty ("aweary with the … weariness"), Pound still finds himself using Tennyson's rhythms. "Personae," after all, denotes not just the impersonation of other voices, but the rehearsal of these voices *per son* or through sound. Pound was well aware that he had to return to a voice to overturn it, but when it came to Tennyson, the intricacy of this transaction (with Whitman he called it "commerce") gets overshadowed by Pound's ire for the career poet.

Pound's forswearings distract more generally from his own Tennysonianness of career, with its profound study of past forms so as to avoid them. Eliot, writing in 1917, defended Pound against complaints being lodged against his peer: "early verse was beautiful… later work shows nothing better than the itch for advertisement."[264] Such

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[263] Bloom: "Mariana … is a poetess, and she sings a Dejection ode that Tennyson scarcely ventured to write in his own person" ("Introduction," 4).

[264] "Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry," in *To Criticize the Critic; and Other Writings*, 3rd ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 162. Hereafter cited as "Pound's Metric."

valuations weren't untrue; there was, Eliot was arguing, more to Pound. Eliot's defense in

fact delineates Pound's exhibition of the usual contours of poetic vocation, from being

"merely a technician" to becoming "merely a prophet of chaos" (163). All of this had

been said rather famously about Tennyson in roughly equivalent terms. And in exact

ones: Eliot in 1936 praised Tennyson for his "exquisite adaptation of metre to the

mood,"[265] which is precisely the phrasing he'd used in Pound's defense two decades

earlier, approving his "adaptability of metre to mood, an adaptability due to an intensive

study of metre."[266] The only difference between these assessments is that "intensive

study," which Tennyson of course had carried out, but which by Eliot's time could

readily be divorced from all impressions of the Laureate: "no one accuses Tennyson of

needing footnotes" (166). "Pound," on the other hand, Eliot says, "was original in

insisting that poetry is an art, an art which demands the most arduous application and

study; and in seeing that in our time it had to be a highly conscious art."[267] Highly

conscious, and consequently highly refined, poetry was as we have seen exactly what

Tennyson wrote. Eliot's effort to discriminate thus puts Pound in the Tennyson lineage

on more than one count, while also giving the lie to Eliot's claim that Pound is "original."

The following decades did little to dispel this critical myth. In 1974 Hugh Kenner,

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[265] "In Memoriam," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1975), 242–243.

[266] "Pound's Metric," 165.

[267] T. S. Eliot, "Ezra Pound," in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter Sutton, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 24.

limning the opposing poetic teams of the Victorian era (Browning vs. Tennyson),

apostolically sides with Browning – and therefore Pound – on the matter: "The reading

public put its money on Tennyson, unconscious responding to unconscious, swarms of

inarticulate feelings being aroused."[268]

 Alfred Venison's Poems accuses Tennyson of being, of all things, unfeeling

poetically and humanly. The volume is a rancorous takedown of the office of laureate and

the man, but not of what would seem to be the inevitable result of the two together, the

ode. The ode, as Pound acknowledges even in the wide-eyed early work, is a repository

of received emotion and form:

> Ode! lest some read thee saying secretly
> "Thou singst the rose as others sing the rose["]
> Tell them they lie, for out of purple dreams
> Proce[e]deth all thy substance & thy worth.[269]

In manuscript, this had been the preamble to "Portrait: From 'La Mère Inconnue.'" Even

though the lines forswear any derivation, the purple dreaminess is Keats' in "Ode to a

Nightingale," as is the dim, shadowy imagery of the poem to come. The lines were

dropped by the time they were published in *Exultations*, where Pound accedes to the

well-known matrilineage of his form:

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[268] Kenner is paraphrasing Eliot, who, in canonizing dramatists based on emotional accessibility, said that Shakespeare was more popular than Jonson because "the polished veneer of Jonson reflects only the lazy reader's fatuity; unconscious does not respond to unconscious; no swarms of inarticulate feelings are aroused" (*The Poetry of Ezra Pound* [Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1951], 19).

[269] "Ode" (Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library), 7, MSS 43 Box 112 f. 4743, Ezra Pound Papers.

> Of Provence and far halls of memory,
> Lo, there come echoes, faint diversity
> Of blended bells
> (ll. 1-3)

In fact, to one-up Keats, who also hearkens to "Provençal song" in his ode, Pound

embraces his poem's provenance, rendering a sonnet perfectly Italian in the rhyme

scheme Keats had found too "pouncing."

  In jumping the ode ship, Pound lands directly in the sonnet. This is its own

exemplum of formal convergence and inevitability, but the plot thickens: Pound's hyper-

self-consciousness of form, the addressing of form from within the form (the poem calls

out to "Ode!" even as its title is "Ode"), bears Tennyson's insignia. Pound couldn't have

known about the Laureate's unpublished juvenilium, "I dare not write an Ode…," but the

independent parallel makes a stronger case for Tennyson as Pound's père inconnu.

Though the quest for originality is as old as poetry itself, there is an intriguingly exact

way both poets, in striking odes from publication, reveal themselves to be ode-struck.

Both poets shirk and flirt with the form early on, then conduct a serious-but-with-

misgivings engagement, and finally give the ode full investiture deep into their poetic

careers. Tennyson's lifelong title-grooming, so as to avoid mention of the Form that Shall

Not Be Named, was a strategy for stalling until such a time as the hallowed/embarrassing

form could be fully/unabashedly engaged. Pound too sensed there was something still

daring or audacious about the form. In *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound's 41st lecture is entitled

"Odes: Risks."[270] This from the incurable risk-taker. To two poets very much invested in

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[270] *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 232.

becoming a name, not acting on Pindaric derring-do was a way to protect not just their personal reputations, but the reputation of the form itself. In *Alfred Venison's Poems* Pound goes so far as to transpose the cheap financial connotation of his own last name onto Alf's "Bits," but he never demeans the ode *per se*.[271]

In his early work (1908-1920), Pound does not simply evade or ignore the ode but displays resistance to it, openly represses it, enacts a love-hate relationship with it. The one ode-in-title he writes is suppressed and transmogrified. He writes dozens of other poems resembling the ode in tone and orientation, but he simply cannot bring himself to name it: salutation, exultation, homage serve his turn instead. The ode as absent presence gains starker relief when we consider Pound's encyclopedically meticulous and permuted encounters with virtually every other lyrical form Western poetry had to offer: villanelle, ballad, ballade, ballata, ballatetta, sestina, canticle, chanson, song, sonnet, sonnet in tenzone, roundel, redondilla. All the less formally-specific modes are represented as well: idyl, hymn, dramatic lyric, war song. "Salve O Pontifex!" is an ode to Swinburne, renamed to something called a "hemichaunt." Two "Villonauds" are tributes to Villon,

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[271] The closest he comes is in "Alf's Ninth Bit," where the poetaster brags that he has made "another improvement on a worn-out-model … did it very nearly in my sleep" (*Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth [New York: Library of America, 2003], 596). The final stanza then alludes lightly to the Wellington ode: "Bury it all, bury it all well deep," though the form being attacked is broadside-ballad doggerel. Given Pound's particular obsession with usury (against which, in three years, he will litaneutically rail in Canto XLV), he might have more severely brought down the satirical hammer on the ode itself – that is, the "owed" form that gives its borrower poetic purchase among a "democracy of consumers" (C. H. Douglas), to the exclusion of actual (i.e., original) poetic production. "Only Social Credit could have produced this poet [i.e., Alfred Venison]" (587), Pound declares from the epigraph.

and in the diminutive suffix of Pound's neologism we see him at play in a recurring chess game of leaving the "aud" not quite named.

The "Prelude" to *A Quinzaine for This Yule* says that the poems in the volume are transcribed "shades of song re-echoed" (l. 12).[272] According to that conceit, there is some scribal corruption in the "Night Litany" that immediately follows, which begins with "O Dieu, purifiez nos coeurs!" The extended drop-cap typesetting of "ODIEU" makes this especially conspicuous,[273] as does the fact that the deity invoked, in every other mention in the poem, is "O God" (even while the remainder of the refrain, "…purifiez nos coeurs!", in six other instances remains in French). Pound goes out of his way to give us not quite "ode" but a re-echoed ode, as he manifests his anxieties about the essence of an utterance surviving its various historic, cultural, formal, and scriptural transmissions. For its impurities, the genre is at this point "odieux" to Pound; to counteract the ode's generically typical distortions and diversions, he alights upon litany as an instrument of restoration:

> O God, what great kindness
>   have we done in times past
>   and forgotten it,
> That thou givest this wonder unto us,
>   O God of waters?
> (ll. 9-13)

The decoupled hemistichs convey the sense that divine benevolence is being undeservedly bestowed on the supplicant – or that if God is reciprocating, it is for reasons

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[272] *A Quinzaine for This Yule : Being Selected from a Venetian Sketch-Book "San Trovaso"* (London: Pollock & Co, 1908).

[273] This becomes a feature beginning in 1909, when the poem is republished in the *Exultations* volume.

forgotten. God's limning of the scene is played against the speaker's mere delineation of

it: "Yea the lines hast thou laid unto me/ in pleasant places" (ll. 3-4). These verse lines

go nowhere grammatically, nor does their half-sense quite mount the interjection that

would cover for that fact. Pound thus intimates that the formal/material existence of

litany falls well short of its exigencies. The lines seem to forget where they've come from

and where they're going:

> ……………………….
>   O God of waters?
> ……………………….

These lines bore, go boorishly on, neglectful of the fact that, really, they are being laid

into God. It takes an ex-machina stage direction – "(*Fainter*)" (l. 50) – to quell this litany,

even after its speaker has supposedly achieved inner peace:

> Even as are thy stars
> Silent unto us in their far-coursing,
> Even so is mine heart
>   become silent within me.
> (ll. 46-49)

The be-stilling of the beating heart implies that the calling-out for heart-purification has

proven too effective. As the aspirant swallows the aspirate – "mine []art/ become silent

within me" – Pound is saying that the litany is too quiet, too pure, too much itself, and

that this *cri de cœur* might do well from some coeur-ruption. In the very purest act of

calling out – "ODIEU!" – Pound thus can't help naming the ode. The litany might be a

purer version of the ode, but it demonstrates none of its internal turning nor its external

versioning – generic impurities that make its strong poetic alloy. Just as "Night Litany"

anagrammatizes "night-in-Italy," Pound wonders if there is more to this moment of

Venice in starlight, and whether that transcendence comes by way of a purity of emotion or rather of expression steeped in history.

Pound accepts the latter while still hoping for the former. As with the other volumes of this time, *A Quinzaine for This Yule* is about the quest for a purer poetry, though the poet knows he must uncover it rather than invent it. And this is a tiring process. "[W]hen I weary of praising the dawn and the sunset,/ Let me be no more counted among the immortals."[274] Even when Pound does "weary of praising," the form finds him. "Aux Belles de Londres," weary of England and English, shifts to French for its title, but it's the same *différance*: the "aux" is the odic preposition "to" as well as a Gallicized "O!" The interjection wants to make an appearance in the poem's final lines, "the winds again/ Reclaim their booty and the heart o' me," but ends up as enervated sigh ("o me"). The simple beauty of the winds folds back up, his heart goes with it, as the light from Shelley's fading coal.

There is an essential odic stance or positioning at the heart o' Pound through which he summons a tirelessness to contend with the millennia of formal weariness before him. That poetry has said enough is something that Pound can never say enough. "O my songs," "O chansons foregoing," "Oh, Woe, woe, woe, etcetera….," etc. "O!" is the odic interjection more outworn by Pound in his first decade of writing than by Tennyson in all of his, yet he personally can never wear it out. "O!" is Pound's confession of his addiction to ode diction, as well as praise of its therapeutic effect. In

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[274] "Greek Epigram," ll. 5-6.

"Nicotine: A Hymn to the Dope," the supplicant's addressee is not the interchangeable object of the dream (goddess, houri, sylph), but rather the substance that allows the visions thereof. The substance (shall we call it form?) can also deny access:

> Silent guardian of the old unhallowed places,
> Utter symbol of all old sweet druidings
> (ll. 19-20)[275]

The "Utter symbol" cannot remain unuttered; "unhallowed" cannot remain unhalloed. That Pound won't name the ode while he is always naming it speaks, ultimately, to its intoxications. Tennyson had beat Pound to the punch about the ode as substance abuse: "I was so over-dosed with Horace that I hardly do him justice." But Pound had yet to learn that it had all been done – and undone – before, while Tennyson was good enough to give credit where credit was due, even if it meant crossing the streams of poetic lineage: "Byron expressed what I felt, 'Then farewell Horace whom I hated so.'"[276]

As this ode study enters the Pound era, we will finally bid adieu to Tennyson, as this chapter's aim is not to establish a poetic continuity where the bridge has been so furiously burned. But it is ironic that Pound, in whom we have a poet and writer obsessed with these kinds of parallelism, is ire-blind to them. Pound's forswearing of Tennyson resembles Tennyson's forswearing of the ode: taking on the dominant poetic idiom by, well, taking it on. Pound knew the drill:

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[275] *A Lume Spento, and Other Early Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 78.

[276] Tennyson, *Memoir*, 13.

> So I, for this sad gladness that is mine now,
> Who never spoke aright in speaking to you,
> Uncomprehending anything that's thine now,
> E'en in my spoken words more wrong may do you
> In looking back from this new grace that's mine now.
> (ll. 36-40)

The conclusion to this first of the "Victorian Eclogues" in *Canzoni* – a hendecasyllabic shout-out to Swinburne (I won't say Tennyson) – can't quite be understood according to traditional notions of the influence of tradition. Nor does understanding it as parody deny that sense of genuine Pound that can usually be extracted from him, even at his most ingenious and flippant. In writing "Victorian Eclogues" for a volume of *Canzoni*, Pound seeks the convergence of forms in multiple traditions. To read "Virgilian" for "Victorian" is inevitable; Pound, figuring the poetic past as a former lover, is giving his poetry some plaintive breathing room from the demands of the poetic empire. At the same time, the *canzone* to Dante was the most excellent verse form, a lyrical vehicle for noble subjects, and thus a vehicle for poetic greatness. All this generic confounding is, Pound hopes, a co-founding of poetic venture, the only option in the twentieth century, where purer modes of poetic invention are bygone. The second Eclogue asks, "What if I know thy speeches word by word?" (l. 1). The anxiety of "thy speeches" and the opportunism of "mine now" will both eventually mellow, as Pound comes to terms with the fact that partnering with his predecessors is his only way forward.

Furthermore, the "eclogue" – *ekloge*, selection – prefigures Pound's career-long anthological leitmotif, through which he explores how poetry may trade purity and autonomy for canonicity. In "L'Art," another of the *Canzoni*, Pound calls out to other odists:

Horace, that thing of thine is overhauled,
And "Wood notes wild" weaves a concocted sonnet.
Here aery Shelley on the text hath called,
And here, Great Scott, the Murex, Keats comes on it.
And all the lot howl, "Sweet Simplicity!"
'Tis Art to hide our theft exquisitely.
(ll. 9-14)

The ars-poetical statement of the last line has the exquisiteness of a wrecking ball, as

Pound is aware: "Horace, that thing of thine is overhauled." Over time, though, Pound's

engagement with past form will become less anxious; the "mine"/"thine" dichotomy will

unstiffen, as will the figurations about poetic ownership. We note that Pound, in "L'Art,"

is once again glancing at the ode from within a sonnet. Shelley had done the same in

"Ode to the West Wind" – that is, "on the text hath called" – casting his shadow on the

ode through the concoctions of minor lyrical forms. Keats' Great Odes were boiled-down

sonnets; Pound recharacterizes that Romantic's "purple-stained mouth" from his "draught

of vintage" ("Ode to a Nightingale"), not as a "Sweet Simplicity!" but a distillation

possible only after the division of poetic labor: "'Twas one man's field, another's hops

the brew" (l.7).[277]

A major premise of this dissertation, as it has proceeded monographically by poet

(one-man fields as it were), is that each poet makes his mark on (casts his shadow upon,

tints with stain) the ode. But what Tennyson struggles with and what Pound is

agonizingly cognizant of is how the ode makes its mark on – or, to reverse-engineer Fry's

phrase – how the ode calls upon the poet. In Pound's unpublished ode to the ode, after the

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[277] The reference to "Murex" in this song of "brightest colours" (l. 1) denotes the rich, royal purple distilled
– that is to say, laboriously, expensively produced – in ancient times from snails.

first stanza summons the "Ode!" despite the genre's derivations, the second stanza

describes odic deliverance:

> One came, and coming, over me
> Spread azure spells as at the close
> Of day, some while the shadow dreams
> Yea & the very barren cloth of earth
> Are all ablaze with splendour of the sun[278]

The "One" "Ode" that comes is, as we've seen, Keats'; the "coming musk-rose" of the

Nightingale ode is "coming over me." About that coverage: before the line becomes

"Spread azure spells as at the close/ Of day," the manuscript draft has "Spread the cloaths/

purple cloths of dream." Pound repurposes these phonics into "the close of day," while

"azure dreams" becomes "azure spells." The enclosing, enclothing, covering is converted

into a different kind of coverage, or rather disclosure: a being-overcome, a murky

enlightenment ("shadow dreams all ablaze with the splendour of the sun"), a dis-covery

that, even if not poetic invention, still gets to ring its little apocalypse.

As the "Ode!" becomes the "One," it is for sure a singularity ("spun from out the

power of the parting star"), but not a singleness.[279] Pound is not tolled back to his sole

self, but to an odic guild, in which one must answer the ode's calling while letting the ode

itself remain unmarked, or undercover. The Modernist joins his Romantic and Victorian

big-gun forebears in contending with the transparency of the ode – and the paradoxical

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[278] "Ode," 7–8.

[279] Yet another lyric form is brought to bear on these stanzas, as their rhymes (and rimes riches) are inter-stanza rather than intra-stanza, rendering a sestina-like effect: secretly – rose – dreams – worth :: over me – close – dreams – earth.

condition in which this transparency is a function of its excesses. As the ode's shadowy splendor intensifies from Shelley to Tennyson to Pound, the genre occupies larger and larger tracts of a poet's poetryscape. With the Modernist, though, it does become hard to see the forest for the trees. Pound's ode use is completely uncharted, but this, as it turns out, is a function of the aesthetic he recognizes in it, rather than of the generic dying-out that is understood to characterize his literary era. Pound does not deliver West-Wind or Wellington singularities, as the ode's aesthetic – a persistent renewability of the old – is more about the hiding than the stealing. This, as we will see, explains *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*'s sl(e)ights-of-ode; a sustained close reading will demonstrate that its unity consists in Pound's largest-level figuration of it as an ode even as he seems to pass the genre by. Then, after long silence (including a twelve-year silence – or asylum, rather), Pound comes clean, hides the ode in plain sight. At their commencement, the Confucian Odes sing out "Hid! Hid!" as Pound begins a long journey in song to prove that "orderliness" wins "grace" (III.1.vi.1), and that the ode-liness with which he descants and yet again descants these 305 odes is, though not a new grace, a grace nonetheless.

3.2 *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*: Dam'd if you ode, dam'd if you odn't

There is no more reason to consider *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* within the ode tradition than to consider it within any of several other literary (and even non-literary) traditions, an eclectic array of which both forms and informs this poem: doggerel Byron for its rhymes and dainty Gautier for its quatrains; lyric, elegy, and satire for its modes; vignette and obituary for its content; and, throughout, allusive drifting among epic, myth,

painting, music, and philosophy. In a comment that further consternates any generic

categorization of this work, Pound said that *Mauberley* is "an attempt to condense the

James novel."[280] Thus to call the poem an ode – and to have that do the critical work of

what a genre label usually does – would perhaps be putting too much stress on the

designation that occurs merely last in the cascading headlines of the poem's paratext:

> Hugh Selwyn Mauberley
> CONTACTS AND LIFE
> "Vocat aestus in umbram"
> *Nemesianus Ec. IV.*
> *E. P. Ode pour L'Election de Son Sepulchre*[281]

Nor does the "Ode" in the title consistently perform any of its customary functions, as

Mauberley does a lot with, but not a lot within, Pindaric and Horatian generic constructs,

specters of a classic tradition that Mauberley (the poet) would rather keep "in paraphrase"

(l. 28). Mauberley is an individual talent who feels that he's surpassed the traditions.

Though he doesn't ignore them entirely, he subordinates them to his own idiom, so much

so that the objective rendering that Mauberley perfects is eventually revealed to be a kind

of subjectivity, a solipsistic state within which he collapses.

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[280] To Felix Schelling, July 9, 1922. *Letters*, 180.

[281] Several editions of the poem have been consulted, including the first edition (1920). Through the years, there have been several modifications to the poem's typography and paratext (for example, originally the subtitle read "Life and Contacts"). Some of these changes can be quite significant, but the text of the poem remains largely unchanged. For ease of reference, all quotations are from *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, 2nd ed., and use its continuous lineation.

This is in line with the critical truism that this poem is a study of poetic failure. Where this failure is articulated as Pound's strategy for disowning Mauberley's aestheticism, the task becomes one of authorial designation, which has led to a lot of critical scuffling over how to read this poem and its problematics of voice.[282] One school divides portions of the poem according to the producing talent: some sections are by the Propertian Pound, others by the aesthete Mauberley. The result is a portrait of the artist (Pound) as he fictionalizes and therefore "exorcizes"[283] the kind of poetry that he's growing away from. Some parts are *by Mauberley*, while others are *about Mauberley, by Pound*. This approach is biographically appealing, because it has the potential to characterize Pound's movement away from Imagism toward *The Cantos*.

But the Pound vs. Mauberley dichotomy obscures a more intriguing problematic: that most of the work actually seems to be *about Mauberley, by Mauberley*. Though this strange fact is occasionally acknowledged, criticism nonetheless chiefly uses it as a means of shedding light on Modernist techniques of personas and masks, and ultimately framing statements about that slippery entity "the poet." "The poet," however, represents only half of the difficulty of this work; to concentrate only on formulations of that idea is to ignore the full, abiding paradox of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*: that "the poet" fails,

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[282] This is summarized nicely by William Spanos ("The Modulating Voice of 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,'" *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6, no. 1 [January 1, 1965]: 73–96). The summary is updated by Vincent Miller ("Mauberley and His Critics," *ELH* 57, no. 4 [December 1, 1990]: 961–976).

[283] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 71.

while "the poem" succeeds.[284] We are likelier to appreciate this success if we explore the

ways in which Pound conveys Mauberley's failure in terms of genre. We should have no

illusions that *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* fits tidily into any genre, but neither should we

trust Mauberley's insistence that the traditional genres have failed him and have failed at

large. A flexibly intermediate approach to genre will suggest that there *is* room for Pound

in this poem – not as a writer, but as the editor and anthologist who must synthesize

Mauberley's fragments. That this synthesis is figured and structured as an ode – that

roomy house of echoing chambers – represents Pound's complicated submission to poetic

tradition.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Mauberley resists treading on odic ground, in that he subverts the gesture of

subject-making that typifies the genre. As nearly every ode title in the English canon

makes clear, an ode must be "to" or "on" something. An ode forms upon an occasion, and

its speaker asks a greater power for the authority to circumscribe that occasion and

celebrate it. But Mauberley bemoans the tired business of laureation altogether:

> O bright Apollo,
> τίν' ἄνδρα, τίν' ἥρωα, τίνα θεὸν
> What god, man, or hero
> Shall I place a tin wreath upon!
> (ll. 57-60)

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[284] Kenner: "The poem has commended itself too readily as a memorable confession of failure to those whom it comforts to decide that Pound has failed" ("Mauberley," in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter Sutton, 2nd ed. [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965], 56).

Misquoting Pindar's second Olympian ode,[285] Mauberley uses the language of encomium to lament that there is nothing worth praising or celebrating. Where an ancient Greek audience would have been roused by the "[tin]… [tin] … [tin]" announcing the great poetic subject to come, the same sound in English permits no such grandeur and suggests the material fate of language and culture alike. The cheap "tin wreath" connotes the commodification that drives society economically, politically, and even poetically. That this is a political lament is suggested in the stanza directly preceding:

> All men, in law, are equals.
> Free of Pisistratus,
> We choose a knave or an eunuch
> To rule over us.
> (ll. 53-56)

The choice of a leader is juxtaposed with the choice of a poetic subject (cf. "L'Election" of the title), and both processes are exercises in impotence. A society devitalized by commerce and democracy is to blame for a lack of great poetic themes.

This isn't to say that the society doesn't attempt to manufacture critical moments for itself. The "gods, heroes, or men" of section III are soon at war in section IV:

> These fought in any case,
> and some believing,
>   pro domo, in any case …

---

[285] Pindar asks, "What god, what hero, what man shall we celebrate?" In neither the Greek line nor the English line does Mauberley get the order right.

> Some quick to arm,
> some for adventure,
> some from fear of weakness,
> some from fear of censure,
> some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
> learning later …
> some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
>
> Died some, pro patria,
>   Non "dulce" non "et decor" …
> walked eye-deep in hell
> believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
> came home, home to a lie,
> home to many deceits,
> home to old lies and new infamy;
> usury age-old and age-thick
> and liars in public places.
> (ll. 61-79, suspension points in original)

Where section III resists Pindar's Greek, section IV resists Horace's Latin. Mauberley

takes a line from Horace's odes, "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" ("It is sweet and

fitting to die for one's country"), and deconstructs it. The section as a whole takes the

rhythm of war-rhetoric (a rhythm distinct from the staid quatrains of Horace and of the

rest of this poem) and exposes the cultural blood-lust through the hurried concatenation

of phrases. The rhythm that precipitates and perpetuates war, however, also becomes the

same rhythm of disillusionment and the complicated epistemology of "unbelieving."

This is the section critics have in mind when they posit a voice beyond

Mauberley's. The directness of its language and the knowledge within its rhythms are

beyond the capability (or sensibility) of that same author, through whose aestheticist

apologetics the horrors of world war are, later in the poem, whitewashed: "current

exacerbations" (l. 322), he calls them. Mauberley's solution to the "liars in public places"

is to avoid those public places altogether, rather than to install a prophet or seer in them.

This section, on the other hand, through its language and rhythm, suggests that there can be a cultural knowledge, however ugly. Its irregular lineation, a hint that Pindaric energies are at work on some level, is a refreshing counterpoint to the containment and control that typify not only Horace, but Mauberley. Good, vital poetry such as this – poetry that *moves*, rhythmically and emotionally – surely can't be Mauberley's. But nor should it simply therefore default to Pound: such a poet-centered critical framework scants the collective claim on the poetry made by genre and tradition.

There are other gestures at a "collective" authorship, by which Pound is complicating our ideal notions of an artwork as a unique object of individual creativity. The section entitled *Mr. Nixon* is almost entirely within quotation. The French epigraph that commences the second section of part II is misattributed to Caid Ali. And, in general, quotation makes up the fabric of many other quatrains. Most significantly, Pound himself anonymizes the authorship of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. The first (1920) edition of the work reads only "by E. P." on the title page, and the initials appear once more above "Ode pour L'Election de Son Sepulchre." In every subsequent edition, "E. P." is inserted just before "ODE POUR L'ELECTION" (itself the title of someone else's poem, Pierre de Ronsard's). The all-caps rendering, a feature of most early editions, makes it easier to recognize that E. P. was subordinating himself to a larger tradition: he embeds and textually embodies himself as part of the "EPODE."

An epode doesn't have to carry Pindaric baggage; it isn't necessarily a Pindaric designation. It could simply be an "after-song," a postlude of lament. But that it fastens itself to a title by Ronsard – who is sometimes credited with the indirect introduction of

the Pindaric form into the English language, and who wrote what is probably the most massive Pindaric in *any* language (*Ode à Michel de L'Hospital*)[286] – makes it prudent to consider what else might be Pindaric about this poem, beyond the allusions that seem altogether to dismiss the tradition.

Typically in a Pindaric ode, the epode comes last, structurally and thematically. It is the resolution (synthesis) to the problem that is enacted by its preceding sections, the strophe (thesis) and antistrophe (antithesis). It's puzzling, then, that this "E.P.ODE" comes *first* and that there are no preceding strophes or antistrophes to synthesize. Nor might there be any *subsequent* strophes or antistrophes. Though all kinds of headings and heading systems abound in this work, none commits to this triadic structure. Possibly the strophes and antistrophes are intentionally missing, and their absence is symbolic of Mauberley's escapist tendency to elide conflict altogether.

As Mauberley stylizes out of existence major historical events and human suffering, Pound tends generally to register these amputations in terms of genre. Mauberley, in the same way that he ignores World War I, manages to muffle epic knowledge:

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[286] 816 lines long, according to Robert Shafer. Shafer also records Ronsard's boast, and the objections to it, that he introduced the ode to France ("not only the word ode, but the thing itself") (*The English Ode to 1660*, 52–53, 65).

> Ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ᾽, ὅσ᾽ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ
> Caught in the unstopped ear;
> Giving the rocks small lee-way
> The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.
>
> His true Penelope was Flaubert,
> He fished by obstinate isles;
> Observed the elegance of Circe's hair
> Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.
> (ll. 9-16)

Mauberley fancies himself an Odysseus, privy to the Sirens' song. Yet, just as Homer's Odysseus ultimately resists this song, Mauberley-as-Odysseus seems to resist the plot of the *Odyssey* altogether – i.e., in leaving Penelope for Circe and in preferring poetic insularity ("obstinate isles") over the poetic mainland.

Though Mauberley does "return" to Penelope later in the poem –

> "His true Penelope
> Was Flaubert,"
> And his tool
> The engraver's.
> (ll. 250-253)

– the enjambment of the line points to two other infidelities. The long, stately prosody of epic hexameter (given at line 9 almost its full dactylic "lee-way") is here chiseled down to self-referential lyric. The later Mauberley is judging the earlier Mauberley as too periphrastic, despite the fact that the earlier Mauberley had already given us "the classics in paraphrase" (l. 28). The enjambment also gives a more insistent emphasis to Mauberley's spousal swap: Flaubert for Penelope. Though both figures are parallel in how they undo their art – Flaubert's obsessive revisions in search of *le mot juste* and Penelope's unweaving of Laertes' death shroud – Mauberley chooses the undoer of text over the undoer of textiles.

The affair with Flaubert is fitting. It is one in the series of "[a]dulteries" by artists (l. 119) described in the earlier section, "Yeux Glauques." There artists don't change, so much as they exchange: D. G. Rossetti's real-life wife, Elizabeth Siddal, is cast as the model for Sir Edward Burne-Jones' painting, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*. She also seems to be the "model" for Rossetti's own poem, "Jenny," about a prostitute. Carnal knowledge thus replaces the muse's inspiration, and we are left with an artistic and sexual stagnancy: poetry is "still-born" (l. 110). The fruitless connections between "[p]ainters and adulterers" (l. 103) suggest an artistic milieu that recycles rather than grows, because art is unable to harness sexual energy.

Though he post-dates the Pre-Raphaelites by a good half-century, Mauberley is lobbying hard here to position himself in their milieu. In addition to figuring his inspiration by Flaubert as an adultery, Mauberley also forms his own brotherhood of "pre-Raphaelites" in the stanzas that follow:

> Firmness,
> Not the full smile,
> His art, but an art
> In profile.
>
> Colourless
> Pier Francesca,
> Pisanello lacking the skill
> To forge Achaia.
> (ll. 254-261)

The Renaissance artists Piero della Francesca and Pisanello represent a spareness in style ("Colourless") as well as in subject ("art/ In profile"). These attributes, though "lacking," are nonetheless understood as the result of purposeful focus – the "[f]irmness" an artistic effect as well as an affect. Mauberley's poetics is becoming not just a poetics of

limitation, but a poetics of criticism – a cognizance about how his poetry is "lacking" as well as a defense of such curtailment.

These stanzas comprise the first section of the second major movement of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* – the part simply called "Mauberley" (as if the flaccid "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" itself needed some chiseling). "Mauberley" is Mauberley's *ars poetica*. As such, he revisits the topic of topic-making:

> Unable in the supervening blankness
> To sift TO AGATHON from the chaff
> Until he found his sieve …
> Ultimately, his seismograph
> (ll. 277-280, suspension points in original)

That the Greek phrase is transliterated here, rather than conveyed in the Hellenic alphabet as before, serves to proliferate the letters "to," the quintessential odic preposition. However, its connective prepositional energies are rerouted into different grammatical functions: first the movement of the infinitive ("To sift"), then the stillness of the Greek definite article. What has the poet found to sing "to"? Not quite to "The Good," but to his two new tools, the sieve and the seismograph, emblems of a new style. In the action of sifting, of sorting through poetic subjects, Mauberley finds the sieve itself. His subject, then, is his style.

Across the first four sections of "Mauberley," Mauberley dramatizes his stylistic development, as one that changes from ellipsis to elision. Of all the sections, section II is the most punctured with "…" – a reified "supervening blankness" to represent Mauberley's "three year" apprenticeship in a dark dreaminess, a "drift[ing]" among "phantasmagoria." Mauberley learns to let such "bewilderment" go, though. The sieve

lets through the sandy grains (…) of the ineffable, in order to concentrate on a single

solid object: Mauberley's "new found orchid." The ellipses, in withholding grammatical

and semantic sense, correspond to a deprivation of basic sensation, which this new

objectivity seems to require. Mauberley's focus will become so fixed that he opts out of

all other forms or notions of beauty:

> He had passed, inconscient, full gaze,
> The wide-banded irides
> And botticellian sprays implied
> In their diastasis;
>
> Which anæsthesis, noted a year late,
> And weighed, revealed his great affect,
> (Orchid), mandate
> Of Eros
> (ll. 287-294)

Even in "full gaze" of a rich range of colors ("wide-banded irides") of the Renaissance

master, Botticelli, Mauberley is "inconscient" with "anaesthesis." Referring to

Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (cf. "mandate/ Of Eros"), these stanzas suggest Mauberley's

tunnel vision: his aesthetic insight is premised on the blindness of "anaesthesis,"

preferring line and technique over form and content. As Venus is born amid the wide,

exquisitely colored bands of the clam shell, Mauberley diverts his eyes to the surrounding

ocean spray. Fascinated by its linear rendering, he breaks it down into "sprays." Truly,

these are the "chopped seas" from earlier in the poem, and this breaking down – or

"diastasis" – resounds even at the rhythmic level of these stanzas, as contrapuntal internal

rhymes fracture the quatrain. The result is to "reveal his great affect" – that is,

Mauberley's "(Orchid)" – now properly set apart by parentheses (textual half-shells). In

this light, "sprays" strikes us as a word more from a floral lexicon than an oceanic one. Mauberley will see his flower no matter what.

We might think of this section as a discovery of Imagism. Mauberley's obsession with the poetic line, which stems from his study of the painter's lines, ultimately leads to an abandonment of the bodies within those lines. Mauberley has learned to cut out, or elide, the subjects of the paintings; he prefers the harder surfaces of "verbal manifestation" (l. 284). This leads us to Mauberley's other stylistic emblem, the seismograph. The seismograph transforms texture to text; it takes a volcanic event and robs it of dimension. One such flattening is of *The Birth of Venus*. Mauberley objectifies its erotic energy, reducing it to the clinical, contained, and prosodically reduced "mandate/ Of Eros."

The next section, entitled "'The Age Demanded,'" indicts Imagism as a movement, as Mauberley depicts how pesky contexts keep crashing the party of his texts. The stillness Mauberley has just perfected in the section before ("still stone dogs,/ Caught in metamorphosis") here gets disturbed by movement:

> For this agility chance found
> Him of all men, unfit
> (ll. 299-300)

The antecedent of "this," we are told by the quoted title, is to be found in a line from the earlier poem:

> The age demanded an image
> Of its accelerated grimace,
> Something for the modern stage,
> Not, at any rate, an Attic grace
> (ll. 21-24)

The recurring [age] in agility, image, and stage suggests that the tiresome, villainous age from before – the one Mauberley had excised – seems to have embedded itself, even within the iconoclastic statements (Imagism) that have sought to avoid it. While Mauberley has perfected a stance of "social inconsequence," his images build as a Movement (an "agility" or Age-ility) into Imagism, by now its own free-standing society. Indeed, the section's several references to comparison and valuation ("examination," "non-esteem," "'his betters'") posit a different society – not the one that Mauberley before had proudly resisted, but one that he fails to fit into. The section concludes with Mauberley's "[e]xclusion from the world of letters" (l. 359).

Mauberley is bothered in this section. As the [age] continues to haunt him, his quatrains suffer a polysyllabic reinflation as he deals with this "[i]mpetuous troubling/ Of his imagery" (ll. 317-318). This psychic turbulence proves incompatible with his artistic method. The "artist's urge" collapses into the sexual void earlier established: "his desire for survival,/ Faint in the most strenuous moods,/ Became an Olympian *apathein*" (ll. 335-337). Mauberley falls into a subjective delirium ("delighted with the imaginary"), as he vies for transcendence that he is futilely forging in egoistic terms:

> Nothing, in brief, but maudlin confession,
> Irresponse to human aggression,
> Amid the precipitation, down-float
> Of insubstantial manna,
> Lifting the faint susurrus
> Of his subjective hosannah.
> (ll. 348-353)

With this "subjective hosannah" Mauberley calls out to himself as deity. This is a breach of odic protocol, which puts men, gods, and heroes into very definite, disparate roles.

Before, Mauberley was confused about the order of these roles; here he collapses them altogether.

The fourth section is Mauberley's last gasp, his own rendering of his own demise, where he pulls himself together long enough to take himself apart:

> A consciousness disjunct,
> Being but this overblotted
> Series
> Of intermittences;
>
> Coracle of Pacific voyages,
> The unforecasted beach;
> Then on an oar
> Read this:
>
> "I was
> And I no more exist;
> Here drifted
> An hedonist."
> (ll. 373-384)

Mauberley figures his alienation in textual terms ("overblotted/ Series/ Of intermittences"). He figures his demise in terms of a hedonistically misdirected sensuality, a sexuality that cannot effect unification. No longer Odysseus, Mauberley is now Elpenor – Odysseus' shipmate whose intoxication on Circe's island causes him to fall to his death. After drifting through Elysium, Elpenor is cremated and buried at last by Odysseus, who marks his beachside grave with an oar. Mauberley, having failed to shore up his fragments against ruin, ends up as fragments ("disjunct … intermittences") on the shore.

*   *   *

We should believe Mauberley's "I no more exist." It's rendered with objective precision.[287] But if these are Mauberley's last words, then a problem arises via the final section, *Medallion*: who put it here? In fact, we might ask, how did the poem as a whole get here, and, furthermore, where or what is "here"? To get at the full import of these questions, we should start by stating the obvious: that the second half of this poem comes after the first half. Put another way, the first half cannot occur "after" the second half, because the second half quotes lines from sections I and II of the first half. This problematizes the "Epode" as many critics understand it: i.e., as Pound's "after-song" for Mauberley. For how could Mauberley have quoted a poem in honor of his own passing?

A real tension thus arises between the two major movements of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. One says "he's died," the other says "I've died" – and in their agreement they contradict one another. This is enough, at least in a chapter such as this one, to warrant considering one movement a strophe and the other an antistrophe, especially since, at the juncture of the two movements, there is the word "Turned" (l. 246). Ben Jonson, writing his own Pindaric ode in 1629 (the first in English fully to realize Pindar's intricate form) translated the triadic parts of "Strophe," "Antistrophe," and "Epode," into "Turn," "Counterturn," and "Stand." The labels were literal understandings of what the original Greek choruses were doing on stage while also chanting lyrics. It becomes immediately apparent that "Turned," as it commences "Mauberley," is a word that issues no longer

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[287] As well as anti-subjective precision: there are no personal pronouns in strophe IV, except in the final quotation, rendering this "consciousness disjunct" syntactically and agentially "adrift."

from the lexicon of dance (n.b. the "Attic grace" at line 24), but rather from that of

reading:

> Turned from the "eau-forte
> Par Jacquemart"
> To the strait head
> Of Messalina
> (ll. 246-249)

This is an image of Mauberley reading an edition of Gautier, whose etching appears in

the volume. He's turning the pages, and simultaneously he's turning away from this

symbol of poetic influence, preferring another etching in another book (and preferring a

different art form altogether).

Other images of reading pervade this poem, namely the "dumb-born book" of the

"Envoi" and the recitation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the salon of The Lady Valentine.

In the concluding section, "Medallion," Mauberley is still flipping through books:

> The sleek head emerges
> From the gold-yellow frock
> As Anadyomene in the opening
> Pages of Reinach.
> (ll. 389-392)

The birth of Venus suffers further flattening: Anadyomene ("Venus from the foam") is

no longer viewed but read. She is no longer nude but clothed; her golden hair now a

covering textile ("frock"). The "bright Apollo" from before (l. 57), it turns out, is more

specifically *Apollo* – the title of a book by Salomon Reinach. As "Medallion" suggests,

everything for Mauberley gets colder, flatter, thinner.

Mauberley does not turn back in any sense. To acknowledge change would be to concede mortality, something he cannot quite bring himself to do. Even his dying words are a commandment for another reader:

> Then on an oar
> Read this:
>
> "I was
> And I no more exist;
> Here drifted
> An hedonist."
> (ll. 379-384)

Mauberley's diminutions would be an uninteresting ruin, were it not for the fact that "E.P." comes to bury him, and so resurrect him.

E.P. is not an author, though. He is an editor and anthologist, and the real success of this poem about poetic failure comes in its organization – the highest level of poetic control (which Mauberley only grows away from), which at the same time might not be control at all, issuing as it does from communal sources. E.P. doesn't give us the "Ode" (tribute to the deceased poet), but rather the "E.P.ODE" or synthesis of the poet's fragments. I'm referring not just to the fragmented style that Mauberley perfected, which speaks for itself through the poems, but a tying-together of a consciousness that could not do this for itself – that could not "Contact" others or even itself. Mauberley, no matter how poetically aware he is, falls short of that kind of consciousness that is epiphany, that must come of context and not merely text. This is what F. R. Leavis calls the "tragedy" of *Mauberley*: that for all the poet's "aesthetic fastidiousness, technical perfection, [and]

exquisite eclecticism," he is much less than the poem about him, which taken altogether

is "a representative experience of life."[288]

"Tragedy" perhaps evokes the wrong genre.[289] Mauberley is neither a hero nor an

anti-hero. To call him either would be to misunderstand Pound's strenuous efforts to give

us a form emptied of heroes. In one sense, this could be the most anti-Pindaric gesture

Pound (not Mauberley) makes. In his *Letters*, Pound criticizes Pindar as "the prize wind-

bag of all ages" and a "dam'd rhetorician half the time,"[290] probably for the way that the

ancient poet turned men into heroes for money. At the same time, however, to produce a

form without heroes isn't a lament, but rather a statement about the perseverance of form

– not necessarily as a triumph of classicism or tradition, but more as an inevitable

construct or fiction. Pindar knew, as would eventually Pound, the tremendous potential in

the unaccounted-for half of being a "dam'd rhetorician half the time": a poetry that

properly contextualizes its solipsism is not only an ode to immortality but also a form of

it. Mauberley gives us poems; E.P. gives us the accretion of several poems into a greater

work, a single poem. As the editor, E.P. manipulates the paratext so that we do, unlike

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, turn back. One of the strangest "lines" of *Hugh Selwyn*

Mauberley is the subtitle of the section "*The Age Demanded*," which reads "VIDE POEM

II. PAGE 383." Or, if one is reading the 1920 edition, it says "VIDE POEM II. PAGE

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[288] "Ezra Pound," in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter Sutton, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 30–31.

[289] Leavis does throw some other modes out there – "tragedy, comedy, pathos, and irony" (31) – though he lands ultimately on the first term, calling *Mauberley* "tragically serious" despite these other elements (33).

[290] To Iris Barry, July 20, 1916; To Harriet Monroe, March 1915. *Letters*, 87, 55.

10." Or, in 1958, "VIDE POEM II. PAGE 48." And so on. This ensures that, however thin are the pages of poetry – the quintessential "art/ In profile" – they get both turned and counter-turned.

3.2.1 Verso, Recto, *Stet.*

Mauberley's odic syntax is Pound's talisman against his fear that the mode he was inventing might nullify the historical depth and context that are Mauberley's saving grace. Northrop Frye names this mode in his discussion of the "encyclopaedic tendency" of Modernist poetry: "The paradoxical technique of the poetry which is encyclopaedic and yet discontinuous, the technique of *The Waste Land* and of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, is, like its direct opposite in Wordsworth, a technical innovation heralding a new mode."[291] Such "discontinuity" applies clearly enough to the Mauberleyan consciousness:

> A consciousness disjunct,
> Being but this overblotted
> Series
> Of intermittences
> (ll. 373-384)

Conversely, Wordsworth's particular achievement, according to Frye, is a continuity of form driven by a "central episodic theme … of the pure but transient vision, the aesthetic or timeless moment" (60-61). Pound wonders what exactly distinguishes Wordsworthian "spots of time" from Mauberleyan blots of time, and whether a "Series" ever amounts to

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[291] *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 61.

a structure.[292] Can odic overblotting yield anything like what it did for Shelley, whose

chaotic "o'er-Creation" in "Ode to Naples" sets him up to deliver prophetic clarity:

> The Anarchs of the North lead forth their legions
>   Like Chaos o'er Creation, uncreating;
> …………………………………….
> Blotting the glowing footsteps of lost glory,
> Trampling our columned cities into dust,
>   Their dull & savage lust
> On Beauty's corse to sickness satiating,
>   They come
> (ll. 137-138, 143-147)

The play on "Beauty's corse/corpse/course" might also provide some food for thought

about Pound's sepulchritudinous ode – the conflict between its little beauties and its

larger-scale hybrid grotesquery – and about what the outcome of this conflict means for

poetry's "course" through modernity. In his early poetry, Pound had sought Romantic-

bardic equivalencies, though these come across more as scribal mysteries or palimpsestic

overwisdom rather than Shelleyan clarity. Pound anticipates Frye's notion of

encyclopaedism, as well as its paradoxical tensions. The poet's job should go beyond

"mediaeval scholasticism" – i.e., beyond being "[m]aster of those that cut apart, dissect

and divide. Competent precursor of the card-index."[293] The poet points with indicial

precision "TO not THROUGH human culture," and so the question remains of "what to

make of it" (343). This question extends to *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*: is it ode or

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[292] Frye's description of the Romantic mode of creating "timeless moments out of time" (61) harbors the
ambiguous phrase "out of time." It's clear from context that Frye intends the extemporaneous sense of the
phrase, though Pound's concern is just how poetic creation might be made "out of time" or out of the times.
Pound's ode/sepulcher is not a moment's monument, but an era's.

[293] *Guide to Kulchur*, 343.

rolodex? Does the summing-up of Mauberley's "Life and Contacts" function as a unity or miscellany?

Leavis unpacks the tension in similar terms, saying that *Mauberley* reflects "the miscellaneousness of modern culture, the absence of direction, of an alphabet of forms or of any one predominant idiom."[294] Still, Leavis concedes that it is "more than a sequence" (30), and that "[t]he poems together form one poem" (31). Walter Sutton agrees: "*Mauberley* is a 'whole,' upon which Pound's reputation rests."[295] Kenner calls it "self-justifying."[296] Eliot, after *Mauberley* (though not referring directly to it), called Pound's poetry "an inexhaustible reference book of verse form."[297] Yet Eliot, in discussing Pound's early work in Provençal verse forms, describes them as "so intricate that the pattern cannot be exhibited without quoting an entire poem,"[298] thus allowing that a unified form might still emerge from an indicial format – an ode from a litany, as it were. Furthermore, Eliot says that these intricate forms "are in a way aside from his direct line of progress" (168). As Eliot renounces Pound's forward motion and ties it into his historical recovery of form, he pinpoints the structural strategy of *Mauberley* as a whole, what we might term an epodic non-progressivity.

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[294] "Ezra Pound," 29. There is definitely an "alphabet of forms" in *Mauberley*; Leavis perhaps means there is no syntax of forms.

[295] "Introduction," in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter Sutton, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 4.

[296] "Mauberley," 41.

[297] "Isolated Superiority," *The Dial* LXXXIV, no. 1 (January 1928): 5.

[298] "Pound's Metric," 168.

Pound in an early critical essay articulates this burgeoning poetic:

It is perfectly obvious that art hangs between chaos on one side and mechanics on the other. A pedantic insistence on detail tends to drive out "major form." A firm hold on major form makes for a freedom of detail. In painting men intent on minutiae gradually lost the sense of form and form-combination. An attempt to restore this sense is branded as "revolution."[299]

"Major form" and "form-combination" are Pound's euphemisms for "genre," which, whatever it is called represents an ideal about the highest level of poetic control, where poet and genre exert upon one another mutually, as symbolized when Pound monograms *Mauberley*'s epigraph. But Pound is no label whore: he is wary of the "revolutionary brand," especially for its neglect of the "restore" in which it is sold. Looking back, in 1931, on the prosodic essentialism of his early-century contemporaries, Pound says, "a change in style does not necessarily imply an absolute progress."[300] *Mauberley*, as Pound conceived it, was a revenge on Imagism's conviction that the new century's annulment of formal and generic contracts could constitute an "absolute" poetic advance. *Mauberley* was thus a "Remedy prescribed" to reclaim modern verse from the abusers of *vers libre*:

[T]he dilutation of *vers libre*, Amygism, Lee-Masterism, general floppiness [has] gone too far … some counter-current must be set going. … Remedy prescribed 'Emaux et Camées' (or the Bay State Hymn Book). Rhyme and regular strophes.

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[299] "Arnold Dolmetsch," in *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918), 258. (N.B. This is the "Arnold Dolmetsch" essay in Appendix V, not the "Arnold Dolmetsch" or the "Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch" essays earlier in the same collection.)

[300] *Profile; an Anthology Collected in MCMXXXI* (Milan: Tipografía Card. Ferrari, 1932), 9.

Results: Poems in Mr. Eliot's *second* volume, not contained in his first …

also "H. S. Mauberley."[301]

Pound's focus on "Rhyme and Regular strophes" throws us off the ode scent somewhat, but his afterthought about "H. S. Mauberley" puts us back on track. *Mauberley* does feature its fair share of regular forms,[302] but in its wholly irregular overall shape, it was serving as a rem-ody: a treatment of the disease – generic escapism/amnesia – rather than its vers-libristic symptoms.

Modernist – that is, Aestheticist or Imagist – objectivity subsists on formal individuation, small-scale effects, self-forged form. The result: an eccentricity that – unlike the Romantic subjectivity from which it was an outgrowth – was self-centered with(out) respect to the "major forms" of poetry and culture. Thus, with *Mauberley*, as Michael Alexander observes, "profoundly Pound wished to reclaim for poetry areas which the lyric tradition lost … in the nineteenth century – areas of social, public, and cultural life."[303] The poem's *e pluribus unum* poetic[304] sets Pound up for this reclamation, but even if it didn't deliver – Pound in a 1949 edition invites American readers to skip

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[301] *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals* (New York: Garland, 1991), 5:363. Hereafter cited as *EPPP*. Essay originally appeared as "Harold Monro," in *The Criterion*, July 1932.

[302] Though these are still not always strictly regular. The stanzas of "Yeux Glauques," for example, might more accurately be called strictly irregular.

[303] *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 121.

[304] "Mr. Pound is not an American for nothing" (Leavis, "Ezra Pound," 32).

Mauberley wholesale[305] – ultimately another "One" would. In 1986, fellow American

Allen Ginsberg was able to laud

> Pound's renewal of the public function of poetry. ... Prophetic, critical,
> educational, the poet intruding on society again. … The intrusion of the person,
> Whitman's Person, back into politics or social activity or social judgment. Pound
> makes a model for poet, poet's career, or poet's lifetime, or the whole spectrum of
> poet's activity from youth through old age.[306]

Ginsberg furthermore ties this renewal to the "major form" of Pound's poetic career,

which, by the time Ginsberg wrote these words, could boast of a new sequence, the

Confucian Odes.

3.3 Antipodes: The Confucian Odes

> **Shall we not seek cognate?**
> **(II.1.v)**

We begin this section again with Whitman, the sometime beneficiary of Pound's

poetic-etiological endowments, but also something of a false cognate, as the American

bard was a poetic soul who cared little for odic body.[307] Assessing Pound after *Hugh

Selwyn Mauberley*, during *The Cantos*, T.S. Eliot says, "Whitman is certainly not an

influence; there is not a trace of him anywhere; Whitman and Mr. Pound are antipodean

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[305] *Personæ: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1949), 185n.

[306] "Pound's Influence," *The American Poetry Review* 15, no. 4 (July 1, 1986): 7.

[307] Thankfully: Whitman's "Ode. To Be Sung on Fort Greene; 4th of July, 1846" (to be sung to the tune of the "Star Spangled Banner") gives an idea of how his poetry underperforms in odic straits.

to each other."[308] Eliot would amend his opinion in 1946 to be "more respectful" of

Whitman,[309] though his original insight is about right: there are only ever traces in Pound

of previous poets, and it is certainly not "influence" that describes the dynamic between

earlier and later poet. Pound's own take on the matter concedes influence along the axis

of content but not along that of form:

> The vital part of my message, taken from the sap and fibre of America, is the
> same as his. … It is a great thing, reading a man to know, not 'His Tricks are not
> as yet my Tricks, but I can easily make them mine' but 'His message is my
> message. We will see that men hear it.'[310]

Pound, unwilling even at age 24 to espouse anything close to formal essentialism, can

still subscribe, here and ever, to an essentialism of content. While "tricks" (i.e., genre,

form, style) are mediated through poetic transference, ventriloquy, trade, or theft,

"message is … message." A strong message transcends one place and time and reapplies

itself in others. Pound reformulated this idea at various points in his life and under

various terms ("sap," *virtu*, *paideuma*), with the understanding that he himself was a

generator of such content.

    Accounting for form and content so integrally had its drawbacks, however. Even

Eliot, whose critical benevolence toward Pound was a decades-long constant, could say,

"I confess that I am seldom interested in what he is saying, but only in the way he says

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[308] "Pound's Metric," 177.

[309] "Ezra Pound," 23.

[310] "About Whitman," 188–189.

it."[311] Pound must have acknowledged that his heavily stylized insouciance about forms –

while the result of conscious effort and prodigious studies, while capable of bringing

even the most obscure forms into the light – ultimately came off as styleless indifference

about his message. For Pound, who had called for other critics to take a/the stand on "the

good" in order to prove their literary credentials,[312] Eliot's question – "what does Mr

Pound believe?"[313] – must have cut to the bone.

     Pound's way of evading this problem came in his fascination with strong voices,

Whitman being the supreme embodiment of a theory of literary tradition that, according

to Marianne Korn, consisted of "ignoring literary structures in general and describing *all*

literature in terms of language."[314] Says Pound, "Great literature is simply language

charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." This "charging has been done by

… people" rather than form.[315] The person from whom Pound seems to take his idea and

its wording is, fittingly, Whitman. In "I Sing the Body Electric," it is Whitman's charge

to charge his addressees – to "charge them full with the charge of the soul" (str. 1:1),

which he does by talking about the body. Whitman's ode to the body is always and

exactly an ode to the soul; neither soul nor body pulls rank:

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[311] "Isolated Superiority," 6.

[312] "I suggest we throw out all critics … who use vague terms to conceal their meaning. … The first credential we should demand of a critic is *his* ideograph of the good" ("How to Read," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot [New York: New Directions, 1968], 37).

[313] "Isolated Superiority," 7.

[314] *Ezra Pound: Purpose, Form, Meaning* (London: Middlesex Polytechnic Press, 1983), 58.

[315] "How to Read," 23.

> The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence downward toward
>   the knees,
> The thin red jellies within you or within me – the bones, and the marrow in the
>   bones,
> The exquisite realization of health;
> O I say, these are not the parts and poems of the Body only, but of the Soul,
> O I say now these are the Soul!
> (str. 9:31)[316]

Whitman is not just saying that the body is a poem, but that the poem is a body, an organism begotten of other organisms. And just as all bodies and bloodlines ("The same old blood!" (str. 7:24)) have brought about Whitman, so all poetry has come to his poem.

Whitman's blazon of his own body is a progress ode. Though he has excluded the names we would typically find there, and though his "poem of the Body" seems to abandon the body of the poem (and the corpus of literary history subtending it), Whitman proves that he is not unaware of poetry's usual haunts: "(Do you think they [the passions] are not there because they are not express'd in parlors and lecture-rooms?)" (str. 7:24). The parentheses are not a diminution of parlored/lectured poetry; another parenthetical aside has the progress of poetry marching on cosmically and microcosmically: "(All is a procession;/ The universe is a procession with measured and beautiful motion.)" (str. 6:17).[317] Whitman has extricated himself from this procession by relinquishing ownership of his poetry:

> O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the
>   likes of the parts of you;
> I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the Soul, (and that
>   they are the Soul;)
> I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that they are my
>   poems,

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[316] "I Sing the Body Electric," *The Walt Whitman Archive*, http://www.whitmanarchive.org. Facsimile of *Leaves of Grass*, 1867.

[317] The parentheses are added beginning with the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

> Man's, woman's, child's, youth's, wife's, husband's, mother's, father's, young
>   man's, young woman's poems
> (str. 9:31)

While Whitman figures himself and his poetry as temporary culmination, Pound misunderstands Whitman's (b)ody as pure origin. Through various critical fiats, he tries egregiously to insert himself into that bloodline. Whitman, Pound says, "prophesied me."[318] The problem with such poetic inevitability is that it might occasion either poetic perfection or poetic doom: "He knows that he is a beginning and not a classically finished work" (145). "Finished" carries dual senses of "perfected" and "exhausted," Pound knowing that he was trapped in the latter sense, even while attempting the former.

Whitman's message – his song of himself – was his bag of tricks. The best Pound could do was a bag of tricks that was the message. And this made him stand or fall with the likes of Browning:

> Hang it all, there can be but one *Sordello*!
> But say I want to, say I take your whole bag of tricks,
> Let in your quirks and tweeks, and say the thing's an art-form,
> Your *Sordello*, and that the modern world
> Needs such a rag-bag to stuff all its thought in
> (1-5)[319]

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[318] "About Whitman," 187. And perhaps he did. In the rejected poem "Apostroph" (1860), Whitman calls out, "O poets to come, I depend on you!" (l. 65).

[319] "Three Cantos: I," *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* X, no. III (June 1917). Hereafter cited as "Three Cantos."

In Pound's critical assessments, the bag of tricks is anything opposed to or outside of content; it is the form that art takes while falling short of being "an art-form."[320] Pound has concerns about the role that form, genre, and style play in a poem's future viability, though in this excerpt his ideals about the canonical and timeless poem remain unreconciled with his affinity for strong, historically particular voice. The "one *Sordello*" is a function of its time and place: "I have the background./ And you had a background" (ll. 95-96).[321] The poem's historicity protects its originality; its mannerism is unrepeatable and does not harden into a mode or genre. At the same time, this originality is not as vital as Whitman's. It reads more as a historical peculiarity that doesn't carry over to canonical singularity (the "quirks and tweeks" aren't "Let in"), and it is the lack of generic investment by the strong-voice poet (in the very act of his inter-century reach) that keeps him and his poem in the nineteenth century. Browning isn't "Let in" to the canon because he doesn't go all in formally:

> So you worked out new form, the meditative,
> Semi-dramatic, semi-epic story,
> And we will say: What's left for me to do?
> (ll. 100-102)[322]

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[320] Looking back on the "botched" *Cantos*, Pound would say, "I picked out this and that thing that interested me, and then jumbled them into a bag. But that's not the way … to make… a *work of art*" (Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1970], 457–458).

[321] "Three Cantos: I."

[322] Ibid.

Browning's six books of iambic pentameter are neither here nor there; a work outside of

forms that is also "worked out." Pound, standing sentry to the "modern world" of the

twentieth century, cites this exhaustion as reason for Browning's exclusion.

Pound figures Browning in a world apart; in a different version of this "Ur-Canto"

from later the same year he changes "I have the background./ And you had a

background" to "I have my background; and you had your background." [323] Even as

Pound reinforces epochal divisiveness (or simply mine/yours poetics), he can't shake the

sense that he is on a continuum with his forebear ("new form" becomes "the form"), and

that this older innovator has made him obsolete ("finished"). Despite his disavowal,

Pound's background includes Browning and his background; he is a poet writing about a

poet who had written about a poet. Asking "what's left?" is a voice at the end of poetic

history. For Pound, this is not a historical vantage or transcultural terminus – where all

progress odes figure themselves to be – but a dead end.

Donald Davie notes that Pound "carried more nineteenth-century baggage than

any … contemporary." What Davie calls the Victorian era's "pretensions" – its esteem

for difficult, restless, ambitious poetry – Pound does little to "explode."[324] Indeed, the

success of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* was its containment of a multiplicity of other poems.

Pound insisted on its unity through its figuration as an ode (the E.P.ODE was not allowed

literally to explode), and it survived as a form while letting its speaker-voice implode, as

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[323] *Lustra of Ezra Pound, with Earlier Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917). This version was published in October 1917, the earlier version in June.

[324] *Ezra Pound* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 8.

Mauberley's style overtakes his subject. The revision of the question – "What's left for me to do?" – extends Pound's interrogation of his relationship to poetic history vis-à-vis form. The "[for m]" latent in "for me" is reminiscent of "mine now" and the smash-and-grab formal opportunism typical of Pound's early work, yet form inscribes itself upon him even as he breaks (away from) it (as in the epode).

Even when previous poetry is his topic, the forms of that poetry operate in Pound as content rather than as form – viz. the early manuscript "Ode" that calls out to the ode. In this process, form loses its pliability, the poetic arteries sclerose. Not wanting to do the same-old-same-ode, Pound rejects the Whitmanian transfusion of the "same old blood." Even in Pound's version of literary history where voice supplants form, he runs into a similar issue: the poet can't have a muse without also having a precursor. Pound in the final version of *The Cantos* (1972) still asks, "But Sordello, and my Sordello?" The *Sordello'd* – a being done-unto that is of his own doing – is a mutant strain of progress ode, a viral replication in the literary genetic transfer. To the end of his career, Pound would retain this ability to sound like himself, a truly comPounded problem of being his own background. Pound, taking a page from Mauberley rather than *Mauberley*, quotes his own earlier poetry, thus enacting his historical patchwork even as he diagnoses it: "Ghosts move about me/ Patched with histories" of Ur-Canto I becomes "'ghosts move about me' 'patched with histories'" in Canto LXXIV.

In the sounding of other poet-ghosts, Pound creates his own idiom, one which he usually does not escape. But this is not to say that another poetic quest was not underway.

Pound was in search of a suppler version of how poetry becomes other poetry, how other

poetry becomes his poetry (a distinction he sought to invalidate):

> Say that I dump my catch, shiny and silvery
> As fresh sardines flapping and slipping on the marginal cobbles?
> (I stand before the booth, the speech; but the truth
> Is inside this discourse – this booth is full of the marrow of wisdom.)
> (6-9)[325]

The "marrow of wisdom," like the "marrow" of Whitman, is the ultimate content, the

innermost message. The flapping fish direct toward it but distract from it, as does Pound-

as-fishmonger, who in standing "before the booth" figures himself both as in the way and

also off to the side. He is extraneous to the "discourse" while buried within it. In that

Whitmanian aside, Pound is making a "stand" by getting out of the way. He can join

Whitman's "universal procession" – and Browning's too – if he can silence himself,

thereby making his own variation on their very different feats of self-denial through self-

projection (one through democratically scattered apostrophism, the other through

historico-dramatic casting).

After trawling the poetic deep, Pound wants to "dump his catch," a phrase which

we can understand in two senses. In the first, he lets it loose on the cobblestones; it

becomes *The Cantos*: "an endless poem, of no known category… all about

everything,"[326] and thus another bag or unloosed net of tricks. In the second, the catch is

let go of entirely, and Pound is free to write a finite poem of a rather well known category

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[325] "Three Cantos: I."

[326] This was written to James Joyce in 1917, six decades before his "endless" poem would come to an end
(*The Life of Ezra Pound*, 289).

all about the one thing, the content known as the Great Learning, the form being *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*, or the Confucian Odes (*Shi Jing*). The odes commence not with the fish-hawker standing in the way, but with the fish-hawk who has partaken of its share of marrow:

> "Hid! Hid!" the fish-hawk saith,
> by isle in Ho the fish-hawk saith
> (I.1.i)

These major projects of Pound's, *The Cantos* and the Confucian Odes, are not perfectly opposed; both are ambitious and idiomatic. Yet the Confucian Odes, somewhere between their Eastern setting and American place of composition, additionally manage to be minimalist and clear in voice, and thus are antipodean enough – to Whitman, to Browning, and to Pound himself – for Pound to rejoin the progress of poetry.

3.3.1   Odes in *The Way*

Pound did have an answer for Eliot: "I believe the Ta Hio."[327] The *Ta Hio*, or "Great Learning," is a part of Confucian philosophy, "an idea of order in which the mind, the state, and the universe were organically related."[328] It emphasizes self-cultivation and moral refinement through an investigation of things, and this in turn leads to effortless action in the realms of family and of state. It seeks an experience of the essential nature of the universe, referred to as "the way" (*Dao* or *Tao*), which remains eternally nameless.

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[327] "Date Line," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 86.

[328] L. S. Dembo, *The Confucian Odes of Ezra Pound: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 23. Hereafter cited as *Odes: Appraisal*.

Though an ineffable essence rather than a named thing, *Dao* can still be known through its manifestations in the things of nature. Pound's rejoinder obliquely answers Eliot's other criticism (that he was interested only in "the way" rather than the "what") by insisting that there is no *what* but only *way* – that the ultimate content is, ultimately, a method; not an order but the act of ordering.

Pound's credo took form as odes – lots of them: the 305 odes of *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*. This number makes him far and away the most prolific writer of odes in English, a title he once sought explicitly to avoid. The Confucian Odes rarely garner critical mention, and their marginality, their being way out of the way of English literary tradition, might just be their express purpose. But first let us address how on earth the Confucian Odes belong in a study of the ode, the form that was born and died in the West. Patently false cognate, of antipodean poetic lineage, are the odes riding into this study on a nominal technicality rather than a taxonomic reality?

In coming to name the *shi* of the *Shi Jing*, Pound had various precedents: carmina, odes, poems, poetry, chansons, songs.[329] The only translator to call the *shi* "odes," before Pound fixed on the term,[330] was the Victorian sinologist James Legge,

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[329] Alexandre de Lacharme, *Confucii Chi-King, sive, Liber Carminum*, 1750; Thomas Percy, *Fragments of Chinese Poetry*, 1761; James Legge, variously, "The Book of Poetry," "The Poems," "The Odes," 1871ff.; William Jennings, *Shi King: The Old "Poetry Classic" of the Chinese*, 1891; Clement Allen, *Book of Chinese Poetry*, 1891; Marcel Granet, *Fêtes et chansons anciennes de la Chine*, 1919; Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 1937; Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, 1950; Wong Man, *Poems from China*, 1950.
[330] Though Karlgren's *The Book of Odes* was published four years before *The Classic Anthology*, Pound had been using the term for decades (Mary Paterson Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997], 153).

who made a point of saying that they could just as well be called "songs," "ballads," or "Bardic effusions."[331] Pound too could get creative in naming the individual poems. Sometimes the naming is against a familiar if distant literary backdrop ("Epithalamium," "Compleynts"), sometimes cryptic ("(? Round in Canon)"), but usually neutral ("Songs"). Throughout the anthology and at its larger-level rubric, Pound holds fast to "odes." Translators and critics agree that Pound's strategy in employing the term was to evoke poetry's associations with music,[332] in which case "ode" is at least as effective as "song" or "chanson," and in turn to evoke music's association with purity, perfection, heavenliness, or temperance – in which case "ode," as we know by now, is less suitable, given a long history of being overdone, extraneous, Tennysonic.

Pound's musical imperative was a longstanding component of his poetic, whether we consider the third tenet of Imagism or his proposal to employ professional singers so that students of poetry could have "practical contact with all past poetry that was actually *sung* in its own day" (this in an essay entitled, of all things, "How to *Read*").[333] And, accordingly, critical reception of the Confucian Odes is dominated by their putative musicality. This trend originates with Achilles Fang's introduction to the first edition of the *Anthology*. Fang says that Confucius was only apocryphally the anthologist of the odes, and instead was their "musical editor."[334] Pound inherits this particular sense of

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[331] *The Chinese Classics: The She King; Or, the Book of Poetry* (London: Trübner & Company, 1876), 58.

[332] Achilles Fang, "Introduction," in *The Confucian Odes: The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1954), x–xii. Cheadle, 153-154.

[333] "How to Read," 39.

[334] "Introduction," x.

Confucianism, as he too is "intent on fusing words and music" (xiii). But the musical

aspect of the Confucian Odes would be diverted into a separate project, a 600-page

"singing key" that was a guide to reading the Chinese poems aloud, encouraging a focus

on the sound of the language instead of its semantic function.[335] Something like that

doesn't fuse words and music but rather registers their divorce.[336]

While much in the Confucian odes seems musically pure, that is their trick. And it

is a trick that Pound repeatedly confesses, especially when he seems about to pull it off.

The first ode, quoted in full:

> "Hid! Hid!" the fish-hawk saith,
> by isle in Ho the fish-hawk saith:
>   "Dark and clear,
>   Dark and clear,
> So shall be the prince's fere."
>
> Clear as the stream her modesty;
> As neath dark boughs her secrecy,
>   reed against reed
>   tall on slight
> as the stream moves left and right,
>   dark and clear,
>   dark and clear.
> To seek and not find
> as a dream in his mind,
>   think how her robe should be,
>   distantly, to toss and turn,
>   to toss and turn.

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[335] Cheadle, *Pound's Confucian Translations*, 153.

[336] Pound and Fang seem to have fallen out over the singing key, which went unpublished (Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams, eds., *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005], 117).

> High reed caught in *ts'ai* grass
>   so deep her secrecy;
> lute sound in lute sound is caught,
>   touching, passing, left and right.
> Bang the gong of her delight.
> (Ode 1) (I.1.i)[337]

The reed is both vegetation and instrument and thus represents an ideal of natural music,

an art form that comes minimally processed from nature. Together, "High reed" and

"ts'ai grass" represent an easy interchange between the sound of the manmade flute-like

instrument and natural sound of the wind passing over hollowed out cellulose. The "*ts'ai*

grass" also accommodates a "sigh" to suggest easy correspondence between the sound of

poetry (manmade in a different sense, by the longing prince) and the music of the reed.

However, the sound changes two lines later, as does the instrument producing it. The

"lute sound" is presented without a natural association, nor any association for that

matter, as it is "caught" in itself, and even in the phrase "lute sound" there is an

estrangement between the instrument and the music it makes. The reed is also "caught,"

and though this connotes an open commingling rather than entanglement, the airiness of

the wind instrument gives way to the entanglement of the string. From this point, sound is

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[337] *The Confucian Odes: The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1954). Hereafter cited as *Confucian Odes*. In citing the odes, I will give both the linear number – e.g. (Ode 196) – and the decimal format – e.g. (II.5.ii.6), which indicates (Part II. Book 5. Ode ii. Strophe/Stanza 6). Either numbering system is sufficient for locating the poem in the New Directions edition, but they offer different ways to sense one's place in the anthology as a whole. Many odes are not numbered beyond the third-level digit (e.g. I.1.i). When applicable, verbal titles are also given. The verbal titles are Pound's invention; the decimal formats are Legge's; the linear numbering respects, more or less, that of the original anthology, with its 305 poems.

depicted as bodies in motion ("touching, passing, left and right"), primarily at an impasse. The recurring "caught … caught" gives a logical conclusion to the "Hid! Hid!" opening by the fish-hawk; the guttural pronunciation of those words enacts a different kind of "hauking." Pound supplants Legge's "Kwan-kwan"[338] to distinguish more sharply the avian screech from the human guttural, as well as to establish the arbitrariness between signifier and signified through the very linguistic construction generally understood to avoid that fate, the onomatopoeia.[339]

The larger point is that Pound's rhyme-spitting is not a symphony of wind and string, nor a harmony between man and nature. This ode's chiastics – sensical, sonical, etymological, musical, mucosal – reveal cross-purposes: sound against meaning, music against poetry, language against nature (and language against language, as we will later explore the conceit of the poem as translation). The reed is not quite a flute, and in a different way the "lute" is not quite a "flute" – and so the sounds of the poem threaten (or promise) to alter radically the sounds they represent. No amount of onomatopoeia or transliteration can avoid this fate. Even the Chinese *pípá* is not a pipe – that is, not a wind instrument, but a string instrument or lute. Thus, *la trahison de la poésie* is that it is not

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[338] *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, 1871. Reprinted from the last editions of the Oxford University Press (Hong Kong University Press, 1960), IV: 1.

[339] Korn says, "He is translating signifiers," which I take to mean Pound is conveying not the essence of something but its construct, replete with the ideological foibles in which it is caught (*Ezra Pound: Purpose, Form, Meaning*, 49).

"musical" – at least not in the homogeneous sense of that term, as it is invoked in so many discussions of poetry, as if music were a single thing.

Pound ensures musical variety, even cacophony, with "Bang the gong of her delight." This might have been rendered in all caps for how delicate it is, but the line's bald percussiveness declares itself in other ways, as the rhythm we hear in the scattering of seven-syllable lines throughout – "touching, passing, left and right" – is confirmed to be the rocking epiplocean line[340] of Gray's "The Progress of Poesy":

> Now the rich stream of music winds along
> Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,
> …
> Now pursuing, now retreating,
> Now in circling troops they meet:
> To brisk notes in cadence beating
> Glance their many-twinkling feet
> …
> Hark, his hands the lyre explore!
> Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o'er
> Scatters from her pictur'd urn
> Thoughts, that breath[e], and words, that burn.
> But ah! 'tis heard no more –
> (ll. 7-8, 32-35, 107-111)[341]

While Gray's ode generally demonstrates a faith in its own musicality (the lyre is tied to lute and harp in a footnote that quotes the Psalms), he does draw attention to bygone Pindaric "accompanyments" ("strings," "flute," and, remarkably, "song"), all of which are "heard no more" as the progress ode lands at his feet.

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[340] Four-beat, seven-syllable line that can be read as either iambically acephalous or trochaically catalectic. In the excerpt, all but lines 7, 32, 34, and 111 are epiplocean.

[341] Quoted from *Eighteenth-Century Poetry*.

This particular rhythmical lineage indeed "glances" and cannot hold.[342] Gray's pre-cataractic "stream of music," though "deep," doesn't have the psychological depth ("deep … secrecy") of Pound's static Chinese marsh, where the progressive Pindaric movement of "distantly, to toss and turn" is siphoned into the stagnant refrain, "to toss and turn." Pound is anyhow surveying other poetic claims. There is the balladic talking bird, as well as the literary-balladic archaism of "the prince's fere." "To seek and not find" grazes Tennyson's "Ulysses," and this sidelonging manages to avoid the longing of dramatic monologue and also to parry (for now) the epic thrust with a different set of infinitives: "distantly, to toss and turn,/ to toss and turn." The restless dreaming of Pound's subject contrasts with Gray's wakefulness ("Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake"), though the prince's "fere" (if not the prince himself) is delivered sexually in "Bang the gong of her delight." Pound himself is announcing a poetic deliverance from – after having stayed adrift in – this marsh of poetic antecedents, still more of which are odes. His gong is not Gray's "rebellowing," nor Keats' "word … like a bell" that tolls him back

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[342] Not unless the lineage is understood in terms of Hollander's (not Dryden's) notion of "untuning the sky," which is anticipated by Pound in his essay, "Arnold Dolmetsch," about a contemporary maker of ancient instruments. In the essay, Pound disables one of his most fundamental enabling myths. The essay begins by invoking the flautist god Pan and traces the demythologizing of him, parallel to a modern falling away from immersive ancient music and dance. Though the stated aesthetic ideal is "to make music again a part of life, not merely a part of theatricals" (435), Pound "finds himself" in a room full of pictures of pipes: "I found myself later in a room covered with pictures of what we now call ancient instruments, and … when I picked up the brown tube of wood I found that it had ivory rings upon it. And no proper reed has ivory rings on it, by nature" (431). (N.B. This is the "Dolmetsch" essay appearing earlier in the *Pavannes and Divisions* collection, not the "Dolmetsch" essay in Appendix V.)

to himself. The banged gong *is* a wake-up call, but Pound's is an Ode (that has it out) for Music, and Gray's "loud symphonious lay" is radically refigured into a consummation that puts its energy into commencement.[343]

Even as Pound puts distance between his poetry and traditional poetry in English, it's not as easy as transpacifically exchanging bedfellows, or declaring, "Awake, Confucian gong, awake." Pound equally keeps his distance from a romanticized Daoist poetics, which would consist of an enlarging of the onomatopoeic or transliteral ideal: the easy, uncomplicated transference of the real cry in nature of the osprey, to the "Guan guan ju jiu" of the poem in Chinese, to the canonical title of the poem *Guan ju* as it is named in the *Shi Jing*, to the poem's actual civil "instrumentality" at the level of the state. Whether animal sound or instrument sound, Pound complicates all such equations.

Pound's odes do not harmoniously resound as much as they re-sound, i.e., foreground the difference of their sound through a heightened attention to their verbal implementation:

> the heir sits to receive the augur's announcement
> the airy spirits (the spirits who go upward)
> have all drunk and stand upright (cease drinking)
> The representative of the White Splendour (the halo'd)
> has risen
> drum and gong sound: (nunc dimittis)
> the spirits, sustainers, have instantly ascended back to their dwelling.
> (Ode 209) (II.6.v.5)

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[343] A later ode upholds the sexual connotation of "lay":

> Mid the wild grass dank with dew
> lay we the full night thru,
>   that clear-eyed man and I
>   in mutual felicity.
> (Ode 94) (I.7.xx)

The running parenthetical commentary presents optional translations, as Pound acknowledges that the sounds of his words get in the way of their meaning. The "heir" is different from the "airy spirits," but Pound doesn't want to risk conflation through homophony, so "airy spirits" is clarified as "spirits who go upward." Spirits, in turn, are potentially confused with the hard drink of the following line; "have all drunk" is not to be confused with "are all drunk," and so Pound clarifies that this ceremony's imbibing is done with utmost discipline, by changing the wording to "cease drinking." The "(nunc dimittis)" is a liturgical instruction – "insert *Song of Simeon* here" – but also (like the other parenthetical translation options) an invitation to "now dismiss" the "drum and gong sound" altogether, as Pound confesses their thoroughly verbal aspect: that they are words that signify sounds to be replaced by other words that signify sounds.

Pound further confounds the musicality of the odes in how he handles the subsets of the anthology designated as "changed" (odes written after China's golden age, during a period of decline) or "banished." Pound consistently figures the corruption of these odes in musical terms. The Songs of Cheng (I.7) are introduced by this headnote:

> "Banish the songs of Cheng."
> 						-K'ung, the Anthologist
>
> K'ung-fu-tsy seems to have regarded the
> tunes to these verses as a species of crooning
> or boogie-woogie.[344]

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[344] *Confucian Odes*, 37n.

"[C]rooning" is Poundspeak for Tennysonics: "therapeutic, cathartic" sentimentality

mixed with mellifluousness.[345] But the term can also refer (in a different anachronism) to

mid-century American radio chanteurs. The problem with "crooning" (and the same goes

for "boogie-woogie") is the music style's populist associations, even though this book of

odes is named "Folk Songs" and offers "lessons of the states" – wisdom for the rulers by

the ruled, to demonstrate that *feng* blows bidirectionally along the Daoist continuum. As

the local hipsters ward off government intrusion, Pound has them do so in a bebopping

that he repeatedly pronounces "awful":

> Hep-Cat Chung, don't jump my wall
> nor strip my mulberry boughs,
> The boughs don't matter
> But my brother's clatter!
>   Have a heart, Chung,
>   it's awful.
> (Ode 76) (I.7.ii)

The "brother's clatter" is a caterwauling, a plea for *fraternité* that is to be ignored because

of its sentimental impetus ("Have a heart").

      To refer to the verses as "a species" etherizes their musicality but preserves them

as a specimen. Thus, "awful" and ignorable as these odes are, they are nonetheless

included.[346] "Banished" but still anthologized, these odes are here on a technicality, as a

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[345] These are Kenner's terms, as he discusses Pound's own banishment – i.e. his refusal to seek popular appeal like that enjoyed by Tennyson or Eliot: "there is a Pound whom … nobody reads, because he does not even afford the illusion of crooning" (*The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, 22).

[346] We've seen how Tennyson, too, got away with writing odes this way – via the "awful odes" paralipsis in *The Princess*.

matter of study: "Not study the odes; won't be able to use words."[347] Such inclusiveness

would seem to go against the fibers of Pound's critical and poetic being. He is ever

whittling – whether the roughly hewn wood of Whitman, or through hundreds of

canonical fiats – but the indicial precision of Mauberley-era Pound gives way through the

Confucian Odes to a more capacious, if messier, sense of literary potential. This isn't to

say that Pound doesn't at times intimate a pedantic precision. In Ode 281, "Conservation

Hymn," Pound refers modestly to "all sorts" of fish as part of the ceremonial feast, but in

the note he is caught dumping his catch: "Icthyological [sic] dictionaries available to

Karlgren give two kinds of sturgeon. Legge ventures further: thryssa, mud-fish and

yellow-jaws."[348] On the whole, though, the translation conceit overwhelmingly enacts a

proliferation of words. The parenthetical translation options permeate all four books.

"Aliter" ("In Other Words") is the title of at least a dozen retranslated odes – and even

these point to still other words, as the footnote to Ode 174 and its "Aliter" reads, "All of

which ought to be got back into lyric form somehow," as if both his ode and his ode-in-

other-words were falling short.

  Pound's second tenet of Imagism – "To use absolutely no word that did not

contribute to the presentation"[349] – is a resolve to "conserve" words, but by the time of

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[347] "The Analects," in *Confucius: The Great Digest, the Unwobbling Pivot, the Analects* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 273.

[348] *Confucian Odes*, 204n.

[349] "Imagisme," in *Early Writings: Poems and Prose*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 210.

the Confucian Odes this scheme has given way to a veritable conservatorium of words,

styles, and forms. This is the "Conservation Hymn" in full:

> Lo, how our love of god is shown in fish,
> here be all sorts in sacrificial dish
> such as our grandsires' sires offered of old,
> we have conserved them, manifold
> blessings, held from age to age
> by men who shun all forms of sacrilege.
> (Ode 281) (IV.1.ii.vi)

Reading that first line, it's hard not to hear Pound's early ridicule of Whitman: "Lo,

behold, I eat water melons." Here Pound sacrifices his acerbic exclusionary impulse

toward his own poetic sire, for the greater good of poetic abundance. This roughing-in is

understood by Kenner as "awesome technical mastery":

> Pound is able by drawing on dozens of chronological and formal conventions to
> convince us that we are handling, in English, an authentic Sacred Book with a
> long history. … [T]he élan of the chronicler whose mind is on the most important
> facets of his subject comes through the rhythmic primitiveness … as it would not
> through a more enameled surface.[350]

This "primitiveness" can be seen in a variety of vulgates, from the jitterbug slang quoted

above, to a soldier's double-time appreciations of the stylistic acumen of a fop (or pimp),

which comes through in argots both proper and improper:

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[350] *Gnomon: Essays on Contemporary Literature* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), 90.

> Lamb-skin for suavity, trimmed and ornate,
> But a good soldier who will get things straight;
>
> Note that lamb coat, fleecy to leopard cuff,
> a dude, but he knows his stuff.
> (Ode 80) (I.7.vi)

There are working-class rhythms – "Folk worn out, workin' so late" (III.2.xi.1). These in turn evoke African-American dialect, whether the plaintiveness of a farmhand – "Thaar's where ole Marse Shao used to sit,/ Lord, how I wish he was judgin' yet" (I.2.v) – or the booming authority, "true measure," and unbroken "flow" of a griot, as Ode 213 is alternately titled "Ole Man River." Pound's vernacular showboating upstages Wordsworth's "language really spoken by men," a strategy similar in its intent to authenticate the poetic voice. Authentication cannot outrun artifice, however. The "how!" that ends each refrain of Ode 244, the monosyllable uttered by Native Americans in T.V. westerns, evokes one kind of primitiveness through its aboriginal connection, and another kind through the coarse stereotype that allows such a connection in the first place.

L.S. Dembo takes Kenner to task for his assessment, reading sacrilege rather than sacredness into Pound's colloquialisms.[351] Dembo doesn't say so outright, but what is being ravaged isn't *The Classic Anthology* in its primal holiness, but rather the fundamental conception of the ode *in English* as "elevated." Dembo notes two main styles of Pound's odes: "the lyrical, associated with the sense of the mysterious and divine, … and the colloquial or dialectical, usually associated with the sense of injustice, although occasionally used to express other kinds of unelevated emotion" (25). This

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[351] *Odes: Appraisal*, 95–98.

lyrical-colloquial dichotomy amplifies throughout Dembo's book-length study, to

culminate in his thorough outrage at Pound's poetic license (always a function of his

colloquialism), which runs counter to poetic merit (always a function of his lyricism):

> We begin, confidently enough, in the realm of the mysterious:
>
>> "Takk! Takk! axes smack
>> Birds sing "ying, ying"
>> …………………………….
>>
>> …………………………….
>> Spirits attend
>> him who seeketh a friend.
>> Air, hear our cry
>> concording harmony.
>
> This highly effective rendering is followed by a passage that in both
> diction and rhythm plummets us back into what Pound thinks is reality but
> is actually inanity:
>
>> …I call all
>> my dad's clan, if they come not, not
>> my fault, they were invited, all hereabout.
>> …………………………….
>> None of my mother's folk have been slighted,
>> If they don't come they were, in any case, invited.
>
> (83, suspension points in original)

Dembo continues: "An ode like 'Fraternitas,' [(II.1.iv)] with its mixture of lyric diction

and cliché, seems to be a deliberate travesty of all poetic expectations" (83-84).

Dembo loses the "deliberate" as operative in his assessment of Pound's

"travesty," though perhaps a little more attention to the lines he elides might have

avoided this. "Shall we not seek cognate?" (just before "Spirits attend") is a rhetorical

question about Pound's formal quest, as it invites various bloodlines to the party –

cognates and agnates, matrilineage and patrilineage ("mother's folk" and "dad's clan").

"Air, hear our cry" is as pure as Shelley's "Be thou me," but Dembo does not

comprehend that Pound's outreach to odic brethren is to announce his difference from them, an ugh-liness in all its glory:

> Air, hear our cry
> concording harmony.
> "Ugh! Ugh!" grunt woodmen all
> (Ode 165) (II.1.V)

Here, the purity of the ode and the excess of the ode are allowed to coexist. Yet Dembo interprets the stylistic inconsistency as a failure, even as it becomes its own larger-level consistency. Pound's rendering of Ode 252 would be praiseworthy, as it sustains for nine stanzas the decorum and dignity of its namesake, but its "Coda" to Dembo's ear proves ruinous as it lapses into "phraseology" that is "trite" and "sing-song" (96-97):

> The Lord's wagons be many,
> his fast horses trained better than any,
> And a few verses will make a song
> when there's a tune to drag it along.
> (Ode 252) (III.2.viii.[10])

Everywhere thus Pound targets the ode while not taking it out. In this ode, the refusal to assassinate manifests as a blessing ("and so your life reach term") and ultimately a coronation: "I see no reason not to take this as a coronation ode in three parts. St./ 1-3; 4-6; 7-10. Or 7-9 and 10 as coda."[352] Dembo does acknowledge the footnote, but the expectation it creates is too strong, so he does not see that as Pound perfectly misses the mark, he is confessing that *all* the odes are "changed."

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

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[352] *Confucian Odes*, 170n.

As Pound does odes, he redoes them, and this overhaul extends far beyond matters of style and into the canon. "The Odes" are first in Pound's "fairly solid pentagon" of literature. The other four are all Western: "The Homeric Epos, *Metamorphoses*, *Divina Commedia*, The Plays."[353] Pound was always ranking and classifying; notable about this list are its brevity and the fact that the canon-fodder, for once, comprises names of works rather than writers. The names in turn evenly represent the major literary modes, with "The Odes" standing in for lyrical achievement, Pound having made a point in an earlier essay of "chucking out Pindar … without the slightest compunction" and in the same paragraph expelling Horace, who as a writer "acquired all that is acquirable, without having the root."[354] Replacing the odes with the odes – the Greco-Roman with the Chinese – especially given Pound's radical conceit, is a radical move – a conspicuous, egregious transplant or graft. But its seamlessness to Pound is worth exploring, as in other essays the idea of the ode swap recurs:

> The reason for reading the Book of the Odes, the books of poetry, that is the books of basic poetry whether in Ideogram and collected by Kung (B.C. 500 or whatever) from the 15 hundred years before his time, or by me or even by Dr. Ward (English Poets) is that poetry is totalitarian in any confrontation with prose. There is MORE in and on two pages of poetry than in or on ten pages of any prose.[355]

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[353] *Guide to Kulchur*, 236.

[354] "How to Read," 28.

[355] *Guide to Kulchur*, 121.

The casually mentioned interchangeability of Thomas Humphry Ward's anthology and

Confucius's might be chalked up to Pound's critical flippancy, but later it is revealed to

be a more genuine personal goal: "I hope to read the *Odyssey* and the *Ta Hio*, someday,

without need to look into dictionaries, and, beyond the *Ta Hio*, the Odes" (144). This is

the second time his ode-longing is mentioned in the same breath as the *Odyssey*, as the

"fairly solid pentagon," a list of literary travels, was introduced with an opening line of

the Odyssey.[356]

Pound's personal progress narrative culminates in and as odes, and this ode-yssey

is fulfilled in exact ways. Like Odysseus in Ithaca, Pound is an exile in the heart of his

home country. The odes were composed during his confinement in St. Elizabeths

Hospital for the Criminally Insane, in Washington, D.C., after he was charged with

treason in 1945 and deemed unfit for trial. Pound was there incarcerated not for lunacy

but for political dissidence: he'd spoken for the wrong empire at the wrong time. The

odes thus exhibit a lesson learned, though he still metes and doles some lessons of his

own:

> Folk burnt out need a little peace,
> Kindness in middle causes no injuries.
> Turn out the oily tongues and parasites,
> thieves, squeezing governors; don't upset honest men.
> The king wants jewels and females,
> I therefore lift up these wails.
> (Ode 253) (III.2.ix.5)
>
> The sky's course runs a-foul and in reverse,
> a jaundiced people sink beneath the curse.

---

[356] "POLLON D'ANTHROPON IDEN." Ibid., 236. "Many were they [whose cities] he saw, [whose minds he learned of]," Lattimore.

> Given to untruth plotting never a-right,
> You say, and lie, that no sage sees the light.
>   Against your nearsightedness
>   I employ this reproving verse.
> (Ode 254) (III.2.x.1)

The "changed odes" show that protest may be voiced, but how it must "avoid[] lèse majesté in the form."[357] What "the form" is that prevents offending sovereign dignity isn't entirely clear. Wafts of blank verse are here and there, but the stanzas of both ode sequences tend to conclude in the apparent indignity of doggerel. This goes for the disaffected "lesser compleynts" of the "Elegantiae" or smaller odes.

> And here's my address, I am still
> at Willow Hollow Road by Acre Hill,
> Meng Tsy has lost his balls but makes this verse,
> let the administration heed it, or hear worse.
> (Ode 200) (II.5.vi.7)

"And here's my address": this non-apostrophe is returned to sender, the calling out against the larger entity has put him in his place, which is now a minuscule locality, "here … still" like the "still hearth" of Tennyson's Ulysses.[358]

Like any do-over, the odes were both an opportunity and a "ballsy" risk, politically and professionally, for Pound; they are a "reproving verse," a proven genre through which he might prove himself. Often in his essays he is talking himself up to

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[357] Headnote, Ode 253.

[358] Yet Ode 164, "Fraternitas," suggests that the utmost bound of human thought might still find its center at the hearth:

> Calm over earth, under sky
> so be thy hearth and house as they should be;
> probe to the utmost plan,
> here the sincerity to rest a man.
> (II.1.iv)

their production. In his preluding, we see him answering directly the despondent question asked from within Ur-Canto I, "What's left for me to do?": "What concretely do I myself mean to do? ... I hope to read ... the Odes."[359] Pound says that a man's "hope is the measure of his civilization" (144), and two senses are at play here: Pound is interrogating "his [own personal degree of] civilization" while measuring civilization-at-large by what he himself dares to hope. Through the odes, Pound hopes to reinvest the ode (and by proxy all form) with an innocence in the face of the history that precedes it.

The innocent ode – or "halo'd" as Pound about calls it[360] – is neither autonomous nor atemporal. Not wanting innocence to be mistaken for ignorance, Pound wasn't naïve about this project, and so he set about it not by forgetting the history, but showing that history repeats itself, or that histories run analogically: "Parallel situation centuries ago in China."[361] Indeed, the structure of the anthology and particularly Pound's translation of the titles of the major divisions give a sense of the transcultural, transhistorical durability of poetic taxonomy:

> FOLK SONGS or "lessons of the states" (simple lyrics)
> ELEGANTIAE or Smaller Odes
> THE GREATER ODES
> ODES OF THE TEMPLE AND ALTAR[362]

---

[359] *Guide to Kulchur*, 144.

[360] "Halo'd" occurs once in the *nunc-dimittis* sequence, and once just after (II.6.v.5 and II.6.vi.6). In the first instance, as explored earlier, it stands in parallel to another meaning; in the second, it is an invocation to "our halo'd sires" and the "ten thousand years" of deep history.

[361] *EPPP*, 5: 363.

[362] Davie argues that Pound's section titling is alienating: "so far from illuminating the reader, [it] seems on the contrary to insist on how remote from him is the world from which these poems come and to which they refer" (*Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], 4).

These each correspond to poetic classes, as Pound makes explicit ("simple lyrics") or implies (the "Greater Odes" about Chinese nation-building are epics or at least epyllia). In each of these correspondences, the common denominator/nomen is the ode. Pound's sense of the ode – right or wrong – therefore is as a building block of other poetries, as poems gather into form more and more "major" until they become political fact, religious artifact. These forms, unlike Pound's rigorously architectural Provençal poetry and its involuted emotional exactitudes, do not require structural resemblance, but a "structuralist" resemblance, i.e., an attention to the sociological, political, or cultural purpose of the poetry.

As cultural and generic expectation become one and the same, Pound foregrounds the use of poetry beyond the individual. In one of the "simple lyrics," a "country girl" gives "advice to the guardsman" whom she desires:

> OUTDOORS VERSUS THE COURT
>
> Marquis' yeoman, oh so brave
> to lift lance or show signal stave,
> but the person living at ease
> has three hundred footmen with red pads on their knees.
>
> Pelican on the dam
> wets not a wing,
> she's less important than
> her furnishing.
>
> Pelican on the weir will not stir
> even to dip its beak,
> and she whom you seek
> cares less than you for her.

> South Mount, East Slope, you scarce can see thru the mist
> when the dawn's half alight.
> Pleasant, yes, ready, yes,
> the youngest girl has an appetite.
> (Ode 151) (I.14.ii)

From the sexually charged genuflection of the first stanza to the all-systems-go checklist of the last, the girl's desire is duteous. She puts the "court" in courtship, even as her seduction of the guardsman traduces him "outdoors," trying to make him accept the way things are: that the "pelican" he pines for doesn't give a "dam" about him, that he won't be able to marry up into the leisure class. The lyric that follows this, "The Young in Newfanglenesse," necessarily evokes Sir Thomas Wyatt's "They Flee From Me," and we are led to discover that the typically Petrarchan lyrical stance that is found in Renaissance lyrics of that sort – the "strange fashion of forsaking" or of not letting go after being let go from embraces real or imagined – is itself being forsaken for the direct invitation to consummate. This directness, even if understood as a triangulation of the girl's desire through the desire of the state to maintain class stability, is alyrical, in that it subordinates the individual to a larger order. The strategy of these "simple lyrics" (which are anything but, of course) relates to Pound's decision to call the collection at large odes and not lyrics, which (if the criteria were merely musical) they might have been.

Whitman's middleman between mind and universe was the body, Pound's the body politic. "In essence, what Pound discovered in Confucian philosophy was an idea of order in which the mind, the state, and the universe were organically related, and, in the

Shih Ching, a demonstration of that idea in action."[363] As a ceremonial and archical

instrument then, the Chinese ode is no different from the ode in English. Odes

characteristically take a stance toward the state of the art that is also the art of the state:

> And as
>
> The Milky Way sets rule aloft in sky,
> in his longevity the king of Chou
> has raised up men distantly.
>
> To make true form as metal or jade he grinds;
> as needle that draws on silk,
> draws on the whole nation's mind.
> (Ode 238) (III.1.iv)

The rulers act like the elements; the people act like the rulers; the odes mediate as a

platform of observance.

The odes gauge the health of this dynamic, while remaining a free will, rather

than imperial stone-setting. Descriptive rather than prescriptive, the odes operate as

enforcement of imperial ideology only for as long as they don't, as they are also the voice

of remonstrance (or "reproving") in the other direction, as both ruler and ruled do their

equal share of keeping the state "aloft." The new leadership in the "time of King Liu" is

"adorned but useless as the constellations":

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[363] Dembo, *Odes: Appraisal*, 23.

> A river of stars is lit across the heaven,
> ....
> That eye-full of led oxen in the sky
> draws not our farm carts here terrestrially.
> …...
> Sky hath a rabbit-net that takes
>   Naught save its way.
> (Ode 203) (II.5.ix.5-6)

The very way that before had modeled "true form" and right action for "the whole nation" – the Milky Way – is here immaterial in its celestial distance from the "terrestrial." As the people cleanse the doors of perception, the constellation's metaphoricity is called out rather than called upon. It no longer "draws on" but rather "Draws not," and the "Sky" itself insularly "takes/ Naught save its way." As well, "Sky" is the archetypal odic target, but instead of an apostrophized embarrassment, it is here (as elsewhere throughout the odes) simply seen for what it is.

On the whole, the anthology creates but does not necessarily sustain the myth that there is no difference between art and life, that form and content simply *are* one another (rather than linked through an exquisite mimesis). The force of metaphor is softened with the suggestiveness of simile (above, "And as" is its own stanza, as easily regarded as not). The power of *The Way* is that it isn't particular about the way it manifests; it can and does manifest multiform, any old way. Throughout the anthology, Pound demonstrates just this as he attempts to navigate a hundred points of the windrose of English literary history. Of the *Shi Jing*, Kenner argues "No comparable reservoir of impulses feeds English poetry,"[364] but this cannot possibly ring true, given the formal and

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[364] *The Pound Era*, 520.

modal ranges implied in Pound's major designations, as well as the smaller-scale,

pervasive poetic allusiveness that defies enumeration. Davie does more justice to Pound's

effort as he traces echoes of Jonson, Burns, and Browning, all of which are "too loud to

be accidental."[365] These echoes spur Davie on to a more thorough articulation of Pound's

poetic:

> Pound … can find English precedents for certain passages, certain turns of
> thought and feeling, and in these cases he will invoke the English precedents or
> analogues so as to ease the way for the English-speaking reader. But the Chinese
> poems as wholes, the kind of poem all of them exemplify, the body of
> conventions governing them as wholes, have no English precedents. (15)

This recombinant poetics makes itself most prominent in the anthology's general mash-

up of ballad and ode, which to Davie "represents not only a fusion of the artless and

spontaneous with the ceremonious and fixed, but equally a fusion of piety toward the

superhuman with common courtesy among humans" (16). Davie's remarks agree in spirit

with Kenner about Pound's odes being unprecedented in English, though he crucially

specifies that this is "as wholes." Indeed, at the topmost level, Pound is delivering an

unprecedented poem built of precedents – a *making* new where virtually everything is

old.

"Heavy, old-fashioned, and solemn, the ode necessarily confronts the

unlikelihood of being new more candidly than any other lyric kind."[366] Fry's comment is

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[365] *Poet as Sculptor*, 13.

[366] *Poet's Calling*, 10.

particularly suited to Pound as he confronts, from his odic stance, naïve Modernist ideals about novelty. The whole of Part III (the "Greater Odes") as it moves toward its conclusion – "there are men who do not strive to grasp the antique" (III.3.xi.7) – is an allegory about form. Throughout this section, a deep, dynastic time wants to be relieved of its hierarchy. One king abdicates his throne and upsets the succession for a more merit-based monarchy,[367] and throughout there is reference to exequy, acolyte, cortège – trains of willing followers who are "in conformity, filial" (III.1.x.3). Pound repeatedly returns to the idea of the "deferent…fraternal prince":

> Thick oaks and thorn give folk fuel to spare,
> a brotherly prince shall energize
> the powers of air.
> (Ode 239) (III.1.v.5)

The energizing of air/heir is to set fire to systems by which new is kept in line by old. However, something goes wrong in the wake of these manumissions, as liberty becomes licentiousness, and the "changed odes" ensue during an epoch of drought and corruption. This civic volition-turned-willfulness has a formal correlative, as Pound opts out of the typically balladic lines and rhymes typical of the *Anthology*'s first two Parts, to render largely rhymeless, linearly irregular stanzas and strophes. The odes have thus been "changed" via/into free verse.

The Earl of Fan laments:

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[367] *Confucian Odes*, 156n.

I look up with awe to the exigeant heaven
which hath no kindness to me-ward,
my unquiet is come to the full.
………………………………
there is no easy reform.
....
Heaven is come down like a net
all-taking, and men go dolorous into exile,
heaven is come down like a net
hardly-visible,
and men go into exile heart-broken.
(Ode 264) (III.3.x.1, 6)

The "net/ hardly-visible" might be considered in light of Robert Frost's famous dictum,

not two years off, about free verse: that he'd "just as soon play tennis with the net

down."[368] Pound would have agreed that the free verse game requires more skill rather

than less, so as to prevent its controlled burn from becoming a conflagration. In any case,

"there is no easy reform." In the final ode of Part III, the Earl of Fan speaks again; his

despair at the "disorder" around him is given wider berth than before, formally speaking:

[1]
Compassionate heaven, O thou autumnal sky
hasty to awe, famine is here, now surely death draws nigh,
Folk die and flow to exile in the waste,
dead homes and stables are hidden beneath wild grass.

2
Heaven has let down a drag-net of ill-doing,
the locusts have gnawed us with word-work,
they have hollowed our speech,
Perverse alliances and continuing crookedness have divided us,
evil men are set above us, in ease.

3
Amid slanders and vain disputations
they see themselves flawless,

---

they know not their errors
they count on their not being seen,
emulous, ostentatious, cantankerous in their ostentation
by long disorder
the high offices are brought down.

4
As grass in a drought year
with nothing to water its shoots,
as cress in dry tree fork, dry as bird's nest
so in this state
there is none not given to sabotage.

5
Former prosperity stood not on a chance of weather,
nor does calamity now.
………………………

6
Pool dry without inflow,
Fountain dry without inner spring,
they have overflowed wide with their injuring,
they have engrossed and expanded their functions,
may they not overwhelm me.
(Ode 265) (III.3.xi.1-6)

As the Earl begins to range in longer lines, Pound "Fans" the free-verse flame with odic

wind. The apostrophe to the "autumnal sky" makes the English ode the breath-of-being

for this Confucian Ode. The sky is called to, though not exactly as a Shelleyan

"Destroyer and preserver." Rather, like the "Sky" from earlier, it is undestroying and

unpreserving: "Former prosperity stood not on a chance of weather,/ nor does calamity

now." Rebuffed omen, this mere symbol or "chance of weather" nonetheless implies that

man writes his fate. This free-willing, in matters of verse, must be underwritten by "the

antique" – the occluded or "Hid!" tradition – even if that in turn threatens it with a being-

overwritten. Not that this is a bad thing. Prosodic history being cyclical, the "net" again is

"down," setting the scene for an "ostentation" that is somehow "not being seen." This is, Pound seems to be saying, the prosodic fate of both the irregular ode and its twentieth-century avatar, free verse.

"Overflowed," "engrossed," "expanded" – odic distension extends to Pound's anthological strategy and the "as-wholes" poetic that Davie observes. The collection is entitled *Anthology*, but its entries are not discrete from nor innocent of one another. Dembo (in his continuing role in this discussion as touchstone of critical ideology circa 1960) laments the fact that the odes do not stand on their own: "a large number of Pound's version still do not stand as independent poems."[369] Pound keeps the linear Confucian numbering (1 to 305), but also superimposes his own decimal system,[370] which intimates a more intricate mapping of the anthology's architectonics, which is capable of specificities exceeding the taxonomies of drama (act, scene, line) or scripture (chapter, verse). Ode 243, for example, is known also as "Wu, as the Great Foot-Print" or as III.1.ix.1-6. This anthology has an anti-anthological thrust, in that the insulation of poems from each other, and thereby from everything else, is denied. In warding off the notion of the anthology à la Ward, Pound insists on the connectedness of the poems to one another, but also to the mind, the state, the universe beyond. To serve and to contain the projections of these respective entities, poetry manifests at levels small and large, from lyric to epic. And the bridging genre he calls, with good reason, ode.

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[369] *Odes: Appraisal*, 82.

[370] This system is based on Legge's but not identical to it. In particular, Pound tends to remove the fourth-level headings, yielding stanzas uninterrupted by numerical title.

Pound's refusal to individuate the odes relates to his reconfiguration of poetry's relationship to the individual, the concern broached but unresolved by *Mauberley*. The epic thrust of Book III (the "Greater Odes") is briskly cut according to a more basic cognitive unit, as we proceed odically/episodically through its vast historical purview (six centuries): "Unlike the Western epic, [Book III] does not celebrate the warrior-hero nor dwell upon his deeds. In other words, its interest is in revelation, not plot, in the supremacy of heaven, not in human glory."[371] Yet those revelations are objectively narrated – "Then God to Wen" (III.i.vii.7) – and so epic and ode mutually act upon one another. Pound's odes work not simply to reroute perception of the world through the subjectivity of Romantic odists, but to anneal that subjectivity in the crucible of history. "They have cleared the thorn from this place" (II.6.v.1); no ineffectual angels will fall or bleed here. Shelley's odic hope worked through an "uncreating;" Pound's odic hope is based in creation – or rather accretion, given his confession that novelty must be forged, that new must be made.

In his book *Ode Consciousness*, Robert Eisenhauer clarifies Kenner's remark about "no comparable reservoir":

> Because he was not interested in the history of ode consciousness, but in the practical application of Confucian wisdom to the chaos of the first half of the 20th century, this reservoir was not of primary interest to Pound. Making English pay attention to its history and castigating the *mores* of the English-speaking world was. To believe with Pound that the *Shih Jing*, as he "did it," could change the

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[371] Dembo, *Odes: Appraisal*, 92.

cultural habitus of the English-speaking world is to have a high Romantic regard
for the capacity of linguistic choices to affect consciousness and/or legislate.[372]

This account has Pound displaying, counterintuitively, a high Augustan regard for a place
for poetry and poetry in its place. This is an estimation with which Dembo would agree –

> As the final articulation of a rectified society that, through the person of the king,
> has bound itself to the past, the genre [the "sacrificial odes" or odes of the temple]
> is itself a kind of logos or "verbal correlative" of a supreme moral condition of the
> mind and therefore an instrument par excellence for communication with heaven.
> Through prayers and "reports," the society at once announces and demonstrates
> its salvation.[373]

– which is precisely why we should expose the valuations underlying this "correlative."
While Pound is concerned with what connections exist between natural, psychological,
moral, aesthetic, social, and political orders, his more fundamental belief is that none of
these connections proves necessary. Just as content is not in lockstep with its form, poetry
is not in lockstep with its culture, thus Pound's rather precise mislabeling of his genres.
The "Elegantiae" are stridently inelegant. The Smaller Odes operate similarly to our
Greater Romantic Lyric.[374] If he'd truly wanted to deliver the "correlative" of the "Folk
Songs" for an English-speaking audience – to evoke their sophisticated, subversive
simplicity – Pound had only to name them "Lyrical Ballads." Fang got halfway there
with his pronouncement that the odes were "essentially ballads,"[375] but Pound's point is

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[372] *Ode Consciousness*, 214n.

[373] *Odes: Appraisal*, 98–99.

[374] Had Abrams coined his phrase earlier, perhaps Pound would have made a point of not using it.

[375] "Introduction," xiii.

that the odes aren't essentially anything – or rather (to give this a *Daoist* rendering), their essence is inessential.

3.3.2   Translation: An Ode by Any Other Name

Pound expresses this paradox through the anthology's formal conceit, and also through its conceit as a translation. Though he may have fancied himself in a direct line to Confucius, Pound more often acknowledged being in a long line of translators:

> [T]he English cribs give me NOTHING, or else a mere annoyance. Beyond the dead English something extends, per forza, extends or Kung [Confucius] wd. not have told his own son to read the old poems.[376]

The meaning "extends" in spite of the dead language in which it is wrapped, and even before he attempted his own D.O.A. translation of the Dao, Pound understood the decision all translators make between the spirit and the letter of the original. Pound was well acquainted with the earlier major translations and their apologetics, and with how each translator of the Confucian odes fashioned and dealt with this tension. James Legge distinguished between "prose translation" and "faithful metrical version,"[377] and indeed delivered both in entirely separate volumes (1871 and 1876, respectively). Clement Allen in 1891 pled that his "utmost license … is not necessarily inaccuracy," as he noted the difficulty of rendering into English anything in the odes' original form (a four-word line,

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[376] *Guide to Kulchur*, 144.

[377] *The Chinese Classics*, 35.

a four-line stanza).[378] The elegance with which this form was invested in Chinese turns into a "harsh and barbarous" exercise in English. "It would take a "*tour de force* requiring the skill of Mr. Swinburne to infuse anything like music into it" (79). In 1937, Arthur Waley rendered a free-verse translation, not to insist that free verse could inherently lay claim to musicality, but rather the opposite:

> The [original Chinese] text sang, just as the lines of Homer somehow manage to sing despite the barbarous ignorance with which we recite them … [T]he text has been continually before me, the jumble of problems linguistic, botanic, zoological, historical, and geographical which the translator of such a work must face, has never robbed the *Songs* of their freshness; and I trust that some part of my delight in them, despite the deadening lack of rhyme and formal metric, has found its way to the reader. (83)

Two translators from the 1950s (the decade in which Pound published his translation) took decidedly opposite ends of the spectrum. Karlgren says his translation is "as literal as possible … not intended to have any literary merits" (84), while Wong Man's goal is "to reproduce the image of the original in form, meter, rhyme, couplet-symmetry, and order of words, even to the use of monosyllabic words and a narrow vocabulary" (84) – so that the translation visually resembles the original.[379]

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[378] John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 79. All subsequent quotes by translators in this paragraph are taken from this anthology.

[379] A rather dubious path to literary merit, as Pound implies in his own visual rendering of Ode 274 (IV.1.i.ix):

Great	hand	King	Wu
vied	not,	made	heat. [etc.]

Pound, too, debunks the accuracy of his – and all – translation: "My translation probably wrong, and others' no better."[380] It is a forced error, though, and a fool's errand, acknowledgment of which is also a tradition for translators of the Confucian Odes. Sir John Davis proclaimed in 1829 that "a verbal translation from Chinese must of necessity degenerate into a horrible jargon," quoting for back-up his eighteenth-century French predecessor Jean-Pierre Abel Rémusat: "The Chinese poetic language is truly untranslatable. One could perhaps add that it is often unintelligible."[381] This last comment carries with it the additional sense that there is something wrong with Chinese itself – a sense that persists to this day, as the strangeness of ancient "oriental" wisdom is conveyed via grammatical error – "Confucius say…" – though surely Confucius' wisdom extended to an understanding of subject-verb agreement. Pound has his fun with this too: "Not study the odes; won't be able to use words."[382] At other times, he brandishes terms that today would be termed "politically incorrect" and in the 1950s also would have constituted a faux pas: the word "chink" appears at least three times (II.3.viii, III.1.v.6) and "slope" at least six. These terms never refer to people, but a full-blooded wordsmith like Pound could never plead ignorance.

He was, perhaps, pleading a kind of innocence – that is, insisting on an innocent usage of words despite their given histories. Substitute "odes" for words in this formulation (which Pound nearly does in the "odes; … words" quote above), and we can

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[380] *Confucian Odes*, 57n.

[381] *Anthology of Translations*, 79, 72.

[382] "The Analects," 273.

see that a similar insistence – about the liberating or enfranchising burden of the past – is

being made by him about his form. That there was something innately wrong with poetic

language is *Mauberley*'s premise:

> He strove to resuscitate the dead art
> Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"
> In the old sense. Wrong from the start—
> (ll. 1-4).

Maintenance of "the sublime" is odic dominion. The ode shoulders, "per forza," its dead

self (as *Mauberley*'s antistrophe does for its strophe). This obligation is simultaneously

structural and historical. Even the innocent "halo'd" – that is, an ode that dares to

articulate "the sublime" in a new sense – must regard its own history: "Hail, ode!" This

is Pound's early intuition in his unpublished "Ode" that calls out to the "Ode!", and by

the time of the Confucian Odes, it has become a full-scale poetic: "Not study odes; won't

be able to use odes," as it were. As a translation, the odes are allowed an overwriting, in

the sense not only of the superscription of an editorial annotation, but also an

overdoneness that enacts not the loss of translation but its gains. The point, then, of

Pound's translation conceit isn't to capture some ancient essence but to continue odic

versioning, to revel in the form's persistent renewability.

3.3.3 Silence: The Tranquil Abode

Mauberleyan odic "maintenance" gives way to odic sustenance as the Confucian

Odes conclude with the construction of Shang's temple:

> Shang's capital high in the air and quiet,
> ridge-pole to the four coigns,
> Splendour of fame to Shang,

> clear, washed clear in his sensitivity to prognostic
> as of wings and of water;
> his old age was contentment
> that he sustain our kind of posterity.
>
> They went up the King mountain,
> straight trunks of pine and cypress
> they cut and brought here,
> hewed pillars and rafters
> carved pine beam-horns ornate
> contrived pillars and sockets
> to the inner shrine, perfect
> that his ray come to point in this quiet.
> (Ode 305) (IV.3.v)

Recently "this quiet" has been understood by critics as a final word by Pound in his figuration of the East as a silence to be overwritten. R. John Williams, writing about the "scandal" of Pound's translations, argues that he "created a scandalous image of 'the' Chinese poetry that relied on a series of "blanks," such that [his] voice could be amplified, made loud, and strong, while the Chinese culture he described remained quiet, absent."[383]

If the silent, inscrutable East is overwritten, it is only by Pound's louder "quiet." Davie's second book about Pound begins with how Pound ended, i.e. in silence:

> He had nothing to say; or else, whatever was worth saying he had said already; or else again – and this came nearer to the painful truth – he no longer trusted himself to say anything, because too much of what he had said seemed to him now to be dangerously false.[384]

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[383] "Modernist Scandals: Ezra Pound's Translations of 'The' Chinese Poem," in *Orient and Orientalisms in American Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Sabine Sielke and Christian Kloeckner (Lang, 2009), 162.

[384] *Ezra Pound*, 2.

Hep-Cat clatterer Allen Ginsberg met Pound in this phase of his late life, tried affably to draw him out of his silence and to engage him in dialogue about the self-condemnation at its root. This was one of Pound's gnomic replies: "There was too little presentation and too much reference."[385] Between a similar Scylla and Charybdis, the "Ode of Presentation," as Fry calls it, ekes out its subsistence:

> The ode survives in our anthologies because it is the most challenging proving ground of presentation; the ode is the Letter that most boldly and openly tests the possibility of calling in the Spirit, … despite the poet's burden of knowing that where there is no distance there is no need for a calling, and where there is no discreteness of parts there is no need for a predication that "enunciates the whole."[386]

The Romantics had suspended disbelief to avoid post-enlightenment implications for odic claims. Is the Modernist's equivalent of the Ode of Presentation to shutter himself in silence and not call out at all?

Pound's comment – "too much reference" – intimates that in his work knowledge and intellect took over rather than partook of the sublime and transcendent. Though the Odes' ending in "this quiet" is self-referential, it is delicately so. It is not the comPounded din of *The Cantos* through which Pound *proved* himself through too much reference, but a sacred space for Pound to prove *himself*. David Hawkes remarks of the Confucian Odes: "The Pound – hauntingly beautiful, clownishly funny, or just tomfool-

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[385] "Pound's Influence," 8.

[386] *Poet's Calling*, 3. The internal quotation is Coleridge, from *The Statesman's Manual*.

silly – is good Pound."[387]   Thus the "point" is where two lines or lineages come to meet:

East and West to be sure, but also old Pound and new Pound. The "dim splendour" of

that early transmuted ode, "Portrait: From 'La Mère Inconnue,'" has here become a

"Splendour … clear," and this early instinct for a "quiet come to the full" (though largely

unheeded in Pound's other works) is given full space in this final and thoroughly muted

ode. As he quietly connects to Legge's prose translation that ends in "this tranquil

abode,"[388] Pound alludes to his own career that began ab-odally and that avoided the ode

at all costs. But in circumnavigating the literary globe, he has come full circle ("The

Pound … is good Pound"), and in this journey the ode is the unsung hero. This ode

speaks to Pound's idea about all odes, that the end is the beginning. The ode's

transparency – the zero-dimensional "point" in which it concludes – does not signal its

absolute disappearance into literary history. The ode's "ornate contrivances" will

inevitably appear again, its prosodic pluralism will make a stand against its counterpart in

the literary-historical cycle – i.e., the putative purity of prosodic essentialism – and it's

only a matter of time until *that* "clear" is, in turn, "washed clear."

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[387] Quoted in *Anthology of Translations*, 86.

[388] *The Chinese Classics*, 646.

CONCLUSION: THE ODE'S LAST STAND

After Pound, the ode must perforce reduce its swelling; an ode study in his wake
might tread lightly. In Auden, the ode seems particularly convalescent, as he leaves
enough odes-in-name (two or so per decade) to receive modest notice. But there is more
here, odically speaking, than meets the eye. By way of concluding this dissertation – and
to offer up some guiding principles by which other, future studies of the ode might
recognize the genre in its persistent desistance – I present a brief case study of Auden's
odic career. It begins in *The Orators* (1931), a long three-part poem in prose and verse,
the third book of which comprises "Five Odes." One critic notes that "so far, no one has
found the pattern in the carpet that shows how [all the parts] fit together."[389] This
Jamesian allusion should remind us of Pound's generic challenge about *Mauberley*, that it
was "an attempt to condense the James novel."[390] More successful at this attempt than
Mauberley is Auden's Airman, who emerges in Book II of *The Orators* as "an active and
even aggressive arranger of his subjective experience" (249). Both the Airman and the
Aesthete are technicians, but the Airman's organizational skills are more useful to the
war effort:

> Pulses and reflexes, normal.
> Barometric reading, 30.6.
> Mean temperature, 34° F.,

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[389] John R. Boly, "W. H. Auden's The Orators: Portraits of the Artist in the Thirties," *Twentieth Century Literature* 27, no. 3 (1981): 247.

[390] *Letters*, 180.

> Fair. Some cumulus cloud at 10,000 feet.
> Wind easterly and moderate.
> Hands in perfect order.[391]

This is the Airman's last journal entry before a bombing run that presumably hospitalizes

him, at which point Book II ends. Then the odes take over:

> Watching in three planes from a room overlooking the courtyard
> That year decaying,
> Stub-end of year that smoulders to ash of winter,
> The last day dropping;
> Lo, a dream met me in middle night, I saw in a vision
> Life pass as a gull, as a spy, as a dog-hated dustman:
> Heard a voice saying – "savers, payers, payees, all of you,
> Read of your losses."
> ("Ode I," ll. 1-8)

The Airman is grounded, "Lo." "Watching in" rather than from within the planes, his

appropriate vantage point is the ode, whence he commences a Shelleyan quest of being

"One with power":

> Neither in the bed nor on the *arête* was there shown me
> One with power.
> ("Ode I," ll. 55-56)

But from neither (10,000 feet above) the Romantic ridge ("*arête*") nor the morphine-

induced phantasms (l. 12) in his hospital bed is the soldier granted divine perspective.

The odes avenge themselves on the Airman for his scheme of putting "perfect

order" to a world at chaos (an ironic goal for a bombardier anyhow). Though highly

formed, the odes are not perfectly ordered; they are not presented *as* a scheme, as were

the diagrams and graphs of the Airman's journal. This brings us to the first point of the

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[391] *The Orators: An English Study* (New York: Random House, 1967), 60. Quotations from the "Odes" are
also from this edition.

Auden case study: as with Pound, Tennyson, and Shelley, it is the ensemble of odes that most effectively serves as a literary manifesto against real-world manifestoing, as the ode writer seeks a way, or multiple ways, into the world rather than beyond it. In his sequence, Auden has each ode (except the last) perform its irregularity differently, in either stanzaic or strophic formats. The stanzas of "Ode I" maintain the Airman's dream-state and outrun his disillusionment. Their sprawl, an effect of their irregular syllabics, is disarming until the "pistol cocked" of "Ode IV," with its different take on a similar metric:

> Though aware of our rank and alert to obey orders,
> Watching with binoculars the movement of the grass for an ambush,
> The pistol cocked, the code-word committed to memory,
>   The youngest drummer
> Knows all the peace-time stories like the oldest soldier,
>   Though frontier-conscious.
> (ll. 1-6)

"[O]rder" becomes "orders": the irregularity that achieves regularity through brute reiteration becomes a kind of zealotry. By this point in the sequence, the ode comes through in a collective voice, having found its proper, celebratory, nationalistic office in the previous ode, which concludes:

> A birthday, a birth
> On English earth
> Restores, restore will, has restored
> To England's story
> The directed calm, the actual glory.
> ("Ode III")

But in "Ode IV" there is dissent among the chorus, and despite the memorized "code-word," the soldiers' doubts seep through party lines, no one taking at face value the ode's word, later described as "bravery/ In inverted commas" (l. 83-84).

"But careful; back to our lines; it is unsafe there" (l. 85) – "there" being the doubt

with which this ode commences and to which it nearly apostrophizes, in "Though"

instead of "Oh." The Odes are "satirical warnings against naïve political allegiances,"[392]

and the same can be said for poetic allegiances, as Auden deftly converts the ode's

traditional stand-taking heft into a heaving queasiness about side-taking. Tellingly,

Auden changed the title of "Ode IV" to "Which Side Am I Supposed To Be On?" and

later changed it back to "Ode" again.[393] This leads us to the second point in this Auden

exemplum: the doubt that prevents the ode is the same that drives it. Fry observes that

"the ode from its first appearance [is] a vehicle of ontological and vocational doubt."[394]

To this we may add "... and to the last." For, despite any given ode writer's anxieties

about taxonomy and praxis, the ode remains unextinguished, despite its tendency

generically to cultivate the more profound sense of indeterminacy or inscrutability of

occasion,[395] of which such misgivings are symptoms.

In odic doubt, then, there lives poetic hope. The final "Ode" of *The Orators*

implacably accepts defeat –

> Not, Father, further do prolong
>   Our necessary defeat;
> Spare us the numbing zero-hour,
>   The desert-long retreat.

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[392]Boly, "W. H. Auden's The Orators: Portraits of the Artist in the Thirties," 258.

[393] Jump, *The Ode*, 57.

[394] *Poet's Calling*, 1–2.

[395] Note, for example, the triple tense in "Ode III" of "Restores, restore will, has restored."

> Against your direct light, displayed,
>   Regardant, absolute,
> In person stubborn and oblique
>   We set our maddened foot.
> ....
> Be not another than our hope;
>   Expect we routed shall
> Upon your peace; with ray disarm,
>   Illumine, and not kill.
> ("Ode V," ll. 1-8, 21-24)

– while still achieving the Shelleyan surrender to hope. "Be not another than our hope."

The ode cannot divest itself of this hope; rather, it is reinvested into that "maddened foot"

– like Pound's ire or Tennyson's Maudness – even though it does not and cannot make its

mark:

> mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
> Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its saying where executives
> Would never want to tamper; it flows south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.
> (ll. 32-41)

This excerpt is from the unmarked "[Ode] In Memory of W. B. Yeats" of 1939. But by

now we must recognize that poem's mostly irregular, three-movement structure, as well

as its desire to scatter a poet's words among mankind: "Now he is scattered among a

hundred cities" (l. 18).

As the ode to Yeats ho-hums its apostrophe – "O all the instruments agree/ The

day of his death was a dark cold day" (ll. 5-6, 30-31) – its madness (along with that of the

other odes of the 1930s) has begun to give way to the dispassionate odes of later decades.

These are not cause to abandon all odic hope; rather, the odes are more fully enabled

from within – because they are more rationally probed by – the Audenic diagnostic

stance. In his later odes, Auden often addresses – or simply is one of – Tennyson's

Lucretian gods. "Ode to Gaea" (1954) explores through its odic overreach what it means

to have divine perspective:

> Tempting to mortals is the fancy of half-concerned
> Gods in the sky
> (ll. 49-50)

Yet, even as man via jet engine attains godly heights in "this new culture of the air" (l. 1),

the divine perspective does not take, and this ultimately reserves and defends a place for

human wonder:

> we may well
> shake a weak fist one day at this vision, but the spell
> of high places will haunt us
> long after our jaunt has declined,
>
> as soon it must, to the hard ground.
> (ll. 53-57)

The ode allows for a grounded (though not crash-landed) passion, touchdown on

Wordsworthian terra firma, thoughts too deep for tears. This is so even if the meanest

flowers or poesies are not as odorous or odic as they once were:

> [Our] greatest comfort is music
> Which can be made anywhere, is invisible,
> And does not smell.
> (ll. 81-83)

This is "In Praise of Limestone" (1948), a decidedly visible poem, the three-part formal

monolith of which scarpingly attests that the ode does not merely "survive[]/ In the valley

of its saying." Rather, Auden admits of an interchange with earth's geological features

that is unremitting but also lasting:

> The poet,
> Admired for his earnest habit of calling
> The sun the sun, his mind Puzzle, is made uneasy
> By these solid statues which so obviously doubt
> His antimythological myth
> (ll. 69-73)

The mutual erosions of a "doubt[ed] ... antimythological myth" do not cancel one another out. "[R]ock creates the only truly human landscape," Auden says from a footnote. And thus we are left with an uneroded ode.

"In Praise of Limestone," though decidedly visible, is generically see-through. "Praise" of course pegs its tenor, but the poem suggests that there is still cause for the specific concern that had concluded the earlier poem to "Yeats":

> Teach the free man how to praise.
> (l. 77)

"To praise" is the essential odic action, but the "free man" is free to do it from within a variety of forms. The question of "how" throws into relief not only a deep field of poetic precedents but also the virtually infinite possibilities, at this point in literary history, of free form. Thus we arrive at the third and final point of this Auden coda: the ode humbly and immortally disappears not *from* but *into* the anthologies. "Ode IV" originally appeared in its own odic company, which was in turn part of the larger verse/prose omnibus of *The Orators*. "Ode," as it is now called in most anthologies, is now presented as is; its clever formal relativism is still legible but not as intriguing.

The largest disappearing act is "The Shield of Achilles," a poem that proceeds by pitting two ideologically overburdened forms (ballad and rhyme-royal stanzas) against each other. However, a still more burdened and ancient form presides at the highest level

of the poem – "The Shield" has guarded its form a little too well – as no anthological

appearance it has ever made captures the unmistakably triadic structure that is evident in

its 1955 printing.[396] Is it a Pindaric ode? If not, we retire our overmindfulness to the ode

at our own risk. For its formal camouflage signals more than its mere survival, but rather

the poetic evolutionary mechanism by which this most over-conspicuous of all forms has

been turned into something unrecognizable – that is to say, virtually new.

"The Shield of Achilles" is not Auden's last ode. But, nearly contemporaneous to

Pound's Confucian Odes, which were themselves openly "Hid!", it does provide a fitting

bookend to a study that began with the odic "twi-/Lights" of Milton and Jonson. Theirs

was a stellar double entry into English letters. Pound and Auden, I hope, do not represent

the ode's twilit double exit therefrom, but rather the next of succeeding re-entries into

poetic history by this enchanting, vexing, and enduring genre.

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[396] See Figure 1, Appendix. *The Shield of Achilles.* (New York: Random House, 1955).

APPENDIX

The Shield of Achilles

She looked over his shoulder
    For vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities,
    And ships upon untamed seas,
But there on the shining metal
    His hands had put instead
An artificial wilderness
And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
    No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
    Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude.
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face
    Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
    No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
    Column by column in a cloud of dust
They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

35

She looked over his shoulder
    For ritual pieties,
White flower-garlanded heifers,
    Libation and sacrifice,
But there on the shining metal
    Where the altar should have been,
She saw by his flickering forge-light
    Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
    Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated, for the day was hot:
    A crowd of ordinary decent folk
    Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all
    That carries weight and always weighs the same,
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
    And could not hope for help and no help came:
    What their foes liked to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.

36

She looked over his shoulder
    For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
    Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
    But there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing-floor
    But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
    Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
    That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
    Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept
Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,
    Hephaestos, hobbled away;
Thetis of the shining breasts
    Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
    To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
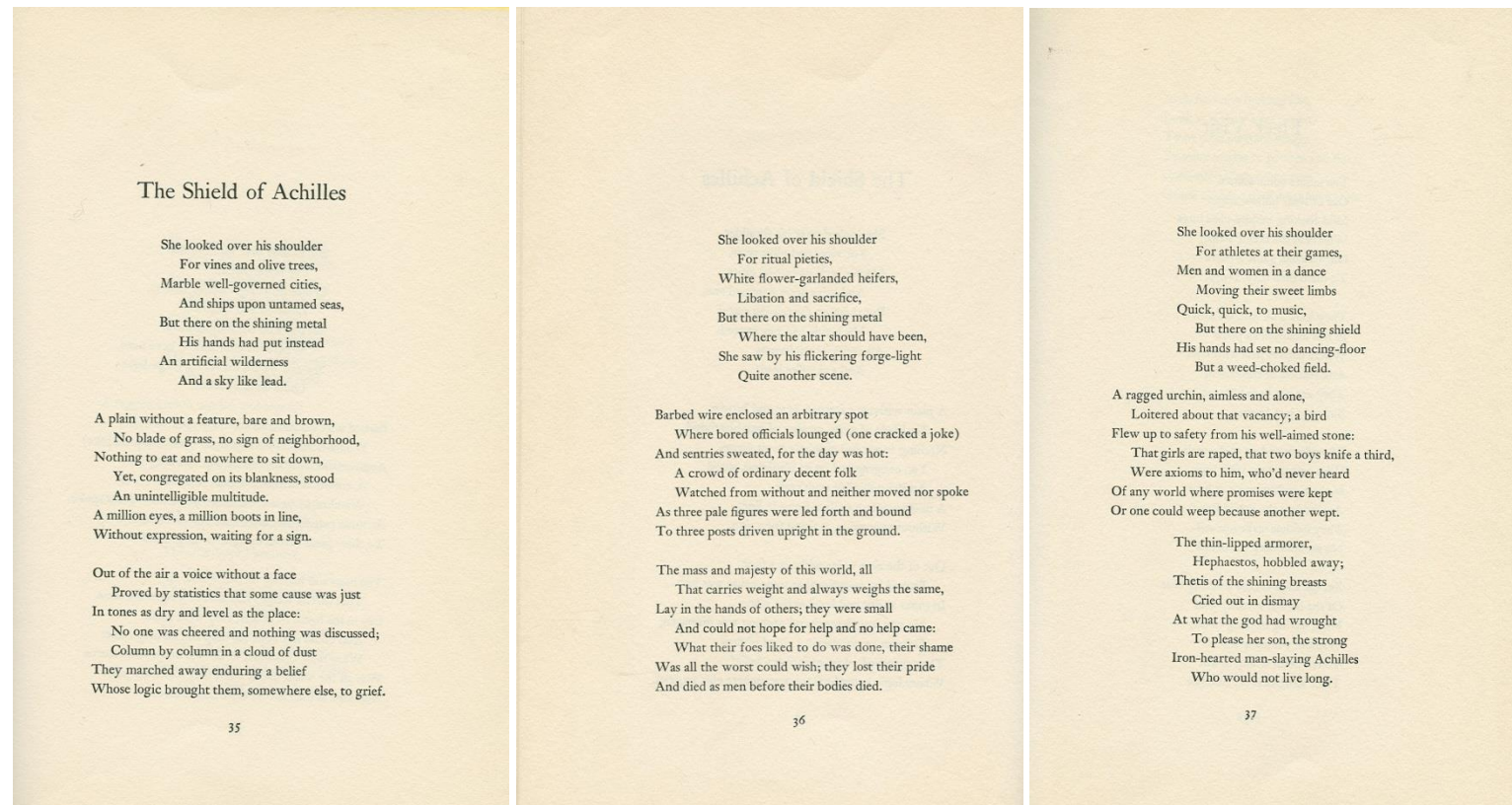   Who would not live long.

37

Figure 1. Auden's "The Shield of Achilles."

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