

Scanning for Silence:
Psychoanalytic Listening from Keats to Freud

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Abstract

“Scanning for Silence” is, first and foremost, a study of rhythm in the postromantic Anglo-German canon. More specifically, I’ve tried to show how signal works of nineteenth-century verse and prose deploy the diagnostic metrics then in currency—supplied by the contemporary vanguard of physicians and psychologists—to declare the deeper, inarticulable meanings that all writers, authors and clinicians alike, were attempting to convey within this period.

Ultimately, the project looks toward a certain methodological transition in Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), a slight shifting of attention from the verbal contents to the interruptive rhythms of his patients’ oral reports. Be it a slip of the tongue, or a stutter, a gestural spasm or a recurring phrasal trope—or in the more advanced conception of his 1916 *Papers on Technique*, the subliminal “oscillations” exchanged between the patient and the psychoanalyst—rhythm takes the stress of the unspoken, and very possibly unconscious, truths which language does not fully comprehend in Freud’s analyses. Psychoanalysis thus reinstates a style of reading which goes back to the very beginnings of Freud’s literary century. Keats set the tone with his famous “proofs upon the pulses”; and Wordsworth before him, laying down the universal “laws” of meter against the “arbitrar[iness]” of language. Chiefly the dissertation builds on three major authors at midcentury, who, writing on the very precipice of language’s collapse, help to convey the extra pressures that get routed into rhythm in the decades leading up to Freud. Chapter One investigates the prose-poetic patterns that consistently emerge, in Thomas Carlyle’s history of *The French Revolution* (1837), just where the author wants to get a gauge on the unscripted (“inarticulate” and “unconscious”) forces at the heart of that event. Chapter Two looks at an epistemic crisis on a smaller scale in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850); and discovers the finely-

calibrated verbal and phonetic recurrences whereby Tennyson registers, and at the same time tries to make his literal “returns,” upon the tragic loss of Arthur Hallam. Chapter Three revisits the idea of traumatic repetition in the life and works of Charles Dickens: particularly, the “flashback” rhythms he performed throughout his railway writing in the 1850s, leading up to his own near-fatal accident at Staplehurst in 1865.

Finally this project verifies, albeit to qualify, what trauma theorists have discerned across the board in Romantic and Victorian writing. Rhythm spells a mental crisis: the neurological replay *ad infinitum* of some event which Freud would say had bypassed comprehension in the first place. What trauma theory tends to undervalue is the reconstructive, ultimately therapeutic work that is the other half of postromantic rhythm: a potential that reveals itself more fully when the above three authors are read alongside their contemporaries in clinical physiology (cardiologists vis-à-vis Carlyle, neurologists when we come to Tennyson) and the new “associationist” psychology which Dickens captures at a Victorian midpoint between Wordsworth and Freud. Sounding the unconscious through the well-established patterns of the pulse, the brain, and the autonomic nervous system, ultimately these writers—in every reach of postromantic science and letters—provide a glimpse into the longer history of what the dissertation styles as the “hermeneutics of rhythm.”

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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE LANGUAGE

Romantic prosody, Tractarian liturgy, Freudian psychoanalysis

Keats's famous proof-upon-the-pulses took an interesting turn in the writings of his friend and fellow critic, Leigh Hunt (1820). "If a passage in *King Lear* brings the tears into our eyes, it is real as the touch of a sorrowful hand. If the flow of a song of Anacreon's intoxicates us, it is as true to a pulse within us as the wine he drank" (71-2). The shift from Keats to Hunt is minute, but crucial; and it only registers if we recall that for Keats, "proved upon our pulses" meant proven by our "larger experience" in the world. The Keatsian pulse is extrinsic—referential, empirical—where Hunt's is intrinsic to the point of tautology. "Whatever is, is," writes Hunt. "Whatever touches us, whatever moves us, does touch and does move us" (67).

We might think forth to Tennyson's "Ulysses" in 1842 ("that which we are, we are, — / One equal temper of heroic hearts": 67-8); or backward, following Hunt's Shakespeare-lead ("To be or not to be..."). Either way you translate, it is the very essence of Hunt's tautology (tautology in general) that it *does* translate so neatly into verse. As reason folds into refrain, as predicate verbs rather press than properly *predicate* the beat of the poem (the force which "*does* touch and *does* move us"), Hunt shows us a logic that is frankly more rhythmic than semantic. His "truth" is proving its palpable, prosodic pulses—even though little, arguably nothing, has been proved *upon* those same pulses. Just where Keats extended an epistemological aid, Hunt

grabbed for an epistemic default: the pulse is a substitute, not a mere sponsor, for greater knowledge.

It turns out Hunt's reading was prescient. Just a casual glance through the annals of nineteenth-century verse—the early- and midcentury bestsellers (Keble's *Christian Year* in 1827, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* in 1850, and Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* in 1856), or the later experiments (such as Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (1876) or Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* in 1882)—should suffice to demonstrate how creatively, and prolifically, the Victorians elided knowledge into rhythm. Of course the rhythms they chose were as diverse as the kinds of knowing they'd elected to leave out. George Eliot, for instance, gives us the strain of an unfathomed psyche ("And measured pulse, with cadences that sob, / Exult and cry, and search the inmost deep / Where the dark sources of new passion sleep").¹ Barrett Browning conveys the stress of the un-mastered prayer ("[I] prayed, since I was foolish in desire / ... / That He would stop his ears to what I said, / And only listen to the run and beat / Of this poor, passionate, helpless blood").² Hopkins throbs out a pious oblivion ("pást áll / Grásp Gód")³; Swinburne's is more an *erotic* oblivion ("wherein the pulse of waves / Throbs through perpetual darkness to and fro").⁴ Meanwhile, literary Tractarianism—long before these latter-century "dark" days of the Catholic Hopkins and the Pagan-leaning Swinburne—had been honing its own methods of mental occlusion. "Reticence" was the official term in use; the doctrinal guard against the heresies of trying to know too much, borne out in versifying-action by none other than John Keble of the aforementioned *Christian Year*. "Such trembling joy the soul o'erawes /

¹ George Eliot, "The Legend of Jubal" (1870): 415-7.

² VII.1266-71.

³ XXXII.254-5.

⁴ VIII.204-5.

As nearer to Thy shrine she draws: — / And now before the choir we pause” (“Trinity Sunday” 19-21).

“Pausing” mid-stride, as it were—keeping his silence for the measure of an iamb—Keble treads lightly on the tacit but established understanding that his meter will help us to fill in the blanks. As he later explained in one literary review (1838),

Poetry is the indirect expression in words, most appropriately in metrical words, of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence whereof is somehow repressed. (Reviews 6; Keble’s italics)

This is a direct nod to the expressivist theory of poetic meter, as conveyed in Wordsworth’s 1802 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* and then elaborated by Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). One simply cannot drop in references to “repressed” or “overpowering emotion,” without invoking Wordsworth’s famous dictum that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (393). Meter is the pulse of those same feelings, and—by equal rights, as Keble reminds us—it is their monitor as well, the thing which captures and tempers them back into verse with all the authority of a common understanding. Wordsworth had argued this point out at length:

Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for...metre is regular and uniform, and not like...poetic diction, arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices ...In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion, whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain [...] (404-5)

Meter emerges from this reckoning as a new and *disciplined* mode of expression. This is no mere personal pulse; but it is the sort of pulse that works like proof, bending the language to a deeper and more stable code of reference. The appeal of this theory, especially to one such as Keble, should be obvious. A poet turned to meter (as Keble turned to God) in the spirit of the greater truth; what Coleridge described as that “high spiritual instinct...impelling us to seek unity by *harmonious adjustment*, and thus establishing the principle that all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts” (211; my italics).

Adjustment is the keyword, for our purposes; and from there, the “parts” and “wholes” should settle down into their circumspectly cosmic, postromantic and (I will suggest this now) more broadly post-Renaissance epistemic ambit. If we can allow that meter must at some point have had to prove itself (literally) upon the pulses, then I might add to this conversation the early seventeenth-century cardiologist William Harvey, whose path-breaking *De Motu Cordis* (1628) effectively launched in scientific and literary history the self-adjusting, mutual correction of systole and diastole that keeps the balance on the circulation of the blood and—by a natural extension which the poets will be reaching for, well into Coleridge’s century—among the mind, body, and soul. Harvey’s treatise comes up more than once in the chapters ahead, as Coleridge and his major Victorian successors (Carlyle in Chapter 1, Tennyson in Chapter 2) reach for the rhythms of the heart in their ongoing efforts to sustain the cosmic harmonies, and the bodied immanence, that are increasingly imperiled in an age of scientific doubt. God’s proof was on the pulses—notwithstanding the seismic epistemic shocks of Lyellean geology and Darwinian evolution, the nerve-fraying damages of war and revolution, and never least (what I’ve just put down implicitly) the growing possibility that the human psyche was, indeed, none other than an oscillating mass of nerves.

“I think we are not wholly brain,” says Tennyson (and in less optimistic moments finds himself, after all, a mere “weight of nerves without a mind”: *IM CXX.2XII.7*). That’s another argument to be revisited, throughout this dissertation, on the overlapping prosodic and physiological grounds upon which this century negotiates the contending claims of post-Cartesian neuroscience and, always in exquisite contiguity to this, post-Harveyan cardiology. With an ear to Tennyson’s perfectly tempered iambic measures—the poetic regulation of “the **unquiet heart and brain**” in *In Memoriam V*, for instance, the slack-stress metrical correlative to Harvey’s systole-diastole, and a metric which I hope to demonstrate is not coincidentally predominant in Western literary tradition—we could say that meter, given the option of the modern brain, is still selecting for the rhythms of the heart.

That’s part and parcel of a greater point that needs to be declared up front—getting back to the prosodic theorists who got this conversation started—inasmuch as Coleridge’s system of “adjustments” is necessarily more complex than he, or Wordsworth, or their major scion in liturgical tradition, Keble, wants to imagine in the bright heyday of literary Romanticism. For these writers—the Romantics of both generations, even Keats when it comes down to his verse praxis—meter was intuitive, self-evident, intrinsically correct and corrective. Accordingly this epistemic foothold had to give way, if only by inches, as the Victorians (Carlyle, Tennyson, and Dickens; even Coleridge himself, in later years) showed up rhythm’s dark side: the mechanical demon of the Industrial Revolution, the clockwork guillotine of the French Revolution, the galvanic chatter of a press-fed public that leverages nearly *every* revolution, riot, and strike that century heard no end of. Dickens adds to this the newly voluble tick-tock of Railway time, the same technology that pushed out at record pace the telegraphic dailies and parliamentary minutes; the “hourly gratifi[cations]” (in Wordsworth’s phrase: 395) of a news-hungry populace;

and the hourly reminders of time's greater, epochal relentlessness. Lyell's geological dream joins up with Darwin's evolutionary nightmare, "the shocks of chance— / The blows of death," as Tennyson would have it (XCV.42-3), feeling heavily in his friend's early death the overwriting Malthusian tempo that was increasingly, and by midcentury almost irreversibly, entrenched in social consciousness.

Then there is a growing hunch that rhythm signals psychological regression in the face of these same forces. We will see in Dickens (Chapter 3 of this dissertation) how real-time historical unfolding ultimately doubles back into the flashback rhythms that are one half mental chaos, one half coping stratagem. Freud, of course, is somewhere in the room. And in this age of proto-Freudian symptomology (increasingly, as we move among three authors alongside the fast-unfolding clinical vanguard of cardiology, neurology and early psychoanalysis) we will find rhythm reaching down, with superadded urgency, into the very psychic depths that the Romantics had supposed to be increasingly at risk of being lost on untrained ears. "If when the oak stands [to borrow Carlyle's favorite analogy] you know that its heart is sound, it is not so with the man; how much less with the Society, with the Nation of men!" (*FR* I.30). *Reading* in this age is nothing other than the art of diagnosis; and diagnostic auscultation is, after all, the embodiment of prosody done right. If rhythm's muscle memory needs to be un-kinked into proper calendrical time—thinking forth especially to Dickens's many proto-Freudian hysterics, counting and gesturing continually back to some unsolved traumatic riddle—still rhythm's symptomology is the necessary signal that the times have gone traumatically off-kilter. (Or at least, most writers heartily agreed, that time was happening too fast.) That is one reason Carlyle and Dickens and their romantic predecessors, in verse and no less in prose, were still deferring to the beat even as they saw how a beat could spin off into new and frightening velocities of

mechanism, urban and industrial and (not least) neuroscientific chaos. I believe this might also explain how these writers kept up their faith in the unconscious mind—how the Victorian Unconscious retained its medical and metrical authority across an age that was, all the while, trying to recover some stray vestiges of higher intelligence.

Coming back to our main point: unconsciousness had at very least (when this was most) the basic anchorage of rhythm. And thinking back specifically to Keble, we might say that the Victorians had devised upon the interstitial metrics of modern science, culture theory, psychology and poetics what might as well be styled a new liturgy: a secular counterpart to the Tractarian model of knowledge-by-gradual-measures. We will observe this liturgical influence, where we might have least expected it, throughout the scientific prose that was thundering down from the secular pulpits of mid-Victorian cardiology, neurology, biology, astronomy, and acoustical physics (the list goes on). And we shall see as well, in Chapter 1, how far that influence was channeling through Carlyle himself, neatly positioned at the Romantic/Victorian pre-two-cultures midway point between old-world liturgy and modern physiological psychology.

On the strength of that elision, I should like at this point to flesh out a broader prefatory history that, culminating in Freud, begins with the Romantics, Keble especially, who (it turns out) was willing enough to lower his pulses from the Heavens to the darker regions of psychology. In fact there is much in Romantic prosody that might best be described as a kind of proto-Freudian tremor, a nervous twitch, like some muffled excrescence of the primitive ego. “[E]very passion has its proper pulse,” as Coleridge observed—and he lists off the rhythms of “love, fear, rage or jealousy” (211). Wordsworth had talked of the “sexual appetite” (contiguous, he said, with the pleasures of metrical language: 407) and Keble joined the pop-psychological bandwagon when he theorized that verse had begun (like all “primitive” song) with “the desire to

relieve thoughts that could not be controlled” (*Lectures* I.65). And so it remained, in Keble’s estimation of the poem’s modern work: the manifestation of something untamed, some affective burden that had been “somehow repressed.”

One gets to understand why critics might hear more of neurosis than harmony in Keble’s poetics—and why “repression” takes on a distinctly Freudian spin that’s going to resonate through most of the literary criticism Freud defined in the twentieth century. Abrams has referred to Keble’s Christian-metric doctrine as a “radical, proto-Freudian theory, which conceives literature as disguised wish-fulfillment, serving the artist as a way back from incipient neurosis” (147). If extreme, the Freudian analogy is basically right. Keble dealt with the mysteries of the church as he dealt with the mysteries of the mind: in guarded, measured bursts of revelation that are effectively designed to keep his readers on the tenterhooks of something they’re not ready to know yet. (“Behind the veil, behind the veil,”⁵ promised Tennyson, in the most persuasively suspensive iambs anyone contrived within the decades after Keble’s *Christian Year*.) The poet must guard his real feelings, Keble said, just as the Fathers had guarded the secrets of the sacrament and “the key-words of the faith” (*Lectures* I.75). That comparison is not lost on Abrams, who finally concludes that “the poetic theories of Keble and Freud may be taken as one more evidence of the extent to which psychoanalysis is a secularized version of religious doctrine and ritual” (148).

I believe that, at the very least, we can say of these two authors who frame our long Victorian century that their rhythms attempt the same subtextual work. Freud takes over here from Keble, for the purposes of this dissertation; but I shall devote the remainder of its introduction to the subliminal/sublime poetics that critics like Abrams could without difficulty

⁵ *In Memoriam* LVI.25-8.

read back down to their Romantic/post-Renaissance roots. Look no further than Freud's premises: that certain "incompatible" thoughts get pressed out of language and down to a pulse, a "physical reminiscence" that cuts across the words, the syntax, and whatever putative meaning the conscious mind wants to have conveyed (II.122).

[W]e adopt the term "conversion" to signify the *transformation of psychical excitation into chronic somatic symptoms*... There are cases of hysteria in which the whole surplus of [mental] stimulation undergoes conversion, so that the *somatic symptoms of hysteria intrude into what appears to be an entirely normal consciousness*. (II.86; my italics)

The "intrusion" here is a physical stutter, what Freud described variously as the "spastic inhibition[s]," organic "oscillations" and other patterns of "persisting resistance" in his patients' reports (II.93,281,296). Rhythm is so far an index of repression (as Abrams himself seems to have heard it). More importantly, however—and even more in line with Freud's Romantic and Tractarian precursors—it was the promise of a latent rationale, the guarantor of some underlying phylogenetic and/or cosmic purpose. According to Kurt Eissler (eminent practitioner and theorist of the Freudian school):

[O]ne day biology may discover...that the totality of life is indeed regulated by rhythm, and that the sequences of biological phenomena that we can observe are variations of an all-embracing principle. (169-70)

The impulse contained its own proof,⁶ just as soon as we found out the laws of its actions. This is the scientific version of something the Romantics had already conjectured in the context of meter: the very pulse of the passions (the primal song, the sexual appetite) still registers “certain laws” and still answers to what Coleridge deemed the higher “spiritual instinct.” Freud believed more in “instinct” than in “spirit,” and he swapped out meter for biorhythms, but his premises were fundamentally the same. Indeed, it is a little-known fact of the psychoanalytic technique (and one downright suppressed by Freud’s early, rationalistically-minded biographers⁷) just how far his formative theoretical work was influenced by the *Naturphilosophie* of the German Romantics⁸: a broad intellectual bunch, with diverse roots in the sciences, medicine, metaphysics, anthropology and literature of the day, but commonly attentive to rhythm.⁹ They theorized on the periodicities of the natural world, the determinations (cosmic and terrestrial) these implied and—the poets must have helped them on this front—certain patterns these persistences have carved into the contours of our human language.

It cannot be wholly surprising that Freud was heir to a movement dominated by the likes of Goethe and translated by men such as Coleridge. His interest in rhythm was in no small part the interest of the proper Romantic (and Victorian) man of letters, well versed in the signifying motions of human expression. Lionel Trilling said it best when he observed that Freud “makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind” (52). Certainly he treated the mind in the

⁶ As Freud would explain in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci (1910), “[w]e see the expression of intense feelings, which have been repressed and become unconscious, converted into trivial, even senseless, forms of activity. [Thus] ... one would have to rate their intensity extremely low, were it not that *the compulsive nature of this trivial activity revealed the true force of the impulses involved*, which is rooted in the unconscious and would be disavowed by the conscious mind” (78; my italics).

⁷ Sulloway 144.

⁸ Thanks in large part to Wilhelm Fliess, a friend, colleague and intellectual confidant from about 1887-1892. For a concise but compendious overview of the Fliess years, including the Romantic intellectual context, see especially Sulloway 135-70. (Whyte also has covered the *Naturphilosophie*, with special attention to Freud’s literary precursors Goethe and Schelling: 124-9.)

⁹ Kant, Fichte, Goethe, Schelling, Novalis, Bachofen, Oken, and Carus were among the major figures of this movement.

manner of the poet—always keeping an ear out for its “syntactic laws” and assonantal fixations, its “succession[s] of sounds” and “pauses” (IV.277, V.530).

I believe, indeed, that the character of the *tic* itself, consisting as it did of a succession of sounds which were convulsively emitted and separated by pauses and which could be best likened to clackings, reveals traces of the process to which it owed its origin...

Hypnotic analysis, however, was able to demonstrate how much meaning lay concealed behind this apparent *tic*. (II.92-3)

Whether it’s a tic, a pause, a stutter, or some other gestural spasm, the bottom line is that rhythm *signifies*. It is to be read as a symptom—obscured, but ultimately reliable—as Freud further explains at the end of his *Studies on Hysteria*:

The problematical symptom re-appears, or appears with greater intensity, as soon as we reach the region of the pathogenic organization which contains the symptom’s aetiology, and thenceforward it accompanies the work with characteristic oscillations which are instructive to the physician. (II.296)

What’s “instructive” about these oscillations (the same thing that’s instructive about a verbal tic) is that they always return from the same point of reference. Indeed when Freud writes of appearance and reappearance, “oscillations” and “convulsions,” he builds on the tacit hypothesis—central to the Romantic *Naturphilosophie* and its literary outgrowths—that rhythm is intrinsically singular, “periodic” in the strict dictionary sense that it continues in the orbit of its

originary impulse.¹⁰ For instance, “[t]he patient’s spastic inhibition of speech, her peculiar stammer, was the residue of an *essentially similar* exciting cause” (II.93); and again “the *appearance of disconnectedness* and irrelevance which characterized the words emitted in this oracular fashion...followed up...*lead[s] quite straight to the pathogenic factor* we are looking for” (II.276; my italics).

Beneath the dance of “disconnectedness”—the shocks and spasms and verbal digressions—there is this singular persistence, this “thought” (to quote the neurologist Ezra Jennings, in Wilkie Collins’ 1868 novel *The Moonstone*) “which was underlying it connectedly all the time” (387). Collins is often cited for his proto-Freudian inklings, not least for proposing the fundamental integrity of what looks, at first glance, like a mishmash of “broken phrases” and delirious “wanderings” (374). For instance:

...Mr Franklin Blake...and agreeable...down a peg...medicine...
confesses...sleep at night...tell him...out of order...medicine... (386)

That’s from the amnesiac Dr. Candy, as transcribed by Dr. Jennings, with ellipses to show where the doctor must fill in the blanks. *Collins’s* emphasis comes down exactly there, methodologically speaking; *viz.*, on the ellipses which assume periodicity where contemporary physicians (well into the 1870’s) were likelier to hear division and chaos, “double consciousness” or “multiple personality,” the intrusions of alternate voices and selves.¹¹

¹⁰ For instance the lunar cycles (which Wilhelm Fliess, and several nineteenth-century theorists before him, had used to explain the periods of human gestation and development) capture this root sense of “periodicity.” See esp. Sulloway 153-4.

¹¹ “Memory loss” was not yet a recognized category in British brain science. Thus Jennings was up against the majority who ascribed to “double consciousness” the lapses and distortions we’d now call amnesia. For an excellent discussion of Collins’ amnesiac psychology *avant la lettre*, and its narrative manifestations (e.g. the gaps and ellipses we’ve begun to address in Dr. Jennings’s case history on Candy), see Dames 167-205.

Jennings hears *one* voice, as it rises and falls and wavers through a single recollection which he translates thus:

Mr Franklin Blake is clever and agreeable, but he wants taking down a peg when he talks of medicine. He confesses that he has been suffering from want of sleep at night. I tell him that his nerves are out of order, and that he ought to take medicine... (387)

As the patient's voice turns and returns through this anecdote, so too the patient's thoughts return to certain points within it. Jennings explains:

He [Mr. Candy] reiterated certain words and phrases a dozen times over, fifty times over, just as he attached more or less importance to the idea which they represented. The repetitions, in this sense, were of some assistance to me in putting together those fragments. (387)

His translation is the sum of those returns, of those particular phrases that circulate (I'm inclined to say "oscillate") through the patient's account, till the doctor thinks to find out their meaning.

To this extent, Jennings writes large Freud's premise that the crux of the message is in its rhythm—be that the narrative rhythm of recurring "words and phrases," or the physical beat of a spasm, or a stutter. Either way, rhythm is a mode of persistence; it comes *back*, as the "oscillation" properly does; and the assumption is that it comes back for a reason. According to Roland Barthes:

This oscillation (which reminds us of the movement generating sound) engenders for the psychoanalyst something like a resonance permitting him to "cock an ear"

toward the *essential*: the essential being not to miss (and to make the patient miss) [quoting now from S. Leclaire] “access to the *singular and sensitive insistence* of a major element of his unconscious.” (254; my italics)

We know the Romantics said roughly the same in the context of poetry. Rhythm was a way to the singular essence of things (“establishing the principle that all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts,” as we have already quoted from Coleridge on page 4¹²). Likewise meter bears the imprint—what Leclaire calls the “sensitive insistence”—of certain inexorable human conditions (the sexual passions, the taste for similitude, and those unwritten laws “to which the Poet and the Reader both willingly submit because they are certain,” according to Wordsworth), and of certain immortal assurances as well (thus did Keble entrust his prosodic feet to carry him forth to the Goal¹³).

What’s different in Freud is that the rhythm of the eternal (now the eternal *unconscious*) requires that we follow its subtext, or inter-text: the narrative that extends beneath and between these abbreviated verbal emergenc(i)es. “I only, as it were, see the peaks of the train of thought dipping down into the unconscious” (II.301). Downward he follows, like Jennings, in the train of an ellipsis, tracking “the emergence of isolated key-words which we had to work into sentences” (II.276). That’s the challenge packed into the Freudian oscillation, the singular rhythm which, *being* singular, enlists us at every pulsation and whispers through the gaps in between. Barthes’s “sensitive insistence” gets at exactly this feeling of indenture; indeed, as he

¹² He continues in the same vein: “the composition of a poem...consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same” (212). See also Wordsworth on “the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude” (407).

¹³ This hope comes through especially well in the prosodic puns of Keble’s “Fourth Sunday in Advent” (also from *The Christian Year*): “’Tis misty all, both sight and sound - /.../ ’Tis wandering on enchanted ground / With dizzy brow and *tottering feet*. / But patience! there may come a time / When these dull ears shall *scan aright* / Strains, that outring Earth’s drowsy chime, / As Heaven outshines the taper’s light” (17-24; my italics).

explains, the Analyst has been listening for beats on the fundamental (Barthes calls it “religious”) understanding that rhythm brings with it certain binding hermeneutic obligations.

The communication implied by this second [i.e. rhythmic] listening is religious: it *ligatures* the listening subject to the hidden world of the gods, who, as everyone knows, speak a language of which only a few enigmatic fragments reach men, though it is vital—cruelly enough—for them to understand this language. (249)

Remember that Freud himself talked of “fragments”¹⁴ and “oracular” effusions (II.276). If he writes with his tongue in his cheek, still he registers the imperative Barthes suggests here: truth speaks intermittently and therefore requires us to fill in the blanks.

This was the structural basis of the liturgy and the confessional (think back to the guarded, incremental expressiveness that Keble adduced from the rites of the sacrament); and it takes its secular form in psychoanalysis. To this extent Abrams is right to suspect a through-line from the Tractarians to Freud. He has only slightly overlooked the possibility that this line runs deeper than—I should say it underwrites—both of these men and the particular religious and/or psychic mysteries they sought to resolve. What Barthes sees in Freudian psychoanalysis is, finally, just the modern demonstration of an age-old awareness, older even than the Church, that denotative language had somehow missed out on the finer chords of knowing. Rhythm is, as it always has been, the way we cope with that dilemma. Freud may have been channeling the wisdom of the liturgy, or the poetics of the German Romantics. Or he may have picked up on

¹⁴ See esp. *An Infantile Neurosis* (1914): “I have...been obliged to put [this history] together from even smaller fragments than are usually at one’s disposal for purposes of synthesis. This task...finds a natural limit when it is a question of forcing a structure which is itself in many dimensions on to the two-dimensional descriptive plane. I must therefore content myself with bringing forward *fragmentary* portions, which the reader can then put together into a living whole” (XVII.72). Freud also observes (some pages later, regarding the incidental remarks often thrown out by his patients) that the Analyst “comes to recognize this despised *fragment* of a memory as the key to the weightiest secrets that the patient’s neurosis has veiled” (89; my italics).

the measured intuitions and stop-gap measures that the Victorians had lately perfected into verse and prose. Regardless, he found himself looking to rhythm for palpable proof of those things that language itself did not yet comprehend.

CHAPTER ONE

CARLYLE AND THE RHYTHMS OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS

That *Thiers*, these *Mémoires* of yours...you can hardly conceive with what a tumult of feelings, visions, half-visions, guesses and darkneses they wholly envelop me.

Carlyle, to J.S. Mill (24 Sep. 1833)

I

The things that language did not comprehend were likely to come from one of the two realms we've so far discussed—religion or psychology—and it will be worth a brief detour to explain just how nearly these had merged in the Victorian imagination. Notwithstanding the inevitable conflicts of disciplinary interest (much sharper in Freud's day, granted, than in Keble's) religion yet transferred remarkably well into nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of the unconscious. God was both “in us and around us,” according to Carlyle; and if God was within us then He had to be deeper than consciousness, down in “that domain of the Unconscious, by nature infinite and inexhaustible” (“Characteristics” 40, 42). Carlyle has approximately captured the zeitgeist. From the German Romantics and their British interpreters (Coleridge, followed by Carlyle), and continuing on through the high Victorian poets and novelists (Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Eliot and their ilk), the canon broadly demonstrates how far the Mystery was being withdrawn to the Mind. “*Reverence thyself*,” said Edward Young;

and “contract full intimacy with the stranger within thee,” for “*genius*, is that god within” (33, 53-4). Novalis strikes the same chord: “Inside us, or nowhere, are the realms of eternity.”¹⁵ Of course the fear, in this uneasily secular period, is that eternity might be “nowhere” indeed—that the cosmos might after all be no greater and no wiser than the isolated brain which perceives it. What made Freud so compelling for late-century readers (and for the moderns thereafter) was that he limned out a mind beyond conscious cognition. In the words of Lancelot Whyte: “Freud’s extraordinary influence on the English-speaking world is probably due [in part to] the fact that his doctrine, by making man fully aware (by inference) of his unconscious, offered the conscious person a chance of recovering—some day—a more natural relation to the universal” (178).

We have some sense from the Romantics of how thoroughly engrained was this yearning to connect with the universe. Still, the real crux of Whyte’s comment may lie in the parenthesis: Freud’s English-speaking audience were willing to reach it “by inference” alone. This will not be surprising when we consider that the canon had so lately put them through the motions (prosodic, syntactic, and grammatical) of indirect knowing.

“Boundless as is the domain of man, it is but a small fractional proportion of it that he rules with Consciousness and by Forethought” (“Characteristics” 3). That’s from Carlyle, front and center in this project of psychological inference. He was perplexed by the brain and its processes—dimly aware of his own inner genius, painfully alert to his cognitive limits and yet hopeful all the while that where cognition ended, there something like wisdom began.

¹⁵ As quoted and translated by Lancelot Whyte (121).

Matter no longer seems to me so ancient, so unsubduable, so *certain* and palpable as Mind. *I am Mind*: whether matter or not I know not—and care not.—Mighty glimpses into the spiritual Universe I have sometimes had...would they could but stay with me, and ripen into a perfect view! (*Two Note Books* 151)

There is a nod to the eternal *I am*, the self-predicating mindfulness which Coleridge had lately been translating from metaphysics into modern psychology.¹⁶ But Carlyle—always impatient with these metaphysical truisms—soon tilts back into the syntax of deferral. *I know not—and care not.—Mighty glimpses...would they but...ripen*. This is the structural pattern of what's come to be recognized, a little misleadingly, as Carlyle's "Theory of the Unconscious" (the critics' term, not Carlyle's), which frankly is less a theory than a generalized intuition that something lies deeper than thought. As William Johnson explains it: "Carlyle's criticism must not...be understood as meaning that we are thinking too much, but that we are thinking too superficially; not that we should substitute blind instinct for reason, but that we should recognize and cultivate the vital depths of our nature out of which poetry and religion and all that is deepest and highest in us unconsciously spring" (103). Johnson is talking about the kind of sympathetic awareness which takes place at the crossroads of "nature" and psyche. At this level Carlyle's *unconscious* is probably better defined as *unself-conscious* (as Hill Shine has suggested: 80). It was the inkling of something beyond our own brains: the wisdom of humanity, the palpable touch of the universal.

Palpable: as with the romantics, and as in the passage quoted from Carlyle above, the universe tended to make itself known through a pulse. The thing to understand here (before we go into prosodic details) is that Carlyle dealt with the unconscious in the manner of all great

¹⁶ See esp. *Biographia Literaria*, 149-56.

unknowns: tracking his ideas as he had once tracked out the paces of God in Time¹⁷—or “trace[d]” out the “ground-plan” of Goethe’s grand scheme,¹⁸ or joined Goethe’s march to eternity¹⁹—through a progression of hints and “half-truth[s]”²⁰ which had, if nothing else, the confidence of rhythm. Of course, Keble had tried to put a pace on the unknowable—much as the Romantics before him used meter to feel out the flexions of unconscious thought. Rhythm always *implied* a deeper level of knowledge (as I have argued in the introduction); but Carlyle edges closer to Freud (and Freud’s precursor, Ezra Jennings) insofar as these pulsations of putative knowledge are being recruited to do real hermeneutic work.

Witness the mental struggle in this letter (to J.S. Mill), regarding his forthcoming history of the French Revolution.

Understand me all those sectionary tumults, convention-harangues, guillotine-holocausts, Brunswick discomfitures; exhaust me the meaning of it! You *cannot*; for it is a flaming *Reality*; the depths of Eternity look through the *chinks* of that so *convulsed* section of Time; as through *all* sections of Time, only to dull eyes not so visibly... In any case I...greedily collect whatever knowledge I can get of it. That *Thiers*, these *Mémoires* of yours have done more for me than almost all

¹⁷ See for instance the essay “On History” (1830): “Better were it that mere earthly Historians should... leave the inscrutable purport of [history] an acknowledged secret; or at most, in reverent Faith...pause over the *mysterious vestiges of Him, whose path is in the great deep of Time*, whom History indeed reveals, but only all History, and in Eternity, will clearly reveal” (89; my italics).

¹⁸ “[F]ar-extending traces of a ground-plan we can also see; which future centuries may go on to enlarge, to amend and work into reality. These sayings [from Goethe] seem strange to some; [...] perhaps when Goethe has been read and meditated for another generation, they will not seem so strange” (“Death of Goethe,” II.381).

¹⁹ He wrote of Goethe’s “Symbolum” (which Carlyle had just translated into English) that “[i]t seems to me like a piece of marching-music to the great brave Teutonic kindred as they march thro’ the waste of TIME,— thro’ that section of eternity *they* were appointed for [...] Let us all sing it, and march on cheerful of heart” (Carlyle, letter to John Sterling, 17 Jan. 1837. All letters in this chapter are quoted from the *Carlyle Letters Online*).

²⁰ “Diderot stands forth as the main originator [...] of that many-sided struggle towards what is called Nature, and copying of Nature [...]; which struggle, meanwhile, either as *half-truth*, or *working itself into a whole truth*, may be seen [...] still forming the tendency of all artistic endeavour (“Diderot” 244; my italics).

else I have read; you can hardly conceive with what a tumult of feelings, visions, half-visions, guesses and darkneses they wholly envelop me. (24 Sep. 1833)

What emerges from this passage is a rhythmic instinct which tends, by and large in Carlyle's oeuvre, to kick in just where he is least epistemologically secure. Notice especially the closing cadence:

...with what a **tumult of feelings**, [X] **visions**, [X] **half-visions**, **guesses** and **darkneses** they **wholly** envelop me.

Carlyle recovers a latent dactylic footing (operant from the start if we put a breather on the commas as I've indicated) that got him once already through the chaos of the Revolution. I'm thinking specifically of that quasi-Homeric catalogue of affairs, rolled off in a dactylic dimeter that is best captured if we render it in lines:

sectionary²¹ **tumults**,
convention-harangues,
guillotine-holocausts,
Brunswick discomfitures.

It's as if Carlyle were trying to lock step with the forces of reality—as if he were gauging the facts by their motions. Critics have said that he often took rhythm for reason,²² and in the present context their judgment seems accurate. Carlyle has been trying to tell the history of the

²¹ This tetrasyllable puts a possible snag in the dactylic pattern, though it's repaired if we elide the third syllable (as phonetics allow): "section[a]ry."

²² This is especially well observed in the scholarship of the 1960s (still unsurpassed for its close attention to Carlyle's style). John Holloway writes that "the more discursive parts of his work must be read not as logical argument, but as sequences of verbal marches and counter-marches" (57); and G.B. Tennyson finds likewise that "[t]he feeling of pulsating, onrushing life conveyed by Carlyle's prose enlists the reader's support for Carlyle's beliefs in a way that no amount of discursive reasoning can do" (285).

Revolution, and what he renders instead is a pulse, a march: a common rhythmic denominator to equalize the conflicts of data and the discrepancies of motive, to temper the distance between the author and his subject.

This much of Carlyle's letter to Mill was true to the book he would write. From the Marseillaise peasants ("Marching to the grim music of their hearts": II.92) to the National Convention ("such fiery venous-arterial circulation is the function of that Heart": II.193) to the Guillotine ("rising and falling there, in horrid systole-diastole": II.321), Carlyle's three-volume *French Revolution* is an epic progression of marches and pulses. These are varied and many—prosodically tough and hermeneutically urgent—and they merit an attention that I hope to reward in later sections of this chapter. For now I should like just to impart two key points. First, that these also are rhythms of unknowing: the march of the inarticulate masses, the pulse of a patriotism that has yet to decide what it's fully about.²³

Yes, in that silent marching mass there lies Futurity enough. ... [I]n the hearts and unshaped thoughts of these men, it lies illegible, inevitable. (I.141)

Second, that they modulate into the very *measure* of the unknown, the metrics that calibrate the gaps in the historical record, or the silent illiterate masses that hover, dimly, around it.²⁴ Thus Carlyle's response to the "silent marching mass" is to march right alongside with them, "in fire and thunder...; in the rustling of battle-banners, the tramp of hosts, in the glow of burning cities,

²³ "A mad vitality of Jacobinism, with Forty-four Thousand centres of activity, circulates through all fibres of France" (II.266). The guillotine is likewise described as "the whole enormous Life-movement and pulsation of the Sansculottic System!" (II.321).

²⁴ Carlyle is at pains to commemorate the unwritten voices of the Revolution—but one passage stands out in particular, in part for its unmistakable cadence (marked out by repetition and rhyme): "Thus they **three**, in wondrous **trilogy**, or triple **soliloquy**: uttering **simultaneously**, through the dread **night-watches**, their **Night-thoughts**, —grown audible to us! They Three are become audible: but the other 'Thousand and Eighty-nine... who also had Night-thoughts, remain inaudible[.]'" (II.160)

the shriek of strangled nations!” (I.141). What comes through in this march is the basic liturgical hope of his writing at large: namely, that rhythm alone might see us through the silence of history and the resulting labors of inference.

This has interesting consequences for syntax—as we may see in this comparable excerpt from Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (1843).

Yes, friends: Hero-kings and a whole world not unheroic, —there lies the port and happy haven, towards which, through all these stormtost seas, French Revolutions, Chartisms, Manchester Insurrections, that make the heart sick in these bad days, the Supreme Powers are driving us. On the whole, blessed be the Supreme Powers, stern as they as they are! Towards that haven will we, O friends; let all true men, with what of faculty is in them, bend valiantly, incessantly, with thousandfold endeavour, thither, thither! There, or else in the Ocean-abysse, it is very clear to me, we shall arrive. (40-1)

We have *not* arrived, however—nor has Carlyle really explained where it is we are supposed to be going. The direction, the focus, the conclusiveness of this passage are little more than an illusion of rhythm. “Stormtost seas, French Revolutions, Chartisms, Manchester Insurrections...” It’s as if he marked his journey by the listing of its obstacles: the itinerary rhythm of the things we’ll overcome along the way, whether or not we finally get there in the end. “There, or else... it is very clear....we shall...”

By now the “arrival” feels almost inevitable. We’re *there*, in fact—in the deeper sense that Carlyle’s paradise is really just a perpetual, well-tempered march of man—such as he’s described it in this passage later on.

Show me a People energetically busy; heaving, struggling, all shoulders at the wheel; their heart pulsing, every muscle swelling, with man's energy and will;—
I show you a People of whom great good is already predicable; to whom all manner of good is yet certain, if their energy endure. By very working, they will learn; they have, Antæus-like, their foot on Mother Fact: how can they but learn?
(207)

Again, the certitude of this sentiment is all in its prosodic and thematic muscle. Men will learn by force of common labor; they are unwitting (or “unconscious,” as Carlyle suggested at the top of the paragraph²⁵) but wise in the union of their pulses. *Busy; heaving, struggling...* Carlyle had struck the same cadence when he asked himself in an early notebook entry (with commas tellingly omitted) if one must be always “waiting asking searching” for the right road to truth (21). The syntax implies what Carlyle says outright in *Past and Present*: that truth is a matter of finding the beat, gathering momentum to get at the predicate and, meantime, gathering your kind into the labor of your search.

As he said in the earlier paragraph:

Towards that haven will we, O friends; let all true men, with what of faculty is in them, bend valiantly, incessantly, with thousandfold endeavour, thither, thither!

That syntax conveys the kind of sympathetic outreach which Carlyle usually styled as “unconscious”: not an epistemological orientation so much as a measured, cooperative suspense. Notice how he keeps bending back round to his audience, if only to test the assonantal anchorage

²⁵ “Labour is ever an imprisoned god, writhing unconsciously or consciously to escape out of Mammonism!” (207)

of friends...true men...in them. This may be a voyage of discovery; but what Carlyle discovers, in each successive clause, is the grip of a fraternity that he has supposedly felt (and heard) all along. From that angle it makes small difference whether or not he finally reaches his port, or reveals the great Powers that drive him: Carlyle's universe has already collected itself into the very muscle of his cognitive efforts.

This begins to explain how Carlyle, for all his digressions, hesitations, doubts and redoublings, still manages to pull off coherence. Here I line up with George Levine, who in reflecting on this and other iconic passages from Carlyle's oeuvre, finds "that the disorderliness is more apparent than real...and that the wild, passionate energy is regularly directed to turn back in on itself and to rest upon the single immutable fact of God. This is so" (here he tacks on a crucial addendum) "whether, in any given passage, that Fact be the port of Hero-kings, the Polar Star, or Life itself as the ultimate unchanging source of all energy" (110). Levine is implicitly aware that the only really "immutable fact" for Carlyle (who had long given up on his Calvinistic God) was that we were still questing forth in God's name and—as Levine also suggests—this was a fact reconfirmed at every introspective step along the way. Uncertainty itself feels like proof in Carlyle's world; which is to say that the questing and questioning mind is keyed to the infallible passion of human research, the intuitive chord within the brain's incessant flux.

That paradigm transported well into the contemporary psychology, whose theorists (divided on just about every other count) were as broadly convinced about the brain's incessant motility as they were baffled to name the source behind it all. Thomas Huxley, for instance, would be informing his audience in the 1870s that "there is no proof that any state of consciousness is the cause of change in the motion of the matter of the organism"—thus concluding that "the feeling that we call volition is not the cause of a voluntary act, but the

symbol of that state of the brain which is the immediate cause of the act” (“Animal Automatism” 239). *Something* compelled us to act; if the “cause” is obscure, still the process is assured. We won’t be surprised when our writer starts waxing Carlylean-poetic:

We are conscious automata, endowed with free will...but none the less parts of the great series of causes and effects which, in unbroken continuity, composes that which is, and has been, and shall be—the sum of existence. (239-40)

Huxley’s great chain of “causes” was one part predestinarian theology, two parts molecular biology, and it added up to a radical determinism which flew straight in the face of the popular Idealist theory (Rylance 92-3). This latter was well represented by the philosopher T.H. Green, who declared:

Nothing that the physiologist can detect—no irritation, or irradiation, or affection of a sensitive organ—enters into it [consciousness] at all. The relations which these terms represent are all of a kind absolutely heterogeneous to and incompatible with the mutual determinations of ideas in the unity of consciousness. (I.476)

His point being that our ideas are never contingent upon bodily stimuli. But Green’s oratorical thrust, particularly those rocking, cadential refutations (so close to the measured progressions in Huxley of “that which is, and has been, and shall be”) should remind us that even the autonomous brain takes the pressure of some broader continuity. As he later explains:

A world which is a system of relations implies a unit, self-distinguished from all the terms related, yet determining all as the equal presence through relation to which they are related to each other; and such a unit is a conscious subject. (I.500)

This is not far removed from Huxley's dream of pulsating universalism. And what emerges in this final sentence—even beyond the stepwise grammar, the syntactical outreach-and-recoil à la Carlyle—is a certain rhythmical continuo that's built upon that tiny particle of connectivity, the fourfold-repeated “all.” Notice how this word has rippled gradually back into the grammar of conjunction—as Green himself comes tacitly round to the idea of *embodied* thought. First, he was denying physiological relations (“no irritation, or irradiation, or affection of a sensitive organ—enters into it *at all*”) and then he was admitting relations but denying their relevance (these “relations ... are *all* of a kind absolutely heterogeneous to and incompatible with ... the unity of consciousness”) and then he was proposing relations but holding them off from the overall concept of mind (“self-distinguished from *all* the terms related”). Finally that mind is allowed to generate relations of its own (“determining *all* as the equal presence through relation to which they are related to each other”) as we find our way back to a consciousness which, if not quite universal in Huxley's sense of the term, is at least thoroughly unified,

...and such a unit is a conscious subject.

That concluding clause neatly encapsulates the grammar, the quasi-biblical parataxis of Green's disputation at large. “The effect”—says the scholar and historian Rick Rylance—“is of a failed chant. It is a kind of effort at the Carlylean sublime without Carlyle's rhetorical flair... (316).” Rylance does not expound his Carlylean hunches, though he makes passing reference to

an “assertive rhythm” which turns out (as so often in Carlyle) to inhere in the energy of unfulfilled predicates.

...no irritation, or irradiation, or affection...

...absolutely heterogeneous to and incompatible with...

... the unity of consciousness.

What confirms and steadies this litany of negatives is the “consciousness” which tacitly waits in the object position (every time). That, in a rough nutshell, would be the grammar of Victorian cognition: the inquiring mind has no choice but to pulse its way forth to the end of the sentence.

Recall Huxley, for instance, rolling the brain through the various tenses of “that which is, and has been, and shall be—the sum of existence.” Carlyle, seeking his path to revelation, has to trudge en route through a series of participles: “waiting asking searching for a true one.” We might think here of Browning, proclaiming in *Sordello* that knowledge is a journey to be trekked out on “the beaten road.”

Knowledge by *stress* of merely Knowledge? No —

E’en were Sordello ready to forego

His life for this, ’twere overleaping work

Someone has first to do, howe’er it irk,

Nor stray a *foot’s breadth* from the beaten road. (V.211-5; my italics)

We know that Carlyle had already talked of “working” as a way to get your footing on the Facts. (In *Past and Present*, quoted on p.24: “By very working, they will learn; they have, Antæus-like, their foot on Mother Fact.”) And Carlyle was not unaccustomed to thinking things out in

“stresses” and “feet.” One instance we have examined: the confusions of the Revolution (“...guillotine-holocausts, Brunswick discomfitures...”) were as so many dactylic steps toward the goal which, for Carlyle, is the sublime abyss of total historical contact: “visions, half-visions, guesses and darkneses they wholly envelop me.”

It can only be a measure of his effectiveness that this high-styled Carlylean guesswork turned up in such remote settings as, say, the latest in speculative psychology. Scaling their revelations down to a mere “foot’s breadth,” Carlyle and his literary ilk had essentially made a virtue of the fractures that riddled so much of Victorian prose—scientific, philosophical, and beyond. T.H. Green is an easier case to prove, since he had taken up directly from Carlyle and Coleridge in the tradition of the German Idealists (Rylance 316); but I believe he was just one of many theorists who, consciously or not, registered Carlyle’s assent as they talked through their doubts, hesitations, qualifiers and notwithstanding clauses—the mental folds, so to speak, in their discourse.

II

To this extent rhythm was still, at best, an exalted mode of mental default; a proof upon the pulses (in the style of Leigh Hunt, cited at the outset) for lack of firmer epistemic grounds. We risk forgetting, through all this rhythmic guesswork, that Hunt’s “pulse” was borrowed from a modern physician-in-training,²⁶ and an assiduous student of the brain and nervous system. Indeed, the *Keatsian* pulse was constantly and intricately linked to certain folds of the unconscious which should get us ultimately nearer Freud—and the wellsprings of an intuition

²⁶ Technically an “apothecary-surgeon,” trained at Guy’s Hospital and there distinguished as a “protégé” to the pioneering surgeon and anatomist Sir Astley Cooper (Richardson 114).

that works faster, tacitly but more articulately than we have yet acknowledged within our sampled cullings from the nineteenth-century canon of science and letters.

All in good time. But with Keats's swift-as-thought pulsations in the background of this section of the chapter, and Freud's psychoanalytic auscultations as our endpoint—submitting that these Romantic/Victorian pulse-takers were all effectively endeavoring, after their own disciplinary fashion, to sound the middle language of a not-quite-conscious knowingness—let's press back into the veins of Carlyle's writing. Here he is in *Sartor Resartus*, taking "heart" as he ventures to navigate the dark Goethean pathway from the Feeling to the Thought—

Ach Gott! His whole heart and soul and life were hers, but never had he named it

Love: existence was all a Feeling, not yet shaped into a Thought. (112)

—Between feeling and *thought*, and (the rhyme is irresistible) his *Gott*. Ultimately, this is a rhythmic negotiation between the higher spiritual inklings of Carlyle's hero Teufelsdröckh, and his carnal passions for the beautiful Blumine, transacted on that psychosomatic organ which, true to Keatsian form, inscribes itself somewhere between mind and body, private intuition and cosmic revelation. Transacted *and* contracted, I should say, upon the pulses that are no less urgent here than ever in Carlyle's prose. Let's take a closer look:

His whole **heart** and **soul** and **life** were **hers**, but **never had** he **named** it **Love**...

Something resembling iambic tetrameter; and here's a closing pentameter flush some pages later (when the heart calls on him again, and he again calls on his God,)

I felt as if in great haste; to do I saw not what. From the depths of my own heart,
it called to me, Forwards! ...*Ach Gott!* I was **even, once for all, a Son of Time.**

(120)

Teufelsdröckh has found his footing, then, in every sense—his pulses interlocking with his paces, coinciding with his literal terrestrial passage—across the standard Carlylean groundwork of unknowns and unspeakables. From an unnamed Love to an unnamable Unrest and (what’s always pressing on the negative prefix, in post-Keatsian tradition) the deeper guidance of a force which lies somewhere between unconsciousness and God: here is the lead-up to the passage just quoted.

“A nameless Unrest,” says he, “*urged me forward...Whither should I go? My Loadstars were blotted out ...Yet forward must I; the ground burnt under me; there was no rest for the sole of my foot... Ever too the strong inward longing shaped Fantasms for itself: towards these, one after the other, must I fruitlessly wander... To many fondly imagined Fountains, the Saints’ Wells of these days did I pilgrim...it was ever the same: how could your Wanderer escape from—his own Shadow?*”²⁷ *Nevertheless still Forward!* I felt as if in great haste; to do *I saw not what.* From the depths of my own heart, *it called to me...*” (my italics)

(The rest we’ve covered, “*Ach Gott!* I was **even once for all, a Son of Time.**”) The heart writes large throughout these wanderings; even beyond the measured Gott-sprech at the end, we might discern a certain overarching systole-diastole of *whither’s* and *hither’s*, of dark internal pressures

²⁷ Carlyle’s italics on “his own Shadow”; the rest are mine.

gathered up and then relaxed, by turns, within the Godly summons that are sounding out in steady counterpoint.

Forward...Whither?...Yet forward...

Ever too the strong inward longing...*ever* the same...*Nevertheless* still Forward!

And that's the underwriting narrative—the subliminal directive and the answering, *corrective* pattern of adjustments and returns—which I'm proposing needs to be quite rigorously inferred from Carlyle's beat. Carlyle's *pulses*, I should say again; with an ear toward the Keatsian tradition he's sustaining and (its formal *lingua franca* in nineteenth-century European poetry and prose, literary and scientific and beyond) the iamb.

Iambic or not—we might in any case surprise ourselves, more than once throughout this section, with the smaller metered evidence to be found amidst the bolder postulates of mid-century cardiology and biology (even astronomy and physics). That's part and parcel of a plainer truth which needs to be re-emphasized up front about the scientific spirit of the age—and the poetic—and the special proofs attaching to the pulses in this century which was not (quite) prepared to give up its last resort of non-craniological intelligence. Even against the growing evidence of Romantic and Victorian brain science, one notable midcentury physician still maintains, at length, how

Often the Heart is a more delicate test of something wrong within a man than his own consciousness. His Heart is beforehand with him. It tells of disease...while his own feelings persuade him that he is well. At length, ...the constitution is awaked to a conscious alarm, and, by its fever and nervous irritation, confirms what the Heart has forefelt and foretold by the frequent pulse. (II.528)

That's the famed cardiologist P.M. Latham, speaking in 1847 (more than a decade after *Sartor Resartus*; nearly three since Keats's major works). And when I say he speaks against the evidence of contemporary brain science, I would have us consider, for a start, how often Latham's "pulse" is really shorthand for a more extensive Keatsian network of unconscious and preconscious signals—"something, belonging to our organization, which communes with life more nearly and at once than through the circle of our grosser and more intelligible functions. And this is the nervous system." And once again (here's the crux, and the ruse of Latham's argument) "the nervous system *has the heart for its gnomon or finger* of the clock. This notes, by the rate of its movement, the various degrees in which the nervous system is affected..."

He is, in fact, on the very cusp of finding out that it's the other way around. Further along in the same paragraph,

[T]here is no reason in the nature of things (as far as I know) why a morbid poison, or any other element of disease, should *not affect the nervous system* soonest of all, and *sooner than the blood and blood-vessels*, to which it properly belongs to work out disease into its cognisable products and realities. Only experience says that it is rare, very rare. (II.538; my italics throughout)

What should emerge from Latham's argument—beyond the cardiovascular bias that's still holding out against the new, and frankly more reliable indications of neuroanatomical science—is a measure he's been practicing for several decades now (and several hundred pages more) of bedside listening and close, clinical auscultation and recalibration. "Rare, very rare," he says. And again:

[The remedy] did its work upon the disease *well, very well*. But it would have done its work upon the whole, *better, much better...* (II. 549)

But hour after hour passed away, and she still lived. Days and nights...passed away, and she still lived. (II.536; my italics throughout)

We will have more to say about this cardiovascular rhythm which asserts itself in Latham's prose (very much like Carlyle's in this aspect) just when he is least certain of his scientific premises. But for now I'm taking Latham at his word, as confirmation of the tendency we're following from Keats through Carlyle, and right across the board of nineteenth-century science and letters—*viz.* how much of the Victorian unknown, the unconscious in particular, was still to be discovered in the language of the heart.²⁸

Start with the poets. J. Stanyan Bigg, for example, in his *Night and the Soul* (1854):

The life of all that is, pulses and throbs
Like subterranean music in their hearts (sc. x)

More "subterranean" pulses in Tennyson's *Maud* (1855):

Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe (I.xviii.680-1)

Of course, there is plenty of "undercurrent" passion in Keats, as demonstrated by the love-struck Lorenzo in *Isabella* (1820):

²⁸ Keats above all captures this trend. Though he was arguably *the* poet of the unconscious brain (certainly his clinical precision was unmatched), nonetheless he went about it as the "Poet of the human Heart" (*Letters*: II.338). This fact is masterfully expounded by Alan Richardson, in a chapter on the Keatsian "embodied brain": its basis in what he learned at Guy's Hospital, and its extensions in the poetry he wrote thereafter (114-50).

His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve away— (42-5)

It did not await the cardiologist Latham, apparently, to declare the blood runs deeper than language, and (always the other half of that equation in Victorian literature) conscious thought. Nor Carlyle, to theorize the poem as the “life’s blood”²⁹ that insinuates (*circulates*, but with all the force of unconscious suggestion) upon the silent thoughts of men. As he explained in his lecture on “The Hero as Poet” (1840), “no thought, word or act of man but has sprung withal out of all men, and works sooner or later, recognisably or irrecongnisably, on all men! It is all...*circulation* of...influences, mutual communication...” (*HH* 133; my italics).

This is the Victorian unconscious to a tee: the very throbbing, circulating, subliminal inter-resonance Carlyle’s readers were experiencing at first hand in the poets (Carlyle’s Dante and Shakespeare surely take their image from the contemporary likes of Goethe, Keats, and the early Tennyson) and rediscovering at every juncture, every conjectural expansion and amplification along the scientific line that ends, for our purposes, with Freudian psychoanalysis. Coming back to an earlier hypothesis within this chapter—if Whyte is correct³⁰ that readers came upon the unconscious in their search for “the universal,” then we may add with somewhat more assurance now that what they found en route was a universal *pulse*, in every thematic, scientific, syntactic and prosodic (we know that usually means iambic) sense of the term. Here’s another

²⁹ As he said about Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, “His Book, as indeed most good Books are, has been written, in many senses, with his *heart’s blood*...He died after finishing it, ...*broken-hearted* rather, as is said” (118; my italics).

³⁰ As quoted at the top of Section I (p.18).

passage of psycho-poetical theory from Carlyle's *Past and Present*, quoted with an emphasis toward the meter shaping out at the end.

Think what strumming of the seven-stringed heroic lyre, torturing of the less heroic fiddle-catgut, in the Hellenic Kings' Courts, and English wayside Public Houses; and beating of the studious Poetic brain, and gasping here too in the semi-articulate windpipe of Poetic men, before the Wrath of a Divine Achilles, the Prowess of a Will Scarlet or Wakefield Pinder, could be adequately sung!
Honour to you, ye nameless great and greatest ones, ye long-forgotten brave!
(133; my italics)

We might recognize another variation on the same unconscious (or preconscious or semi-articulate) themes Carlyle had been working out, in regular stepwise motion, since his earliest adventures on the silent side of history. "Strumming...torturing...beating....gaspings..." so much endeavoring toward the sort of "rhythmic coherence" Carlyle said was poetry's, and history's,³¹ main responsibility—here achieved, and with somewhat greater certitude, under the bracket of a measure I'm inclined to call the muscle memory of Keats.

Honour to **you**, ye **nameless great** and **greatest ones**, ye **long-forgotten brave!**

The proof of the pulses gets an extra assonantal thrust as Carlyle modulates toward the major anonymous players (from *you* to *ye*, broadening toward the steady open a's and o's of the "*nameless great and greatest...brave*" and "*long-forgotten*"). You could say these were the hard-earned poetical returns on an extended Keatsian preamble of "beating brains" and "tortured"

³¹ Referring specifically to Shakespeare's history plays: "The great salient points are admirably seized; all rounds itself off, into a kind of rhythmic coherence; it is, as Schlegel says, *epic*;—as indeed all delineation by a great thinker will be." (*HH* 144; Carlyle's italics).

sinews, bursting hearts and baffled tongues that have been gathering and, eventually, released into the commonness of their ongoing labors.

Or say that Carlyle has discovered for himself the deep coordinative metric, iambic and otherwise, that was Romanticism's major legacy in nineteenth-century letters—well beyond the poetic tradition Carlyle resumed from Keats directly. Here again is the cardiologist Latham, for instance, sounding out the basic binary rotation which the pulses represent par excellence. “In listening at the præcordial region, the ear at once perceives two sounds proceeding from the heart,—the one duller and more prolonged, the other clearer and shorter; the one coinciding with the systole of the ventricles and the pulsation of the arteries, the other coinciding with the diastole of the ventricles and the rest of the arteries.” In short, Latham reiterates, “it appears that *for one pulsation of the arteries there are two sounds of the heart*” (I.3; my italics). As always, he's deployed this double sounding in effect to circumnavigate the unknown body (in all senses) of his clinical investigations. “One duller...the other clearer...the one coinciding...the other coinciding...” So we shouldn't be surprised to find this pattern resumes, full force, in Latham's defense of cardiology as the epidemiological sine qua non. Here's a later excerpt, from his lecture on “The Heart and its Affections, not Organic.”

The Heart passes for the most sympathising organ in the body. And it *may be* really so; or it *may be* that it does not in fact sympathise more than other organs, only more apparently. For who shall say that *every part* of the body does not sympathise with *every other part*, and that its functions are not put out of sorts by *every other's* detriment or disease? But the *functions* of many parts are *hidden functions*, and we know not how it may be with them. Yet the functions of others are apparent enough; ...and we know that their secretions are ever apt to be altered

and vitiated, not only *by diseases* of their own, but *by diseases, small and great, beginning and ending* in other parts, and altogether restricted to them. And so, too, of the heart; it cannot *beat a beat too many, or too few, or too strong, or too weak*, without its being straightway perceived; and thus we become convinced that it has as many modes of abnormal action derived *from diseases without as from diseases within* itself. (II.517; my italics)

At the center of this rhythmic game of averages, Latham strikes again on something very near blank verse (“it cannot **beat a beat** too **many**...too **few**...too **strong**...too **weak**”). That’s part and parcel of the rhythmic and rhetorical consensus-building that is at once the premise of Latham’s argument (*viz.* the corporeal synchronicity which allows the heart to speak on every other “part’s” behalf) and his persuasive design throughout these lectures, as a professor and orator sounding out the common ground of modern medical opinion. Let us take a second glance at Latham’s calibrated delivery:

And it may be so...or it may be not.

More apparently...apparently enough...

We know not how...Yet we know...

And what they do know, Latham suggests without quite saying, will at least be known and felt in common.

We’ve seen in the previous section of this chapter, and will continue to discover in this present sampling of scientific and poetic discourse, how the pulse—as a subset of Victorian rhythm in general—is the consensual security of things unfixed or unfathomed, or inarticulable (with the unconscious never far behind in Latham’s argument, or Carlyle’s). But we’re far from

exhausting the literal, muscular *heart* of the matter; the myocardial flex-and-release that was effectively ground zero of all principled concordance, in and beyond the cardiovascular discipline Latham championed. According to one medical contemporary, the surgeon and pathologist James Paget, “No explanation of the rhythmic action of the heart... would be sufficient, which did not involve or appear consistent with *some general law* to which we may refer all other *rhythmic organic processes*, that is, all such as are accomplished with time-regulated alterations, whether of motion or any other change” (480-1; my italics). And the subtext here, underwriting this extended biospheric (“organic” as Paget says, though not strictly organismic) coalition of the pulses, is a greater cosmic principle which Paget almost certainly absorbed from his colleagues in theoretical physics.³² “Thus beats the heart of the universe,” said John Tyndall, as he theorized his way outward from the subatomic and acoustical vibrations of Victorian physics to the Copernican rotations that were their prototype at large (26).

[W]hat is true of the earth, as she swings to and fro in her yearly journey round the sun, is also true of her minutest atom. We have wheels within wheels, and rhythm within rhythm. (28)

Tyndall was another among the many nineteenth-century scientists who, according to Kirstie Blair, “used the pulse as an analogy for the connections between various kinds of rhythmic motion” (90). To be sure, Tyndall’s *prose* is consistently, almost obsessively, analogic.

A body...once heated there, would continue forever heated; a sun or planet once molten, would continue forever molten. (9)

³² Specifically, Paget’s “time-regulated alterations” seem to gesture toward the new physics of wave and particle motion (my thanks to Kirstie Blair for this suggestion: 90); although I hope to demonstrate, presently, that this is just one aspect of a longer-standing overlap of physical and physiological periodicities in post-Cartesian science.

It *was* translation, it *is* vibration. It *was* molecular transfer, it *is* heat. (25;
Tyndall's italics)

This, then, is the rhythmic play of Nature... she oscillates from tension to *vis viva*, from *vis viva* to tension. We have the same play in our planetary system...

And that "same play" again, in Tyndall's oscillating grammar. "Tensions...are stored up, but *vis viva* is lost, to be again restored...on the opposite side of the curve. Thus beats the heart of the universe, but without increase or decrease of its total stock of force" (26).

There is something more in this than mere analogy (*pace* Blair) when you consider the literal *analogue* rotations Tyndall has at least alluded to, with his "translations" and "vibrations" and "molecular transfers"—reenacted by his multiplying rhythms and "wheels within wheels," ricocheted through every stratum of grammar and diction. "They collide, they recoil, they oscillate;" "stored up...to be again restored"; "to restore by their recoil," *etc.*: 16, 17, 27). *Resonance* is the underwriting principle at work, I think—in Tyndall's prose, and very closely in the background of the physics he inherited. Not four decades earlier (in 1828) readers had this explanation from Sir Charles Wheatstone, best known as the inventor of the telegraph:

This reciprocation [of vibrating bodies], to which...the term *resonance*³³ is applied..., is effected by means of the undulations which are produced in the air, or in any fluid or solid medium, by the *periodical pulses* of the original vibrating body—these undulations being capable of putting in motion all bodies whose *pulses are coincident with their own*, and, consequently, with those of the primitive sounding body. (36)

³³ Wheatstone's italics (the rest are mine in this passage).

Without belaboring the scientific details, I'm inclined to say that Wheatstone, Tyndall, and their cohort were effectively delivering—at telegraphic speed, on heavy high-Victorian rotation—the same subliminal consensus that was poetry's (*i.e.* meter's) tacit argument from the start of this long century, at least since Wordsworth and Coleridge. Bear with me a moment longer, as I tack onto Wheatstone's analogue rotations a certain underlying, grammatical-cum-metrical persuasion that's been quietly preparing in the poetry and prose we've read so far. Starting with Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh:

His whole heart and soul and life were hers... (*SR* 112)

And just for comparison, here's a similarly paratactic rendering of "heart and soul" from another of Carlyle's Romantics predecessors, Lord Byron, describing the first colossal kiss of Juan and Haidee,

Where heart, and soul, and sense, in concert move,

And the blood's lava, and the pulse a blaze,

Each kiss a heart-quake... (*Don Juan* II.1485-6)

"[P]utting in motion all bodies whose pulses are coincident with their own," as Wheatstone said. By prosodic, if not by scientific rights, the pulses tend to galvanize the very rhythmic chain reaction Wheatstone is describing here—the cardiac, *viz.* iambic alternations of "**heart and soul and life**," or "**heart, and soul, and sense**," or (thinking back on Carlyle's *Past and Present*) the "**nameless great and greatest**" of poeticizing hearts and brains. Add to this, the metaphysical alignment of "**heart and soul and brain**" imagined by a poet one year earlier than Carlyle (Browning, "In a Gondola" 12); or the clinical attunements and adjustments we've seen demonstrated, in the same conjunctive grammar, throughout Latham's lectures on the heart.

“Degrees of frequency and force in the action of the Heart and arteries, and their variations from time to time, follow degrees and variations of febrile and inflammatory movements, as they *increase and decrease and rise and fall*, and so give notice of their *incidents and tendencies and events...*” (II.518; my italics).

So the pulse “keeps measure” of the brain and nervous system,³⁴ as the doctor in his turns keeps measure of the heart—in a measure that is no doubt intended, on some level, to get Latham’s audience in on the clinical game. As he explained at the outset of these lectures, in a veritable feat of iambic-paratactic co-conspiracy,

Within this **space** we **cannot see**. But at this space we can listen, and **feel**, and **knock**, and **so**³⁵ put it to question, **whether all** be **right beneath**. (I.2)

It is a coincidence, but an instructive one I think, that the English iamb—the metrical foundation of so much persuasive writing down the ages and across the disciplines—has so heavily relied upon the interstitial and’s and or’s, the expansive yet conjunctive slacks which helped, quietly, to negotiate the balance of the pulses. “[W]ithout increase or decrease of its total stock of force,” as Tyndall said. Examples abound of this dynamic equilibrium among the scientists we’ve cited so far: from the systolic-diastolic “rise and fall” of Latham’s cardiac pulses, the “approach and...retreat” of Tyndall’s atoms (recreated in his syntax, though not quite striving after Latham’s metered turns), through the “reciprocated vibrations” of Wheatstone’s sounding bodies, “afterwards to *return* by a succession of isochronous oscillations to their former state” (36; my italics).

³⁴ I quote, or nearly paraphrase from Latham: “Nor are these sympathetic conditions of the heart barely annexed to such conditions of disease. They are often found to *keep exact measure* with them” (II.518; my italics).

³⁵ Following another “and,” this conjunction invites another latent stress (to my ear). But this whole interim clause (“and so...question”) could take any number of possible scansion, till we get back to the solid slack-stress pattern commenced on “**whether all...**”

Resonance, the keyword I'm adopting from Wheatstone's treatise, is exactly that, by definition of its prefix: a rhythmic regulation and return, a *readjustment* (as Coleridge would have it) to sustain the cosmic order that was always proven, and re-proving, on the pulses. It is also, taking the word in its absolute root sense, a return-sounding: an *answer* to the spoken and unspoken questions that rhythm has been asking across the board, in nearly every discipline of postromantic and (this comes back into the equation now) post-*Renaissance* science and letters.

III

There is a plainer point to be reiterated at this juncture in Victorian cardiovascular poeticizing (or poetic cardiology, however you scan it in this essentially pre-two-cultures canon). That *is* the point, essentially; *viz.*, the mutual inflections of scientific and poetic writing, and more importantly (a juncture that is fraught with all the energy of something that's about to lose its epistemic hold as medicine advances) the dialogic concord of the heart and the mind, and a therapeutic discourse that is still modulating back and forth between psychoanalysis and prayer.

Still there is dialogue, whatever the parameters. That's the other point I'm driving here, and have been pressing through the prose-prosodic contours of this latest sampling from Carlyle, the Romantics, and the cardiologist Latham. Here is another passage from Latham's lectures on clinical auscultation, building on the safe assumption that the pulses always do, true to form, "make answer."

[W]e can listen, and feel, and knock, and so put it [the heart] to question, whether all be right beneath. And there is no spot of it which does not in its turn make answer to the ear, to the touch, or to the tapping of the finger, and tell something of the organ that lies herein. Hence proceed sounds, some of health and some of

disease, which of the two the ear must judge. Hence are conveyed impulses,
some of health and some of disease, which of the two the touch must tell. (I.2)

Latham's antiphonal prose underwrites his presumption that the heart must, eventually, give back in kind. He "put[s] it to question," the heart "tell[s] something" in reply, and so on down to the very smallest turns of phrase: "Hence proceed...Hence are conveyed...some of health and some of disease...the ear must judge...the touch must tell."

If Latham writes like the Romantics—in dialogic pulsations that might just flip into meter—nonetheless he writes a well-versed scientific truth. The pulses were, by rights, a dialogue, as William Harvey had revealed some two centuries earlier in the *De Motu Cordis* (1628),³⁶ his pioneering treatise on the circulation of the blood. Keying in to the mysterious resonances that had so far baffled practitioners and theorists of the heart (*viz.* the systole and diastole that packed two strokes per pulse) Harvey discerned a conversation, the ongoing back-and-forth "perception" and "answer,"³⁷ and small interim re-adjustments whereby the pulse sustained the vital equilibrium of the living corpus it supplied. Even beyond the circulation—the respiration, the nervous system and the muscular extremities, brushing the subtler and so-far invisible paths of perception and sensation—the living organism holds together, in Harvey's prescient (aural) vision, through a complicated game of reciprocities.

³⁶ And two lesser-known documents, *De Motu Locali Animalium* (1628) and *De Generatione* (1651), which describe the "polarized" motility of the heart and blood, in broader relation to the sensitive tissues and vital fluids.

³⁷ Harvey's words, as quoted and translated by Grene (63).

The result, we'll find, is something uncannily like Coleridge's definition of poetic meter. But I will defer, in part, to another scientific writer in our own day: Thomas Fuchs,³⁸ on the rhythmic principle which Harvey's circulation leveraged in Renaissance medical science.

The configuration that has thus come about is itself sensitive and *capable of modulation as a whole*... This holds in a similar way for muscular movement in general. Here too, there exists a *synergism of protagonist and antagonist*, a *harmonious interaction* of rest and movement. In this way, units of movement are formed, which can be triggered as wholes [...] (73; my italics)

“Harmony” is the keyword, of course; be this the “harmonious interaction” of the muscles, or “the harmonious balance of the two poles of cardiac action” (72) or better yet, the *harmonious adjustment* of the heart and blood.³⁹ Fuchs does not overstate his source. Indeed, Harvey was himself explicitly and consistently attuned to the concordance, the “silent music” (*Tacita musica*⁴⁰) of the well-tempered constitution—the physician's first experience of the greater (silent) harmony of the Spheres. For instance,

With the help of the muscles nature carries out her works in living things through rhythm and harmony....By divine agency, it is clear, delightful and charming motions are produced in the heavens for which we have no more sensibility than dogs do for music. (Harvey, *De Motu Locali*; trans. Fuchs 72-3)

Harvey provides a very obvious analogy: the muscles as the voices in the chorus, awaiting the direction of the brain (*mester del choro*) and modulated, by nervous intervention, into harmony

³⁸ As translated by Marjorie Grene (2001; from Fuchs's 1992 German publication).

³⁹ In Fuchs's description: “the motion of the heart and blood form a *harmoniously adjusted*, subtly reacting whole” (72).

⁴⁰ Quoted. in Fuchs (69); translated and addressed (as “silent music”) on pp.69 and 72.

and rhythm.⁴¹ But again, we must look to the circulation of the blood—the tempered action-and-reaction that apparently requires no outer monitor—to get at Harvey’s proper understanding of what “harmony” entails. Fuchs confirms: “the ‘rising and falling of the blood’ or the rhythm of cardiac action does not depend on an external principle or on a kind of metronome. The case is rather that the interrelation of perception and movement is variable in itself; it is governed by [Fuchs quotes directly from Harvey again] ‘an inner regulating principle,’ in the last analysis, the soul itself” (72).

Remember Coleridge too “adduced the high spiritual instinct,” *viz.* the cosmically encompassing and (yet) deeply inward “principle” whereby rhythm has evolved into poetics. The parts rejoin the “whole,” the stimulus evolves into subliminal responsiveness; and the “instinct” (just to unpack the phrase which Coleridge has earned, perhaps, but not explained) gets rounded out, reconciled, *harmonized* in short, toward the higher “spiritual” cause that makes for any poem worth the name (211). Thus, having in this chapter overemphasized, perhaps, the inward/downward half of the Romantic beat (the Coleridgean instinct, the Carlylean unconscious, the Keatsian “sublime” that’s more subliminal, as critics tend to hear it, than Godly), I turn to Harvey’s pulse as leverage to help us reincorporate the soul, the spiritual “principle,” or (his most ambitious formulation) the “divine agency” that helped the pulse achieve its greater cosmic resonance in post-Renaissance science and letters (trans. Fuchs 72).

I conclude this section, accordingly, with a small but eminent cadre of Victorians who professedly believed the pulse might be in touch with the Almighty Himself. Not least among

⁴¹ “[C]erebrum tanquam mester del choro”; “nervus ut interventum iudicis, opera per rithmum et harmoniam fiant” (*De Motu Locali*; qtd. in Fuchs 68). “Modulation” is Fuchs’s own term here (“the nerve modulates the muscular self-motion...”: 68).

them, the devout (howbeit problematical) Tractarian Christina Rossetti, with a stanza from her meditational series, “Christ Our All in All” (1893):

I will lift my heart to Thy Heart,
Thy Heart sole resting-place for mine:
Shall Thy Heart crave for my Heart,
And shall not mine crave back for Thine? (“[Because Thy Love hath sought me]”:
5-8)

Before we unpack these lines in detail, here is the more elaborate “systole and diastole” imagined in Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), as translated by George Eliot in 1855:

As the action of the arteries drives the blood into the extremities, and the action of the veins brings it back again, the life in general consists in a perpetual systole and diastole; so is it in religion. In the religious systole man propels his own nature from himself, he throws himself outward; in the religious diastole he receives the rejected nature into his heart again. God alone is the being who acts of himself,— this is the force of repulsion in religion; God is the being who acts in me, with me, through me, upon me, for me, is the principle of my salvation, of my good dispositions and actions, consequently my own good principle and nature,— this is the force of attraction in religion. (54)

Between the attraction and the repulsion—the so-called “systole and diastole” of a mind locked in prayer—there is an audition, and a silent readjustment. Feuerbach’s God fills in here for Harvey’s “regulating soul” (or Coleridge’s “high spiritual instinct”); and to the same prosodic end, inasmuch as repetition gets rewritten as responsiveness. *In me, with me, through me, upon*

me, for me... Each pulsation comes back round to “me” from God, and more importantly (the quiet crux of this rotation, to my ear) the pulse comes back on a different preposition every time—the minor psychosensory gradations, perchance, of a psyche that is gradually expanding into Godly oversight.

Man—this is the mystery of religion—projects his being into objectivity...; he thinks of himself, is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, another being than himself. Thus here. Man is an object to God. (52-3)

Again, this vantage grows by prepositions,

He thinks of himself...to himself...than himself.

...as the object of an object...

unfolding a broader epistemic turn (the phonetics of this sentence helping to bind the contract and exchange of object-nouns and subject-pronouns,)

Man...himself...an object of an object...another...than himself...

...till the Man comes back round secured by the knowledge of (as “an object to”) God. That’s a revelation and a revision—a re-audition, I should say—a self-audit with an interim reception by the Almighty. Thus, Eliot patterns out in prose the cardiovascular dialogues that ensue in Feuerbach’s discussion;⁴² and she picks up along the way the standard dialogic *dialect*, as it were; the postromantic stock exchange of chiasms, phonetic returns and prepositional tradeoffs (so handy, as Latham once discovered, for encoding the special intelligence of the pulses).

⁴²—Two paragraphs down in his text (though we quoted this part first).

We see this technique again in the midcentury writer and physician James Wilkinson, as he recalls the “older” heart of Shakespeare and his ilk—and so resumes the silent dialogue that’s still evolving, gradually, from the Renaissance “soul” through the Victorian Almighty, to (one last thought I’ll throw into this mix of authors) the proto-Freudian unconscious.

Every man is still valued...by [this] heart. Every feeling comes from it and goes to it. Resolve stands in it, or melts away from it; ... it makes the breast by which man touches man, or comes fairly forth from its cage on great occasions, when heart touches heart. The most touching thing in the world, it is the most tangible too; it feels before the fingers, and pulls the words from the speaker’s tongue by an anticipated hearing.⁴³

Silence is divine, they say. (And Freud would answer that the unconscious, the deeper “feeling” in this case, is mainly silent.) In any event, we ought to notice how each “touch” in this rotation seems to incorporate, *without* explicitly restating, that prefatory prepositional exchange: “from [the heart]...to it...in it ...from it.” To this extent it’s less a touch, more like full communion⁴⁴—and not unlike the psychoanalytic conversation we will take up with Freud, next section—as “heart touches heart” (and “man touches man”) and finds the silent sanction and (grammatical) completion of the heart’s unuttered feelings and unfinished thoughts.

We might think here of Keats, in “The Eve of St. Agnes”:

But to her heart, her heart was voluble,

Paining with eloquence her balmy side... (204-5)

⁴³ *The Human Body and its Connection with Man* (1851): 195.

⁴⁴ —Especially considering that Wilkinson’s poet stands in for the human spirit, “that Artist Man...who really dwells now in the physical man as a soul,” as he explained in a letter to Henry James (father of the novelist). See Clement John Wilkinson’s *Memoir* (1911): 81.

Or Christina Rossetti, as quoted above:

I will lift my heart to Thy Heart,
Thy Heart sole resting-place for mine...

And the heart always answers—for the predicate, if nothing else in these well-rounded but admittedly uninformative sentences. Wilkinson says it “pulls the words”; I say it has preempted them summarily, by a sleight of prepositions and a shuffle of pronouns, a quiet exchange with almost no verbal overhead.

[M]an touches man...heart touches heart... (Wilkinson)

...deep out of the author’s heart of hearts...deep...into ours... (Carlyle)

...in me, with me, through me, upon me, for me... (Feuerbach)

The pulse travels far in Victorian letters (as we have found in Tyndall’s cosmic physics and Wheatstone’s telegraphic engineering) but the dialogue is, as ever, close and covert. “To her heart,” and to her heart *alone*, “her heart was voluble,” as Keats would have it. One heart conveys, one is entrusted with the secret intelligence of the soul or (what’s more likely in Keats) the unconscious. According to Alan Richardson,

The first ‘heart’ here [in Keats] seems to figure a sensibility only partly available to consciousness; it fully understands the native language of the second, more purely physical heart, but the painful quality of its eloquence seems more psychological than physical, the effect of her struggle to keep the surprising intensity of her erotic excitement out of full awareness. (134)

In this all-but-clinical process, one “heart” has effectively to play the physician and analyst (the latter increasingly, as we make our way to Freud’s end of the canon) to the other. Remember Latham, intercepting the pulses (“a more delicate test of something wrong within a man *than his own consciousness*”) then responding in kind, with taps and knocks and sympathetic palpitations. To answer a pulse before it struggles into cognizance, to rejoin the stimulus (as Richardson suggests) before it breaks through to “full awareness”; this was the semi-divine inspiration that merged a broad century of physicians, poets, and metrical theorists.

Coleridge was predictive, then, with his “quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited,” of questions raised and resolved in advance of proper “consciousness” (207); Carlyle as well, with his sublime-subliminal rotations to and from the hearts of poet-heroes. Out of the “deep”...and right back again. The pulse is one more way to talk across, I should say around, our cognitive and linguistic limitations. But therein lies the difference too: the pulse talks *roundly*, dialogically, and more informedly than any other rhythm we’ve considered so far in the chapter. This is the subset of return that incorporates, by rights, a measure of responsiveness—a tacit readjustment, in the manner of Harvey and Coleridge, from the reflex to the resolution, the all-embracing cosmic concordance—the kind of rhythmic *overreach* that is, yet, no less attuned than ever to the *undergirding* unconscious of Romantic and Victorian science and letters.

Harvey’s pulse found its way out to the Spheres, as Coleridgean meter became the work of the “high spiritual instinct”—with every bit as much “instinct” as spirit, in that godly poetic unity. And rhythm itself, so often made to feel the grip of unknowing, thus finds inflections of a greater, if still mysterious, intelligence.

IV

Ultimately this was an opening for psychoanalysis. See how Freud writes himself onto the intelligent, “receiving” end of the pulsation or *oscillation*:

To put it in a formula: [the Analyst] must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone. Just as the receiver converts back into sound-waves the *electric oscillations* in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor’s unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient’s free associations. (XII.115-6; my italics)

Freud invokes a long tradition of psychophysical “oscillations,” culminating in Herbert Spencer (1864)⁴⁵ but incipient a good hundred years earlier, with David Hartley’s medullary vibrations and “vibratiuncles”—the early inklings of a nervous system Keats was mastering in his early med-school days, which his predecessors Wordsworth and Coleridge had been steadily contemplating for some time (the latter to reject, ultimately, by the time he got to writing the *Biographia*⁴⁶). Still, I am inclined to say that Freud’s allegiance follows on his grammar—a silent-speaking conversation-cum-chiasmus we should recognize from his predecessors in the cardiovascular vein—

⁴⁵ “[A]nalysis proves...that the mental state...is decomposable into rapid oscillations” or “mental undulations,” or periodicities of energy and mood (240, 242).

⁴⁶ For a fuller treatment of Coleridge’s evolving attitude toward Hartley and the associationist school, see Alan Richardson’s chapter on the same (“Coleridge and the new unconscious,” 39-65). For Wordsworth’s psychological poetics, see the following chapter in that volume (“A beating mind: Wordsworth’s poetics and the ‘science of feelings,’” 66-92).

He must *adjust himself* to the patient as a telephone receiver is *adjusted* to the transmitting microphone...

Reception and “adjustment” (there’s our coronary keyword) turn fast into reciprocation. True to Harveyan (Keatsian, Coleridgean) form,

Just as the receiver converts *back into sound-waves* the electric oscillations...which were *set up by sound waves*,

so the doctor’s *unconscious* is able, from the derivatives *of the unconscious* which are communicated to him, *to reconstruct that unconscious*

Freud was deep—deeper than his readers tend to recognize—in the signifying praxis of the pulses. But here I defer, again, to Roland Barthes. Behind the telephonic “oscillation,” he claims, there is an active, performative flex-and-release (*fort-da*) whereby the child learns the rhythm of his mother’s reappearances—and incorporates the “sign” in all its cyclical fullness. Here is that crucial passage from Barthes’s essay on “Listening”:

Let us imagine this child listening for noises which can tell him of the mother’s desired return: he is in the first stage of listening, that of indices; but when he stops directly supervising the appearance of the index and begins miming its regular return himself, he is making the awaited index into a sign: he shifts to the second stage of listening, which is that of meaning: what is listened for is no longer the *possible* (...the object of desire which occurs without warning), it is the *secret*: that which, concealed in reality, can reach human consciousness only through a code.... (249)

You'll hear that semiotic strain at certain points in P.M. Latham:

the frequency of the pulse begins earlier and abides longer, and runs up to higher degrees; ...or *to look through the sign to the thing signified*, the sympathy of the nervous system and the trial to the powers of life are now felt sooner (II.550)

the frequent pulse, as the accompaniment of disease, is never without a meaning; and...its *meaning is always the same in kind* (II.545; my italics throughout)

That the sign is a *recurrence*—a singular persistence which requires our even attention through the silences and gaps—is a lesson Freud might just as well have absorbed from the annals of Victorian cardiology. I'd like to say, however improbably, that he'd learned from that fictional cardiologist in his own line: Ezra Jennings from Collins' *The Moonstone*, who wondered *avant la lettre* if a patient's amnesia might not be deciphered like his heartbeat.

I admitted the rapidity of the pulse, but I also pointed to its alarming feebleness as indicating an exhausted condition of the system, and as showing a plain necessity for the administration of stimulants...I made a second attempt to appeal to the plain, undeniably plain, evidence of the pulse. Its rapidity was unchecked, and its feebleness had increased. ...I administered half a tumbler-full [...] (372-3)

And meanwhile, Jennings starts the work for which he has been far better known to psychoanalytic posterity,

tak[ing] down the patient's "wanderings", exactly as they fell from his lips... leaving large spaces between the broken phrases...I filled in each blank space on the paper, with what the words or phrases on either side of it suggested to me as

the speaker's meaning; altering over and over again...occupied in this way many vacant and anxious hours... (375)

Thus filling in the blanks as it were (the “intermittent[ces],” the “interval of suspense”: 373) in his long medical attendance. Behind those prose revisions (“over and over again”) we should discern the tense recesses and reassessments that are the very rhythm of the cardiovascular case-study. In Latham especially, we will find a comparable tendency to verbal recurrence:

[The remedy] did its work upon the disease *well, very well*. But it would have done its work upon the whole, *better, much better*, if, in carrying off the disease, it had not left the pulse as *frequent or more frequent* than when the inflammation was present and progressive. (II. 549)

But *hour after hour* passed away, and she *still lived*. Days and nights, even five days and five nights, between Tuesday and Sunday, passed away, and she *still lived*. ...The pulse was *sometimes perceptible, and sometimes not*... (II. 536; my italics throughout)

And Barthes would say *this* was the birth of modern psychoanalysis: in the slow registration of hours and pulses, those small turns of grammar (“much better...more frequent...sometimes and sometimes not”) whereby the sign is indeed a recurrence, the symptom recognized and rounded into narrative being.

I will venture, on Barthes's premises, that to put a pulse behind Freud's oscillation is to comprehend the hermeneutic, therapeutic, ultimately psychoanalytic work that had been

developing in Victorian rhythm, particularly the binary rhythm which was so much their standard. Thus in Carlyle:

I felt as if in great haste; to do I saw not what. ...*Ach Gott!* I was **even, once for all, a Son of Time.** (SR 120)

His iambic *fort-da* (as it were) tries to reconcile the gaps of time and space, and existential perception.

Ach Gott! His whole **heart and soul and life** were **hers**, but **never had he named** it **Love**: existence was all a Feeling, not yet shaped into a Thought. (SR 112)

Honour to **you**, ye **nameless great and greatest ones**, ye **long-forgotten brave!**
(PP 133)

I've placed these passages beside Latham's once already in this Chapter (Section III). But now, I am inclined to press down harder on this parallel—to suggest that Carlyle is working (like Latham) by close conjunctions and recalibrations, toward the goal *that will be Jennings's*. Viz. a hidden thought, a silent voice; or in the present contexts (*Past and Present*, above all in *The French Revolution*) the muted martyrdoms of history.

Her **Trial** was **like the rest**; for **Plots**, for **Plots**. (FR II.391)

...the **chorus is worn out**;—farewell for **evermore**, ye **Girondins**. (II.328)

There is a piecemeal recognitive redemption packed into this pulse—a graduated auscultation, à la Barthes and Jennings—against the silence and the noise, the false inflections that have so far

worked against the truer hearts and pulses of this history. Consider the lead-up to the second passage above:

Bareheaded, hands bound...: so fare the eloquent of France; bemurmured, beshouted. To the shouts of *Vive la République*, some of them keep answering with counter-shouts of *Vive la République*. Others, as Brissot, sit sunk in silence. At the foot of the scaffold they again strike up, with appropriate variations, the Hymn of the Marseillaise. Such an act of music; conceive it well! The yet Living chant there; the chorus so rapidly wearing weak! Samson's axe is rapid; one head per minute, or little less. The chorus is wearing weak; the chorus is worn *out*;—farewell for evermore, ye Girondins. Te-Deum Fauchet has become silent; Valazé's dead head is lopped: the sickle of the Guillotine has reaped the Girondins all away. (II.328)

Let's just home in on the refrain: “with **appropriate variations**, the **Hymn** of the **Marseillaise**...” There is a strong suggestion of anapests—especially if you roll out a good French “r” for the “Marseillaise” (with a little extra push from Carlyle's Scotch brogue): “The **Hymn** of the **Marseillaise**...”

The **yet** Living **chant** there; the **chorus** so **rapidly wearing weak**...The **chorus** is **wearing weak**...

Though they strike up in anapests, they always “wear” down to their iambic pulses. (It's a labored transition, if your ear wants (as mine) to keep two slacks between “wearing” and “weak”; thus)

The **yet** Living **chant** there; the **chorus** so **rapidly wear**[X]ing **weak!**

The **chorus** is **wear**[X]ing **weak**...

But now it appears they have settled their iambic footing:

...the **chorus** is worn *out* [.]

And Carlyle's italics confirm this new measure, something akin to blank verse:

...the **chorus** is worn *out*; farewell for **evermore**, ye **Girondins**.

Just as Carlyle said (five chapters sooner when the Girondins first saw their fate), “This revolutionary Te-Deum has in itself something mournful and bodeful, however briskly played” (II.307). It was a heart-song, after all;⁴⁷ and having recovered the pulse (the downbeat, through all those march-time variations), Carlyle has identified the same unspoken protest, the same raging, now broken heart which got the Nation singing in the first place. “If when the oak stands...you know that its heart is sound, it is not so with the man; how much less with the Society, with the Nation of men!” (I.30). A good physician tracks the symptoms⁴⁸ through their quiet—iambic—persistence.

Before we say “case solved,” however, let us consider the alternative: scanning the last chorus, like its forerunners, in anapests.

...the **chorus** is **worn** [X X] *out*.

⁴⁷ “...the grim music of [Marseillaise] hearts” (II.92)

⁴⁸ “[W]hat seems pertinent to note here, there is a stillness...the symptom of imminent downfall” (I.30).

It's an easy trap on first reading, before we've learned to scan against the grain of prior choruses. But until we have shifted our footing and jiggled our stresses, promoted the auxiliary ("is") and demoted the main verb ("wearing/worn"), and thus rerun the refrain in new iambic feet—

The **chorus is wear-**

[*versus*]

the **chorus is worn...**

—until we've let go the anapest, we'll get one syllable surprised into doing the work of three. "[T]he **chorus is worn [X X] out; farewell for evermore, ye Girondins.**" It's an iamb with a stutter, a palpable cardiac murmur that is of course the essence of this march (inspired by "inarticulate" Marseillaise hearts (II.84, 92) and haunted by a chorus of hearts now deceased).

It is, no less, the brief satisfaction of an on-running polemic in poetry and prose and (not least) in mid-Victorian cardiology. "[M]en's watches agree better together than their perceptions," as Latham said (II.522). The fictional Jennings as well: "We differed entirely in the conclusions which we drew from the patient's pulse. The two [local] doctors, arguing from the rapidity of the beat...I admitted the rapidity of the pulse, but also pointed to its alarming feebleness" (372). This will be more relevant than first appears. Beyond the fact of Carlyle's ongoing reliance on a cardiovascular tradition that was, indeed, never stronger than in this book (his first and signal contribution to Victorian historiography and prose-prosody alike); even beyond his career-long correspondence with *the* Victorian writer of the heart (Tennyson), and his sporadic but no less crucial correspondence with such cardiac physicians as James Wilkinson (whom we've dealt with at the end of Section IV); there is one fact remaining in the books, one more correspondence actually, that will up the ante on this pulse which Carlyle has been at such

great pains to capture for our hearing. One voice, I should say, that was threatening to lose itself in every slip of verse translation.

Goethe, in a word. He is a fleeting character in Carlyle's *Revolution*. His verses are the epigraphic stamp on all three volumes—as his writings had been Carlyle's effective entrée, as translator, to British letters so many years ago. More on the epigraphs, anon. But let's start out with the available evidence that Carlyle had actually been worried, for the greater part of a decade already, at having written the wrong metrics onto Goethe's beat—specifically, the famous poem “Kennst du das Land.” He had made one attempt at translation back in 1824 (or earlier, since there are two undated manuscripts); but he kept up his sporadic efforts through another five decades and as many additional versions, most or all of them failed by his own estimate. “[S]tiff and laboured” (1824); “Another of the same” (MS2); “which is worst?” (MS1).⁴⁹ Consider the “Zitronen” in the opening line—

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn...

—which Carlyle translated as “citrons” in MS1, “fresh citrons” in MS2, “lemon-trees” in 1824 and then “citron-apples” in 1839 and 1842. None of these matches the cadence of Goethe's “Zitronen,” though the second manuscript comes close, if we subordinate the adjective to the noun: “fresh **citrons**.” But even here, Carlyle was feeling a contrary pattern—

Knowst thou the **land** where the **fresh** citrons **bloom**...

—a trisyllabic foot (dactylic in some lines, anapestic in most) that is far better served by the “lemon-trees” he substituted in 1824:

⁴⁹ Carlyle's manuscript variations, his comments on them, and the publication history of the poem are provided by Tarr and McClelland, in their explanatory notes on the same (84, 206-7). I will venture that this was the start of Carlyle's iambic-anapestic debates in the Girondins death-waltz.

Knowst thou the **land** where the **lemon-trees bloom**...

That's not far from Goethe's first line:

Kennst du das **Land**, wo die Zitronen **blühn**...

But Goethe makes plain his iambic (pentameter) intentions:

Im **dunklen Laub** die **Goldorangen glühn**,
Ein **sanfter Wind** vom **blauen Himmel weht**,
Die **Myrte still** und **hoch** der **Lorbeer steht?** (2-4)

Carlyle has settled, meanwhile, for anapestic tetrameter:

Where the **gold** orange⁵⁰ **glows** in the **deep** thicket's **gloom**?
Where a **wind** ever **soft** from the **blue** heaven **blows**,
And the **groves** are of **myrtle** and **laurel** and **rose**?

Eventually Carlyle thought better of it. Thus, in the final published translation (1874, though he'd produced a similar translation in 1842):

Knowst thou the land where lemon-trees do bloom,⁵¹
And oranges like gold in leafy gloom;
A gentle wind from deep blue heaven blows,
The my[r]tle thick, and high the laurel grows?

⁵⁰ This is hyphenated in MS2 ("gold-orange") which to my ear confirms the anapestic ratio of two slacks per stress.

⁵¹ I'm observing Carlyle's indentation of this first line.

This is much more Goethe's iambic cadence. And Carlyle also knows, by now, to allow for those small but frequent trochaic inversions:

Kennst du es **wohl**? (5)

Know'st thou it, **then**?

Möcht ich mit **dir**, o **mein** Geliebter, **zieh**n! (7)

O my **belov'd** one, **I** with **thee** would **go**!

But there is manuscript evidence that at one point Carlyle had been struggling to keep even these lines strictly iambic. "Dost **know** it **well**? ... With **thee** would **I** my **loved** one **go**." I can imagine it was about here that Carlyle was thinking this really wouldn't do, either.

. He did it anyway: in both manuscript versions, and in the publication from 1824, Carlyle has pressed the same iamb (or dactyl or anapest) through the entirety of the poem, all twenty-one lines of it. That he tried three times over and in two different feet—never to his own satisfaction—tells me he rather overwrote than overlooked the growing pressure of alternatives:

Dost' **know** the **land** where **fresh** the **citrons bloom**...

Know'st thou the **land** where the **lemon-trees bloom**?

Behind Carlyle's iambs, there is that shadow of a dactylic (anapestic) doubt which shall come to a crisis in—yes, as promised—the march of the Girondins.

The **yet** Living **chant** there; the **chorus** so **rapidly wear**[X]ing **weak**...

The **chorus** is **wear**[X]ing **weak**...

the **chorus** is **worn** [X X] **out**...

—or—

the **chorus is worn *out***; farewell for **evermore**, ye **Girondins**.

Carlyle's crisis of verse-translation is now his prose advantage. And I will venture that he'd learned by trial and error that the very labor of recognition (those red-herring dactyls and trochees and anapests) were exactly what he needed for his pulses: to round an iamb past its bounds, in effect to reach the silent-speaking spaces (my X marks the spot) *between* the slack and stress, the systole and diastole that work underground throughout this history.

We're coming to a point that will be easier to prove through Carlyle's elegiac distichs—again, burdensomely translated from Goethe—comprising the three-volume epigraphs to the *French Revolution*. Notice how these turn on the palpable weight of their unscripted beats (I've marked the obvious caesurae, as they strike my ear).

To this stithy I liken the land,[X] the hammer its ruler,

And the people that plate, [X] beaten between them that writhes:

Woe to the plate, [X] when nothing but wilful bruises on bruises

Hit it at random; and made, [X] cometh no Kettle to view! (I.xxxiii)

Walls I can see tumbled down, [X] walls I see also a-building;

Here sit prisoners, [X] there likewise do prisoners sit:

Is the world, then, itself a huge prison?⁵² Free only the madman,

His chains knitting still up into some graceful festoon? (I.302)

No Apostle-of-Liberty much to my heart ever found I;

⁵² The caesura I leave optional in this case, as the anapestic meter runs on smoothly without a break on the question mark.

License, [X] each for himself, [X] this was at bottom their want.

Liberator of many! first dare to be Servant of many:

What a business is that,⁵³ wouldst thou know it, go try!” (II.122)⁵⁴

Goethe’s distich is a descendant of the classical hexameter-pentameter elegiac couplet,⁵⁵ usually in dactyls, though Goethe might swap in a line of anapests or amphibrachs.⁵⁶ Either way, it’s a trisyllabic mold which often requires a caesura to help fill a beat—or two—where the syllables themselves don’t measure up. Thus, in the first epigram:

Diesem **Amboss** **vergleich**’ ich das **Land**, [X] den **Hammer** dem **Herrscher**,
Und dem **Volke** das **Blech**, [X X] **das** in der **Mitte** sich **krümmt**.

And in Carlyle’s translation:

To this **stithy** I **liken** the **land**, [X] the **hammer** its **ruler**,
And the **people** that **plate**, [X X] **beaten** **between** them that **writhes**

Sometimes the caesura takes a full stress (*and* a slack), as in the third epigram:⁵⁷

Hier **Gefangene**, [✓ X] dort **auch** der **Gefangenen** **viel**.

Here sit **prisoners**, [✓ X] there **likewise** do **prisoners** **sit**...

⁵³ Although the syntax allows for it, again I find the meter does not actually require a pause upon the punctuation here.

⁵⁴ Carlyle’s translations are provided in the Explanatory Notes of the Fielding-Sorensen edition (ii.455-6, 479, 492).

⁵⁵ This tradition is well summarized by L.R. Lind, in his translated edition of Goethe’s *Roman Elegies* and *Venetian Epigrams* (see especially his introduction to the *Elegies*: pp. 10, 20-4).

⁵⁶ The only strict rule in Goethe is an ABAB alternation of stress-slack/slack-stress endings (e.g. above: **Herrscher**/sich **krümmt**). You will see Carlyle preserves the same pattern.

⁵⁷ From Goethe’s *Weissagungen des Bakis*. The first epigram is from the *Venezianische Epigramme*.

Interestingly, the heaviest pauses seem to fall where (just three times in Carlyle, though it's more frequent in Goethe) there is no punctuation to make up the missing beats—where the stresses get rammed up against each other without the interim relaxation of a slack-beat, a verbal particle, a comma, or even a line-break.

Woe to the **plate**, when **nothing** but *wilful* **bruises** on **bruises**. (Epigraph 1.3)

... Free only the madman,

His chains knitting still up ...? (2.3-4; my italics)

Note the audible willfulness of those “wilful bruises,” a brief trochaic *résistance*, as it were, to the established dactylic order; or the palpable weight of the “chains” pressed kinkedly up against the adjacent stress of the participle, “**knitting**.” We linger as in expectation of that missing third syllable (“**wil**[X]ful”)—just as we might effectively bear the chains until we’ve counted off those (two!) missing interim slacks: “**chains** [X X] **knitting**...”

I’d like to say this is the microscopic measure of Carlyle’s overarching interest in the silent side of History—the unreckoned pains and undercurrent pulses, the dying hearts, the unuttered wrongs and inarticulable injustices—and the inexorable labors of one peasant with an axe to grind. (Recall, “The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes...”: I.29) Thus, from the silent years which made the guillotine, Carlyle builds toward the steady-tolling (still inaudible) hours and minutes which count off the storming of the Bastille—

How the great Bastille Clock ticks (inaudible) in its Inner Court there, at its ease, hour after hour, as if nothing special, for it or the world, were passing! (I.202).

—persisting through the famed September Massacres, four years later—

The tocsin is pealing its loudest, the clocks inaudibly striking *Three*, when poor Abbé Sicard, with some thirty other Nonjurant Priests...fare along the streets...towards the Prison of the Abbaye. (II.148; Carlyle's italics)

—and percolating through the count and counterpoint, the silent protest as it were, of human hearts and pulses. Thus the politician Bailly, following fast upon the Girondins (and no less “wearily”),

is led through the streets; howling Populace covering him with curses, with mud... *Silent*, unpitied, sits the innocent old man... The Guillotine...is there set up again...; *pulse after pulse still counting* itself out in the old man's *weary heart*. For *hours long*; amid curses and bitter frost-rain! (II.340-1; my italics)

We will learn of “*dumb hearts making wail*, with signs, with wild gestures” (when the Abbé Sicard, “who could teach the Deaf and Dumb,” is carted off for execution: II.138). Or the Demoiselle Théroigne: “Such brownlocked Figure did flutter, and *inarticulately jabber and gesticulate*, little able to *speak*⁵⁸ the obscure meaning it had, through some segment of the Eighteenth Century of Time. She disappears here from the Revolution and Public History for evermore” (II.280). The famous Stanislas-Marie Maillard is worth a nod, apparently, for having led the women's march to Versailles, on the strength of that common pulse which (again) lies on

⁵⁸ Carlyle's italics on her “speaking”; all other emphases are mine in this paragraph.

the other side of language: “Maillard, *beating rhythmic*, with sharp ran-tan...A small nucleus of Order is round his drum... Their *inarticulate frenzy* thou must...render into articulate words” (I.265-6). Likewise the balladeers of France, trying to make rhythmic sense of an unspeakable loss,⁵⁹ viz. the death of Mirabeau: “Hoarse rhythmic threnodies come also from the throats of ballad-singers; are sold on grey-white paper at a *sou* each” (I.449).

All this, and plenty more, is in the background of our Girondin choristers, as they fade from song to silence, from a march to a pulse to a dead-stop. “Wearing” and “worn out”—or rather,

wear[X]ing...worn[XX] out

with a caesura in the middle—in effect to *measure* out their final footsteps out of life. All the while they’re catching hold (upon a vocal catch) of something that’s been in the works since Carlyle tried to rescue, in translation, the voice that had just died (five years before the *Revolution*, incidentally) out of our appreciative but not-quite-comprehending ears.⁶⁰ “Such things were; such things are; and they go on in silence peaceably,” as Carlyle finally observed about this Revolution,

—and Sansculottisms follow them. History, looking back over this France through long times, ...when dumb Drudgery staggered up to its King’s Palace, and in wide expanse of sallow faces, squalor and winged raggedness, presented hieroglyphically its Petition of Grievances; and for answer got hanged...,—
confesses mournfully that there is no period to be met with, in which the general

⁵⁹ “So speaks, and cackles manifold, the Sorrow of France; *wailing articulately, inarticulately*, as it can, that a Sovereign Man is snatched away” (I.450; my italics).

⁶⁰ Goethe had died in in 1832.

Twenty-five Millions of France suffered *less* than in this period which they name the Reign of Terror! But it was not the Dumb Millions that suffered here; it was the Speaking Thousands, and Hundreds and Units; who shrieked and published . . . : that is the grand peculiarity. The frightfullest Births of Time are never the loud-speaking ones, for these soon die; they are the silent ones, which can live from century to century! (II.443)

Carlyle finds himself adjusting, in meter as in moral, for those silences that went too long uncounted in our histories. This was the business of the metrist, as defined by Coleridge. Roland Barthes would have it that Carlyle has fulfilled the great prerogative of rhythm itself, filling in the blanks, the inarticulate-interstitial spots of time and language and (since it is, indeed, Carlyle we are addressing, and Freud we are suggesting in the end) plumbing the depths of an unconsciousness that is still, and with increasing urgency throughout this century, asking to be fathomed.

CHAPTER TWO

RECOVERY ACTS: TENNYSON'S ELEGIAC PREMONITIONS OF THE FREUDIAN *FORT-DA*

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
 A use in measured language lies;
 The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (V.5-8)

I

Meter's psychology has grown a shade more complex—and cardiology's therapeutic interventions on the brain, that much more urgent—within the five-or-so decades that will get us from Romanticism's first experiments in 1798 to their major Victorian results, in Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850).

But that's effectively three claims in one, to be unpacked piecemeal (and in reverse order) through this next chapter of the dissertation. Thus, our final destination is as always rhythm's psychological and ultimately psychoanalytic work, à la Freud and, in this case, his major literary-critical scions in Tennyson studies. Our main route (through the interim pre-Freudian sections of this chapter) will take us further down the post-Renaissance intercultural highway we've mapped out in Chapter One, from Harvey's pulse through Romanticism's neuro-cardiovascular variations (Keats and Coleridge are once more of help, as we pursue the fine-tuned schisms and elisions that come out of that welding) to the psychoanalytic praxis where we left off. *Viz.* the therapeutic systole-diastole—Barthes's oscillation, Freud's fort-da—which was

that century's main coping stratagem against the epistemic fractures, and the no-less-pressing fractured voices, it had inherited on nearly every front of life, history, and literature.

But O for the touch of a vanished hand,

And the sound of a voice that is still!⁶¹

We'll call this the quiet underside of Tennyson's "unquiet heart and brain"; the near-traumatic rupture he would "measure" out persistently, lugubriously (much like Carlyle after Goethe, in this aspect) right across the elegiac length of his career. And one more silence, incidentally, plumps out our growing list of postromantic metrical caesurae, heart murmurs and sub-vocal catches, documentary gaps and unspoken/inarticulable grievances.

For this alone on Death I *wreak*

The wrath that garners in my *heart*;

He put our lives so far apart

We cannot *hear each other speak*. (*IM LXXXII.13-6*; my italics)

"Heartbreak" is the silent keyword—acrostically encrypted, but never fully verbalized—as Tennyson tries and fails again to resurrect the dead man's voice. Or in an earlier lyric (notice the assonantal recall at the close of this unwilling farewell) "I, falling on his faithful heart, / Would breathing through his lips impart / The life that almost dies in me...The *words* that are not *heard* again" (XVIII.20; my italics).⁶²

What makes this elegy specifically Romantic is at best summarized as a compound clause of under/overwriting signals on these same prosodic grounds, the predetermining literary

⁶¹ "Break, break, break" (11-2).

⁶² I am indebted to Alan Sinfield's observation on the *words/heard* pairing in this line, a willful ("hyperbolic") echoing which he says "helps to communicate the poet's yearning for his friend's voice" (164).

influences and retroactive critical inferences that I shall do my best to unravel in the pages just ahead. Chronology will give us some beginning leverage, *In Memoriam* just happening to coincide, almost to the month, with Wordsworth's death on April 23rd of 1850, in effect to confirm its author's rites as proper heir to Wordsworth's Laurels. (Tennyson ascended formally to the Poet Laureateship in November of that same year.) His equal, and probably greater, indebtedness to Keats and Shelley was a fact well known since Tennyson's friend Hallam, in the famous 1831 review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), announced him as the next among the "poets of sensation": Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson favorably aligned, in Hallam's estimate, against the sometimes overly contrived poetics of Wordsworthian "reflection" (91, 93). I'll venture straight away—making room for Freud's ideas down the line—that Hallam's distinction here won't be as important, ultimately, as the broadened psychopoetic spectrum Tennyson had available to him as he finessed his later elegiac mode. Lyrics XVIII and LXXXII (above) provided just a soupçon of the modulated silences and retroactive (re)sonances, the tacit underhand recoveries as well, that must have contributed some ways to the surprising (obliquely Wordsworthian) comforts of this mourning anthem. Lyric XCV is another ready case in point, the "shocks" and "blows of Death" matched to the equalizing "measures" Wordsworth had proclaimed were meter's main responsibility; the Keatsian "all at once" joined to the retrospective Wordsworthian "at last"; the youthful-mortal wound of separation finding remedy within the (adding another of our major rhetoricians to the mix, to be revisited in Section II) Coleridgean chiasmus of eternal souls.

So, word by word, and line by line,

The dead man touched me from the past,

And all at once it seemed at last

The living soul was flashed *on mine*,

And mine in this was wound, and whirled

 About empyreal heights of thought,

 And came on that which is, and caught

The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out

The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—

The blows of Death. At length my trance

Was cancelled, stricken through with doubt. (33-44; my italics)

Keats's impact is, if anywhere, in the dashed hemistichs (it is so tempting to describe them as the half-lives) of this latter quatrain. Give just a moment's glance across that poet's numerous experiments in broken steps and vocal catches,⁶³ fractured lifelines and apocalyptic bars for nothing (the sonnet to Haydon, stopping three full iambs short upon the "pulses... / Of mighty workings—"64); comparing certain passages in Tennyson, the early works especially, when Keats's influence was arguably strongest. The blank-verse miniature epic "Armageddon" (1824) tries again for the effect of pulses withdrawn to the inner ear, on the other side of nothingness ("There was a beating in the atmosphere, / An undefinable pulsation [X] / Inaudible to outward sense...": IV.29-30); and some years later, "Whispers" (1833) gives some indication as to how this might bear out in elegy: "Something of pain—of bliss—of Love, / But what, were hard to say. [X]" (11-2). Two hyphens followed by a full-stop loss for words (one of two truncated

⁶³ An especially playful but striking instance is Keats's "Song [Hush, hush, tread softly!]," whose anapestic tetrameter often requires a literal rest upon the commas (e.g. the opening lines: "Hush, hush, [X] tread softly! hush, hush, [X] my dear...") thus effectively enacting the imperative *sshhhh*.

⁶⁴ "Addressed to the Same" (1816). This is the second of two sonnets dedicated to Keats's friend, the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon. The ellipsis was apparently put in at Haydon's bidding. (Cox 56n)

lines within this otherwise tetrameter poem⁶⁵) conveys the seismic impact of a grief too early, or too deep (subliminal or sublingual, whatever you want to call it on this side of the Keatsian sublime) for the normal processual syntax that the elegy officially entails.

All this is to say that Hallam's assessment turned out right in ways he could not have known in 1831, when he extolled the greater influence of Romanticism's second generation: "men who were born poets, lived poets, and went poets to their untimely graves" (93). By his own untimely death in 1833, at the age of twenty-two (some years short of Keats *and* Shelley⁶⁶) Hallam reinvigorates a certain underlying mortal-adolescent strain that will carry on, undiminished, well into Tennyson's poetic adulthood. You could say this loss was the caesura that sustained, even as it defied the maturing, modulating poetics of Wordsworthian reflection. "Oh sorrow, then can sorrow wane? / O grief, can grief be changed to less?.../ No—" Tennyson falls back upon an earlier prognosis, "No—mixt with all this mystic frame, / Her deep relations are the same, / But with long use her tears are dry" (LXVIII.15-20). This recalls the "deep" psychology (and the gelid-liquid imagery) of lyric IV:

Something it is which thou hast lost,
Some pleasure from thine early years.
Break, thou *deep vase of chilling tears*,
That grief hath shaken into frost! (9-12; my italics)

Frozen, I might add, by the shockwaves of this inarticulable "something" we've been tracing backward through the formative years of Tennyson's oeuvre. Of course, there will be other ways

⁶⁵ I defer in part to Yopie Prins's suggestive reading of the shorter three-beat lines, and the "whispered" meaning that comes through in effect (99-100).

⁶⁶ Keats died at twenty-five (1795-1821); Shelley just a few months shy of thirty (1792-1822).

to talk about the fractural formation—and the sub-zero derivation—of a poetry whose emotional language might best be described as a compacted synthesis of every seismic undercurrent on the books. From the tidal pressures of the opening lyrics *In Memoriam* descends, on a consonantal slide around the quarter mark,⁶⁷ into the strata of Lyellian geology (“The moanings of the *homeless sea*, / *The sound of streams that swift or slow* / Draw down the *Æonian hills*, and sow / The dust of continents to be”: XXXV.9-12; my italics). Darwin’s mysteries usher in half way,⁶⁸ as effectively the dark twin to the secrets of the Church (and the epochal-rhythmic counterpoint, for our main purposes, to a liturgy that’s redirecting gradually from God to Nature throughout these lyrics).

Are God and Nature then at strife,

That Nature lends such evil dreams?

So careful of the type she seems,

So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere

Her secret meaning in her deeds

And finding that of fifty seeds

She often brings but one to bear... (LV.5-10)

O life as futile, then, as frail!

O for thy voice to soothe and bless!

What hope of answer, or redress?

Behind the veil, behind the veil. (LVI.25-8; my italics)

⁶⁷ Starting in lyric XXXIV and continuing through the above-quoted lyric XXXV.

⁶⁸ Specifically, Lyrics LIV through LVI.

We'll think of Keble's God (although it might be God's opponent Nature, "red in tooth and claw": LVI.15) concealed within these measured, generational installments of a greater plan that takes millennia to reveal itself in full. So, upon the "altar-stairs" which lead toward, *not* to arrive at, God's all-knowing vision:

I *falter* where I firmly trod,
And *falling* with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's *altar-stairs*
That slope through darkness up to God,
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and *call*
To what I feel is Lord of *all*,
And faintly trust the larger hope. (LV.13-20; my italics)

Keble's legacy unfolds two ways, potentially, across this middle passage of Tennyson's epic journey back from doubt to faith (we think). There is, of course, the processional iambic footing (in the same tetrameter-quatrain installments readers would remember from the early poems of the *Christian Year*⁶⁹); undergirded by assent, *i.e.* the literal assonantal ascension whereby the speaker's *falling* rises, as it were, on trust ("To what I feel is Lord of *all*"). Note as well the quiet anagrammatical-180 from the "*slope through darkness*" (the aspirant but inconclusive ending of the penultimate quatrain) to the "*larger hope*" that is at once the destination and the promise of some Divine (or at very least, a verbal/chiastic) return.

⁶⁹ Specifically, the first two poems: "Morning" and "Evening."

The alternative, to land us back on our main subterranean route (if we take seriously the going line of certain Freudian interpreters, M.H. Abrams et al.) emerged one section earlier: “So runs my dream: but what am I? / An infant crying in the night: / An infant crying for the light: / And with no language but a cry” (LIV.17-20). This looks like faith’s decay into the Ur-sprache that was always, Abrams has reminded us, the other and perhaps the dominant half of Keble’s theory of poetics. “[I]n whatever nation you find a native poetry,” Keble explained in one of the famous Oxford lectures, “its origin has always been the desire to *relieve thoughts that could not be controlled*; whether the poems were secular or sacred; whether it was grief or joy, love or ambition by which men were stirred” (I.65-6; my italics). Another sublayer to be added, then, half way between Romantic cognitive philology and proto-Freudian psychology (with occasional openings onto the psychobiographic line that’s more than ever pressing when we get to Tennyson), to thicken out the rhythmic underground we’re tracing back through Tennyson’s main predecessors in Romantic and also Tractarian and liturgical verse. Remember Abrams’s take on Keble’s views (above), a “radical, proto-Freudian theory, which conceives literature as disguised wish-fulfillment, serving the artist as a way back from incipient neurosis” (147). Freud’s other scions (Seamus Perry, among the sharper contributors in recent Tennyson studies) have kept this possibility alive within the lyrics we’ve been looking at: the “pervasive ‘i’ rhyme,” Perry claims, the echoing “cry,” bespeaks an “unshifably forlorn...‘I,’” even whispers of some “violence / A long way back,” to borrow a phrase which Perry quotes from Philip Larkin (32). He notes the Laureate’s unhappy, and quite possibly abused, childhood years: psychobiographical fodder which Perry treats cautiously but which nonetheless appears to confirm W.H. Auden’s notorious but many-ways inescapable verdict, that “[i]n no other English

poet of comparable rank does the bulk of his work seem so clearly to be inspired by some single and probably very early experience” (xv).

Melancholia, or traumatic repetition, or (not least) the ever-popular “return of the repressed” are some ways critics have been making psychological sense out of the shimmered emergencies—the repeated I’s and cries, the assonantal gropings in the dark, the liturgical-processional footsteps on the stratigraphic quick sands—of this compound-rhythmic throughline which effectively *began* (Aidan Day helps to remind us) with the suggestions of Lyellian geology. “The representation of the humanly desolating temporal vistas of geological science, the portrayal of the endless slippage involved in physical erosion, dramatizes the principle that all forms on earth, whether geological or poetic, are subject to erasure. It dramatizes simultaneously the *undermining of any sense of a sustaining ground of love* in the world” (82; my italics). Thus, keeping an ear to the alliterative drones and sibilants of lyric XXXV—quoted partially above, and I provide an extra stanza here—

The *moanings* of the *homeless sea*,
The *sound* of *streams* that *swift* or *slow*
Draw down the *Æonian* hills, *and* *sow*
The dust of *continents* to be;

And Love would *answer* with a *sigh*,
‘The *sound* of that forgetful *shore*
Will change *my sweetness more and more*,
Half-dead to *know* that I *shall* die’ (XXXV.9-16)

—Day finds Tennyson’s verse reaching, finally, to that “abject space beyond words,” where psychology cohabits with the agnostic scientific zeitgeist in a poetry that ultimately “lies not at the verbal surface...but in areas subliminally intimated which exceed artistic patterning” (83).

There is a pattern, mind you, even beyond the basic alliterative persistencies which Day holds out somewhere beyond the reach of art. (*That*, incidentally, is one presumption we will be confronting later on; in Section IV especially, which attempts the unpacking of this prosodic underhand whereby Tennyson’s “art” rebrands itself as “abject” or “unconscious” or “repressed,” as Day and his psychoanalytic cohort would have it.⁷⁰) Respecting Keble’s legacy in Tennyson—Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s, no less—means revisiting the trodden underground of Romantic/liturgical verse-praxis, where deep psychology sinks (deeper) into the common rhythm that is sometimes called “unconscious,” sometimes Divine. It means as well (giving a heads-up on the scientific grounds we will traverse *en route*, via Coleridge and Keats) weighing in the compound pressures of post-Cartesian neurology and Harveyan cardiology, *and* (this brings us back to Keble, in an oblique way) keeping the greater cosmic/epistemic balance of Renaissance physiological tradition at large.

Psychobiography—that other science we can’t very well avoid—absorbs some part, though I’ve been warning that it doesn’t cover all, of the prosodic fodder we’re confronting in this chapter. Some things do apparently return point blank, unmodulated and unreckoned with, as if to confirm this poem’s “melancholic” branding (in Freud’s sense, opposed to the progressive work that “mourning” would entail). The repeated crying I’s of lyric LIV, for instance, the paratactic grammar of the poet’s call to God (LV, above) and the alliterative sprezzatura which might, after all, be one more writing of the mental stutter Tennyson admits

⁷⁰ “The return of the repressed” shows up some pages later in Day’s essay (91).

throughout this elegy;⁷¹ these are the local demonstrations of a certain predetermined circularity which begins with the *ABBA* rhyme-scheme and extends into poem's broader chronological recurrences, e.g. the anniversaries of a life now deceased, the Christmases that mark Hallam's absence every year, the returns to Cambridge and the near-pathological exactitude of the memories shared there.

Hallam's death was in itself—taken on purely biographical grounds—the latest iteration on a morbid line that might include the passing of Tennyson's father (1831), the madness of his brother Edward (institutionalized in 1833), the melancholic derangement of his brothers Charles and Septimus (Tennyson feared, perhaps not unjustifiably, that he was next). Following the route of certain critics—T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden,⁷² among those who would sustain Freud's definition of the “melancholic” as the victim of specifically unconscious or, in any case, un-outgrown distresses—we might append the signal traumas of Tennyson's youth, his Aunt Bourne's “violent” Calvinism coupled with his father's no-less-violent alcoholism.⁷³ “Emotions of early childhood are hard to express,” Auden conjectures, “because the original events associated with them are not remembered” (xvi). James Richardson elaborates, in language more like Tennyson's (quoting directly from the poet's first articulation,⁷⁴ possibly, of the *déjà vu* that hovers over so much of his later oeuvre) the idea of an art that doesn't properly “remember” and, accordingly, does not forget its psychogenetic origins.

⁷¹ See for instance the suggestively tongue-tripping “froth of thought” in lyric LII. (“My words are only words, and moved / Upon the topmost froth of thought”: 3-4.)

⁷² I deal primarily with Auden in this chapter, sufficing it (I hope) to drop in Eliot's famous praise-cum-diagnostic of the poet: “Tennyson is the great master of metric as well as of melancholia; I do not think any poet in English has ever had a finer ear for vowel sound, as well as a subtler feeling for some moods of anguish” (337).

⁷³ See especially Ricks's biography of Tennyson (12, 56).

⁷⁴ This is the 1832 Sonnet, “To— [As when with downcast eyes]” (Ricks 179), which describes how “with downcast eyes we muse and brood, / And ebb into a former life, or seem / To lapse far back in some confused dream / To states of *mystical similitude*” (1-4; my italics). The second quotation below (re. Tennyson's “immeasurable sadness”) come from the Epigrams of 1868-74 (Ricks 361, XII.11).

Many shocks of “mystical similitude” might be found to spring from such unhappy origins did not their trails vanish as we traced them toward the unconscious. Tennyson, because he was a guilty soul, and because his failure to distinguish moments must have meant that more of them were lost to the vague unknown, was probably more vulnerable than most to the beckoning of lost originals. *The unfinished past repeatedly imposes itself on his present, trying to end*, but all he clearly knows of it is unfocused regret and objectless desire, or, as he himself put it, “immeasurable sadness.” (83; my italics)

Déjà vu is possibly the best that modern neuroscience has to offer on the peculiar longevity—and the inordinate critical interest in—the childhood-Tennyson who was every bit as much the father to the man-poet as his forerunner Wordsworth could desire.⁷⁵ *Psychogenetics* is another term I’ve thrown into the mix, if only to remind us how Freud’s developmental model (“An Infantile Neurosis,” et al.) potentially folds back into the scientific underground which runs—more directly than I may convey within the limits of this chapter—from Darwinian phylogeny and its partner paradigm, Lyellian geology, through the finer neuroanatomical substrata Freud devised upon the strength of those two sciences combined.

There is something deeper, in any event, and very likely earlier than childhood in that “single and probably very early experience” Auden can’t pin down in Tennyson’s pre-scriptorial years; or in Perry’s (Larkin’s) unnamed “violence a long way back.” Christopher Ricks, probably the finest and most circumspect of Tennyson’s literary biographers to date (“the early

⁷⁵ Richardson modulates, but reinforces the popular “infantile” strain when he remarks on Tennyson’s “virginal” self-image (“untouched, unshaped, unchanged by a life he has only dimly lived”: 82). Neuroscience also makes a fleeting appearance in Richardson’s account of the Tennysonian *déjà vu*: “Something like this, involving a lag in the transfer of information between the two hemispheres of the brain, has in fact been proposed by neurophysiologists as an explanation of the common phenomenon” (83).

experience was not for Tennyson a single one,” he rejoins, “and it lasted long past the nursery; it was...a snarled web of family feud, bitterness, genteel poverty” (1) and a myriad of other factors which extended well into the poet’s adulthood) cannot finally resist the indications of a certain Freudian prenatal/phylogenetic determinism. “The cry from out the dawning of his life, the mother weeping: these [quoted from a later poem in Tennyson’s oeuvre⁷⁶] were the core of his childhood and youth” (1). And still more tellingly—responding to this poet’s purported tendency to wander through the churchyard, often “near wishing to be beneath it,” by his wife’s report much later on⁷⁷—Ricks conjectures,

Wishing to be dead: the wish—neither simply yielded to, nor simply repudiated—is at the heart of many of Tennyson’s best poems. To understand the heart of Tennyson (in both senses) it is necessary to go back to the days before he ever wished he were dead. Would it be too grim to say that this means before he was born? (2)

Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (as Freud would say); Ricks’s point being that the poet either inherited some part of his father’s suicidal tendencies, or else was made very early miserable by his father’s equal violence toward everybody else. The “mother’s weeping” is explainable that way; not so much the child’s, as Tennyson transcribes it, the “dawning” cry which seems to resonate from birth, or (Ricks insinuates, although he doesn’t press a possibility that might be just a shade too Freudian for comfort) a *double*-dawning into consciousness and thanatos at once.

⁷⁶ “The Coming of Arthur” (1869), the first part of his epic *Idylls of the King* (published in twelve books in 1885).

⁷⁷ In her memoirs, “Written For My Sons,” Emily explains how: “Many a time has your father gone out in the dark and cast himself on a grave in the little churchyard near wishing to be beneath it” (quoted in Ricks, p.2).

I won't dismiss this without at first acknowledging a phenomenon that seems unavoidable when we come down to the metrics of Tennyson's elegy;⁷⁸ viz. the shifting perceptual doorways of the newborn *or*, in Hallam's case, the soul new-borne unto death.

How fares it with the happy dead?

For here the man is more and more;

But he forgets the days before

God shut the doorways of his head. (*IM XLIV.1-4*)

"Closing of the skull after babyhood," Tennyson explains in a side-note to this lyric. "The dead after this life may have no remembrance of life, like the living babe who forgets the time before the sutures of the skull are closed, yet the living babe grows in knowledge, and though the remembrance of his earliest days has vanished, *yet with his increasing knowledge there comes a dreamy vision of what has been*" (Ricks 902n.; my italics). Déjà vu, as Richardson would have it; the "shocks of 'mystical similitude'" adding to the mundane intergenerational resemblances Ricks has suggested (the shocks of plain genetic similarity, say, between the poet and his father, reapplied here to the phylogenetic revolutions of the soul before and after death): to these possibilities I would add Freud's vision of the child's *fort-da*, played out in epochal time and across death's divide, shifted to the language of midcentury craniology but tempered still, as we have seen in Chapter 1 and will again in later sections of the present, to the basic binary rotations of the heart and pulse.

All this is to suggest, at least, how psychoanalysis might be allowed to coexist in Tennyson with the established biorhythmic (ontogenetic or phylogenetic, but more precisely

⁷⁸ To be explored at greater length in Section III of this chapter.

cardiovascular and/or neurological) periodicities I've been endeavoring to insinuate back into the canon leading up to Freud. But let's take just a moment to rebuild this point from the ground, or *underground*, as it were, one notch deeper than psychobiography's habitual twentieth-century terrain. Ricks is very nearly there, I think, when he reads Auden's diagnosis ("melancholia") back into the deeper phylogenetic periodicities Tennyson had, himself, quite thoroughly if reluctantly imbibed from Lyell's scientific writings.⁷⁹ If anything, that's deeper than this dissertation aims to go; upward a level but still undergirding and encompassing this so-called "melancholic" relapsing, or Richardson's *déjà vu*, or Day's "return of the repressed" (the list goes on, as we'll find out in Section III) there is a common postromantic legacy that gets us quite directly from the poet to the psychoanalyst. A common *pulse*, as I've suggested at the outset, in every circumspective sense of the term—anchored at one end in Harvey's intuitions, modified by Descartes and his followers through the next three centuries of Renaissance and Romantic neuroscience, and renegotiated at every turn by meter's Godly and/or therapeutic agents on both sides of the Anglo-German canon.

II

Wordsworth's interventionism sets the tone of what remains to be accomplished in the final century through Tennyson and Freud: "For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion." Poetry is Wordsworth's answer to the stress of modern life (war and revolution, population growth, urban densification, and the incumbent information overload that is one lesser benefit of the new mass media technology, "a craving for

⁷⁹ Ricks notes elsewhere that the poet had in fact read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in 1837, when the elegy was still in its early draft-stages (*Poems* 910n).

extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies”: 395).

Meter is his answer to the problem that’s not stated here—the greater epistemic challenge that’s writ large, but tacitly, across the project of the lyrical ballads—

namely to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement...to follow the *fluxes and reflexes of the mind* when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature (394)

to determine...in what manner language and the human mind *act and re-act* on each other (391)

What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as *acting and re-acting* upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this...with certain *convictions, intuitions, and deductions* which by habit becomes of the nature of *intuitions*; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and *sensations* [...] (402; my italics throughout)

Poetry may be, as Wordsworth finally declares, “the first and last of all knowledge...*immortal as the heart of man*” (403; my italics). What Coleridge discerned in this, however—responding two decades later in the *Biographia Literaria*—was meter’s last attempt to keep the order of the Heart against the growing pressure of the nerves. We’ll home in presently on this suggestively neurotic patterning of actions and reactions (“fluxes and reflexes...convictions, intuitions, deductions and sensations,” and so on).

Take this as a foretaste, for now, of meter's challenge in a century that is tilting increasingly in favor of the nerves, and—by extension, making our way back to the psychobiographical premises of Tennyson's elegy—a trauma which apparently defies the very calculus of the Renaissance (Harveyan) cosmos.

But who shall so forecast the years
And find in loss a gain to match?
Or reach a hand through time to catch
The far-off interest of tears? (I.5-8)

Keble's liturgy might be the answer here; or (resuming with some others on the list from Chapter One) the Tractarian poetics we've traced forward to Christina Rossetti, or the Feuerbachian systole and diastole that were one reluctant atheist's attempt (translated by another, George Eliot) to map the brainwaves undergirding Christian thought. Arguably these were, indeed, so many efforts to sustain the epistemic balance Tennyson is taxed to reestablish after Hallam's death. According to Alice Meynell, looking back upon the canon from the distance of 1901, the finer poets understood—and no one better, Meynell finds, than Tennyson's forerunners of the "sensation" school⁸⁰—

that presence does not exist without absence; they knew that what is just upon its flight of farewell is already on its long path of return. They knew that what is approaching to the very touch is already hastening toward departure... They knew that the flux is equal to the reflux; that to interrupt with unlawful recurrences, out

⁸⁰ Hallam's term, of course; not Meynell's.

of time, is to weaken the impulse of onset and retreat; the sweep of impetus and movement. (3)

She quotes from Shelley: “O wind, / If winter comes [,] can spring be far behind?” And we might add Tennyson at certain points, equilibrating (when his mood allows it) the inevitable passage of the final years with Hallam:

The path by which we train did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Through four sweet years *arose and fell*,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow:
And we with singing cheered the way,
And, crowned with all the season lent,
From *April on to April* went,
And glad at heart from *May to May*... (XXII.1-8; my italics)

Add to this the greater epochal periodicities Tennyson is striving constantly to get his head around (and his Victorians readers with him, no doubt, since Lyell’s published revelations in 1837):

There *rolls the deep* where grew the tree.
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long *street roars*, hath been
The *stillness* of the central sea.
The *hills* are shadows, and they flow

From form to form, and nothing stands;

They melt like mist, the solid lands,

Like clouds they shape themselves and go. (CXXIII.1-8; my italics)

Tennyson's security is, as always, in the finer print; the paradoxical continuity of "forms" re-formed, for instance, upon a preposition that already spells their link (note the anagram, "*From form to form*"); in effect to confirm the subtler trans-epochal resonances of the foregoing lines, the "rolling deep" and (its sonic-mirror image, two lines and several millennia down) the "roaring street"; followed by the "*stillness*" of the sea that is resumed in its turn (*still there*, as it were) directly underneath that line, "The *hills* are shadows..."

The final quatrain makes good on these tacit promissory notes of cosmic equilibrium:

"But in my spirit will I dwell, / And dream my dream, and hold it true; / For though my lips may breathe adieu, / I cannot think the thing farewell" (9-12). *To God*, as Tennyson would have it, is not gone. His perseverant if shaken Anglicanism is so far in line with Meynell's undergirding Catholicism, the one inflected by Lyell, the other by Copernicus and Kepler;⁸¹ either way finding in science what the faithful soul must ultimately comprehend, what the *heart* (if I might anticipate Meynell's concluding point) already knows, "that what is just upon its flight of farewell is already on its long path of return." Her next example comes from Shakespeare:

Juliet will not receive a vow spoken in invocation of the moon; but Juliet did not live to know that love itself has tidal times—lapses and ebbs which are due to the metrical rule of the interior heart, but which the lover vainly and unkindly attributes to some outward variation in the beloved. (5)

⁸¹ Kepler is cited on p.2 of Meynell's essay; Copernicus I take for granted as his predecessor in heliocentric physics, of whose system Kepler was (roughly a century later) one of the earliest defenders.

Cosmology folds back into the pulses once again in this, our latest, variation on Harveyan biorhythmic themes: a compound-metaphoric turning of the tide from love's "inconstant moon" (lunar gravity joined, in Meynell's expanded scientific vision, to the circadian rhythms of life and love across the biosphere⁸²) through the controlling modulations of the heart.

That is one half of the equation. A closer look reveals another term has quietly been transferred to the heart—

the *metrical* rule of the interior heart

—in effect to prove the pulses of (I should say, to prove *upon* the pulses) what's so far been argued out under the banner of psychology. "If life is not always poetical, it is at least metrical" Meynell explained at the top—and directly she homes in on a psychogenic "metric" whose regulating to-and-fro should strike a familiar chord.

Periodicity rules over the mental experience of man according to the path and orbit of his thoughts...What the mind suffered last week, or last year, it does not suffer now; but it will suffer again next week or next year. Happiness is not a matter of events; it depends upon the tides of the mind. (1)

"Oh sorrow, then can sorrow wane?" asked Tennyson, characteristically in the thick of this humoral catch-22. "O grief, can grief be changed to less? / O last regret, regret can die!" (LXXVIII.15-7). It requires somewhat more work to demonstrate that Tennyson, effectively

⁸² See also Meynell's concluding observation, responding again to Juliet's remark, to the effect that "life will wax and wane," and mankind must learn, accordingly, to "wake and rest in its phases, knowing that they are ruled by the law that commands all things—a sun's revolutions and the rhythmic pangs of maternity" (6).

anticipating Meynell, is writing out his mental calculus upon the—sometimes absent—constant of the heart. We should begin, then, with a common metaphor: a “tide” which turns again between the nautical and cardiovascular and (I might insinuate one other variable from Tennyson’s Romantic predecessors) *neurological* currencies that are all potentially available when this poet puts his mental boat to sea. Or a “lake” in this particular instance, rippled out from Meynell’s counterbalanced tides of the mind,⁸³ extending through the known but still uncharted “fluxes and refluxes” of the brain (Wordsworth’s term, fleetingly picked up later on in Meynell’s essay⁸⁴). Pushing Meynell’s logic past its metric, losing *heart* in every sense, Tennyson quite nearly overturns his mental boat.

—All the while, sustaining melancholia’s predictions that the poet hasn’t moved a fundamental inch. Consider the first, and calmer, half of this extended lyric:

What words are these have fallen from me?

Can calm despair and wild unrest

Be tenants of a single breast,

Or sorrow such a changeling be?

Or doth she only seem to take

The touch of change in calm or storm;

But knows no more of transient form

In her deep self, than some dead lake

That holds the shadow of a lark

⁸³ Meynell’s phrase, in the passage just above (“Happiness....depends upon the tides of the mind”).

⁸⁴ As quoted from Wordsworth, above (p.84 of this chapter). Meynell’s variations (“they knew the flux is equal to the reflux”) shows up in the quotation on p.85.

Hung in the shadow of a heaven? (XVI.1-10)

The melancholic undertow, let's say, for Wordsworth's "overflow" of higher thoughts; and the darker face to the "spontaneous" impressioning which Wordsworth made the basis of his art, "[like] some dead lake / That holds the shadow of a lark / Hung in the shadow of a heaven."
Or—Tennyson considers the alternative,

Or has the shock, so harshly given,
Confused me like the unhappy bark

That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
And staggers blindly ere she sink?

And stunned me from my power to think

And all my knowledge of myself [?] (11-6)

Possibly it takes a trauma to convey this speaker's fundamental, some ways desperate indebtedness to the poetical recovery acts Wordsworth instated fifty years before in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Tennyson, inasmuch as he's succumbed to Wordsworth's "overflow" of feelings is, naturally, returned to Wordsworth's grounding poetic premises. "[M]etre obeys certain laws," as Wordsworth claimed, "to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain" (to which Meynell would append, no doubt, some observation on the "certainty" which returns on Wordsworth's phrasing in its root sense,⁸⁵ like the self-fulfilling prophecy of those "certain laws" he dimly if assuredly submitted at the top). If I might carry out this brief Wordsworthian detour a moment longer:

⁸⁵ As in "fixed" or "assured" (as opposed to the "selected, particularized" sense implied by Wordsworth's "certain laws").

Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind *association* [note this imported keyword of the contemporary neurosciences] of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life...all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. (404, 407; my italics)

Wordsworth's "associationism" is one more way to anchor Tennyson within the practiced art of psychosensory returns: microscopically borne out (in the passage just quoted) in prose which performs, in very deed, the phenomenon it's laboring to establish in our brains, the "*perception perpetually renewed...resembling...imperceptibly...*" And there is just a fleeting premonition of the Freudian fort-da, as the "perception" wraps around to "imperceptible" effect (an effect which Tennyson will have ample use for later on, in coping with the absence of his late friend Hallam).

Getting back to the lyric at hand, with Tennyson effectively testing Wordsworth's syntax on the tide of his misfortunes, and the turn of his own brain: "stunned...from my power to think, / And all my knowledge of myself," in the final quatrain Tennyson ponders whether he has become

that delirious man

Whose fancy fuses old and new,

And flashes into false and true,

And mingles all without a plan? (XVI.17-20)

Trauma is writ large across this stuttering, alliterative recurrence of “false flashes” and “fancied fusions” (Wordsworthian association thus effectively one-upped *and* undone by Tennysonian phonetic chain-reactionism). And the “melancholic” school, Auden et al., might draw attention to the characteristically strung-out parataxis,⁸⁶ tied at one end (as always) to the “deeper, deader” self of Tennysonian psychology. Recall, one stanza before his mental boat begins to flounder, the doubt lest sorrow

only seem to take

The touch of change in calm or storm;

But knows no more of transient form

In her deep self, than some dead lake [?] (5-9; my italics)

Psychobiography would accept this as, just what the poet says it is, “dead” center of his life and art: the wounded chasm that is, *pace* Meynell, one exception in the cosmic order of remediations and returns. I am accordingly, as always, inclined to muddy the waters—or rather, in keeping with our going metaphor, to turn the tide that

knows no more of transient form

In her deep self, than some dead lake.

These lines “know” more of their own form, naturally, than they are willing to declare up front. An exquisite assonantal modulation (knows no more...) conspires toward a “form” which, *true* to form, delivers on its promise one line down—in the very dynamic equilibrium this poet keeps

⁸⁶ In the last two stanzas especially: “And staggers blindly ere she sink? / And stunned me...And all my knowledge...And made me...And flashes into false and true, / And mingles all...” (14-20).

insisting is beyond him. Obviously, there is the closing A-rhyme of a “lake” which does, at least in the prosodic sense, “*take* / The touch of change in calm or storm.” And in the quiet interim—

In her *deep* self, than some *dead* lake

—call this the dynamic resolution, as opposed to the “dead” ending readers have, I think, too readily accepted as this poem’s keynote. I will expand on this distinction in a moment, but let’s take in another passage, two stanzas down, on “the unhappy bark,”

That strikes by night a craggy shelf,

And staggers blindly ere she sink?

And stunned me from my power to think

And all my knowledge of myself [.]

Notice the vertical alliterative stacking of “strikes” (13) “staggers” (14) and “stunned” (15); the first two words conjoined, again, by the interim progression of internal rhymes: “*strikes by night a craggy shelf...staggers.*” These verse fragments (to paraphrase from Eliot) has Tennyson shored up against his mental ruins. Which is to say these well-wrought phonetic minutiae are so much preparation for the total recall, albeit by negation, in the closing line. “[S]tunned...from my power to think / And all my *knowledge of myself.*” A backward glance reveals these two keywords have just washed down from the earlier quatrain (“*knows no more...In her deep self*”) only now to convene within a single line; gathered and declared at last, reflexively, as *mine*, after the vague third-person revelations under sorrow’s aegis.

We could say, hopefully with as much nautical as poetic veracity, that the wreckage is by rites the grounding of the speaker’s self (shored upon the “shelf” which is, in turn, projected

from the “self” that’s at rock bottom of this quatrain). Or we might haul this lyric back to Tennyson’s forerunner of the Lake School. “For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: *but* [recall this crucial, less-oft-quoted half of Wordsworth’s famous dictum] by a man, who...had also *thought long and deeply*” (393; my italics). “Deep” psychology was anchorage, in Wordsworth’s understanding of the term: the subsurface juncture of deep thought and deeper feeling;⁸⁷ the axis, and the metric, whereon the brain’s activities were gripped into expression. But a sideline is in order here, as I have so far been treading gingerly on the proverbial “depths” of Tennyson’s oeuvre: wanting on one hand to press down further, even, to the cultural foundations of his so-called deep psychology or psychosis, and on the other hand (by the same rites) to allow that Tennyson, the artist, was engaged in an ongoing just-above-the-surface calibration of the grounds (or the waters, let’s say) of these same underlying issues. That means taking in the personal *and* cultural zeitgeist of a loss which coincides, in Tennyson’s panoramic elegiac vision, with the compounded fluctuations of Victorian agnosticism, post-renaissance empiricism (Wordsworth continues to remind us that this is where the heart confronts the burgeoning “fluxes and refluxes” of Cartesian neuroscience) and the stealthily ongoing epochal ravages of Darwinian and Lyellian evolution.

Homing in a notch, I will submit again that Tennyson, seeking a return upon his losses—in an age when psychology, specifically, is taking up the slack on a more-than-ever scientifically questionable Almighty—falls inevitably back on the assurances of God’s second-hand within the post-renaissance episteme. The *pulse*, you will recall, was Wordsworth’s answer to the tides and times of modern life. It is also, as we are about to discover, literally one half of the “associationist” psychology he inherited from Hartley and the post-Cartesian theorists at large.

⁸⁷ The “deeper passions,” in Wordsworth’s phrase (quoted on p.91).

Ultimately this should help to elucidate, at somewhat higher scientific resolution, the well-reported therapeutic purchase of the Tennysonian elegiac quatrain. That, and the well-wrought iamb at the heart of it—indubitably the best-known pulse to issue from the postromantic canon, arguably their best approximation of the post-traumatic coping measure par excellence, *viz.* the Freudian fort-da which I reserve for closer inspection in Section III. In the meantime, Wordsworth will get us there on surer ground—paved forth and appropriately complicated by Coleridge, who will close out of the present section of the chapter—through a brief tour of the Cartesian/Associationist school as told, and as measured, by the poets. Drawing primarily on David Hartley’s 1749 *Observations on Man*, Wordsworth gets things rolling on a psychopoetic program that is by equal rites subliminal, or tidally undercurrent, and at the same time fully circumspect, syntactically if not always consciously controlled:

For our continued *influxes of feeling* are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the *impulses of those habits*, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated. (393-4; my italics)

There is more here than we can properly address with anything approaching Wordsworth's (much less Hartley's) scientific and philosophical rigor. My emphasis devolves, first, on the deluge that is quietly sustained throughout this passage; absorbed from metaphor (the poetic "overflow of feelings") into the standard neuroscientific jargon of "influxes" and "impulses" and (again, one paragraph down) the "fluxes and refluxes of the mind" (394). At the same time—more importantly, all told—consider the underwriting syntax of this passage.

For our continued influxes *of feeling* are modified and directed by our *thoughts*,
which are indeed the representatives *of all our past feelings*...

We've seen a few of these neurological chiasms in Keats and Coleridge, and their Victorian contemporaries in science and letters (Huxley and Green, and later on Freud, with his famous telephonic "oscillations" to and from unconscious minds); and to approximately the same effect. The *feeling* is quietly secured and transformed, here, into the epistemic leverage—"influxed" at one end of this phrase, and at the other end re-anchored in the cognitive security of *feelings past*—the literal bracketing of the "thought" that's at the center of this process. That is the first step in the gradual negotiation of a mental "habit,"

... till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such *habits of mind* will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the *impulses of those habits*, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments...in some degree enlighten[ing]...

And another "impulse" has meanwhile been rounded into rhythm; joined to the "habit" that comes back in this compounded sentence with all the (momentary) assurance of a psychological, or at the very least a verbal return ("*habits of mind...impulses of those habits*").

I have framed this passage as a demonstration-by-syntax of what cognitive security inheres in Art—and of what artistic symmetry inheres in neuroscience, still, in these early optimistic days of the Lake School generation. One later instance out of Wordsworth (another syntactic brainwave, as it were) brings us infinitesimally nearer that project’s legacy in Tennyson. Wordsworth derives the gratifications of “metrical language,” from

the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of *similitude in dissimilitude*. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder...and upon the accuracy with which *similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude* are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. (406-7)

Remember Coleridge on meter’s mimetic work, “the interfusion of the *same* throughout the *radically different*, or of the *different* throughout a base *radically the same*” (212; my italics). Same idea, same chiasmus; built on the same essentially neuroscientific premises. (This comes shortly after Coleridge’s detailed calibrations of, say, “spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose” comprising poetic meter, or the “aggregate influence” of semi-conscious stimuli transacted between the author and his readers: 206.) What brings this ultimately nearer Tennyson is Coleridge’s concomitant awareness of the brain *sans* poetic intervention. Consider this virtuoso rundown-demonstration of psychology’s decay since Aristotle, who

speaks of no successive particles propagating motion like billiard balls (as Hobbes); nor of nervous or animal spirits, where inanimate and irrational solids are thawed down and distilled, or filtrated by ascension, into living and intelligent fluids that *etch and re-etch* engravings on the brain (as the followers of Des

Cartes and the humoral pathologists in general); nor of an *oscillating ether* which was to effect the same service for the nerves of the brain...(as Hartley teaches)—nor finally (with yet more recent dreamers) of chemical compositions by *elective affinity*, or of an *electric light* at once the immediate object and the ultimate organ of inward vision, which rises to the brain like an Aurora borealis, and there disporting in various shapes (as *the balance of plus and minus, or negative and positive, is destroyed or re-established*) images out both past and present. (59; my italics)

“Harmonious adjustment” is the word that comes to mind from Coleridge’s later chapters on the poet—and the missing verbal traction, to my ear, in this extended post-Aristotelian rotation,

thawed down...filtrated by ascension

plus and minus...negative and positive...past and present...destroyed or re-established

And it will be instructive to watch Coleridge trying to reconstruct the “balance” that is poetry’s main intervention—a somewhat harder task than Wordsworth had apparently predicted—against the psychedelic ups and downs and alliterative-asonantal roundabouts of the associative process, “down and *distilled*, or *filtrated*...inanimate, irrational... living and intelligent...elective and electric... etched and re-etched,” and so on *ad infinitum*.

Ultimately Coleridge is sounding his way back toward the coalescing, comprehensive spirit that’s been fading out of science and philosophy since Aristotle. “The *general law* of association...the *common condition* under which all exciting causes act and in which they may be

generalized, according to Aristotle is this. Ideas by having been together acquire a power of recalling each other; or *every partial representation awakes the total representation of which it has been a part*" (59; my italics). Notice, briefly, the chiasmus which insinuates some element of resurrected order in this currency of mental "parts"—

every partial representation...awakes the total representation...a part

—and the totalizing vision at the core of it. Coleridge's famous dictum on the Poet comes to mind again;⁸⁸ viz. "the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment, and thus establishing the principle that [another chiastic variation on the same essential/partial themes] all the *parts* of an *organized* whole must be assimilated to the *more* important and essential *parts*" (211). Add to this (what we have just quoted) the mimetic "interfusion of the *same* throughout the radically *different*, or of the *different* throughout a base radically the *same*" (212); and underlying this equation, another and very extensive paragraph of psycho-poetic levelling. Some chapters sooner in the *Biographia* (our final passage on this brief psychological detour, prelude to the metrics of the heart) Coleridge provides this matchless rhetorical performance:

For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet...brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the term

⁸⁸ As quoted in the Introduction to this dissertation (p. 4). The italics are mine throughout this passage.

imagination. This power...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of *sameness, with difference*; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order... (173-4; my italics)

We might observe—before quoting the balance of this paragraph—how Coleridge builds his case toward the differential equation, as it were, that he projected at the start of it. I’m looking at the combined effects of syntax and phonetics in the second sentence above: “The poet...brings the whole soul of man into *activity*, with the *subordination* of its *faculties* to each other, *according* to their relative worth and *dignity*.” The mental “faculties” have effectively signed on, as if by tacit alliterative-asonantal compact, to the operating whole.

activity, with the subordination of its faculties.. according....

subordination...according

All the while these same faculties sustain the soul’s “activity,” and by rights of rhyme, their “dignity,” in effect to secure the soul (and a sentence “whole”) across three separate clausal units.⁸⁹ Thus Coleridge entrains our ears against, and well in advance of, the psychosensory differences he’s laying down for poetry to overcome: the alliterative pairing of “freshness” and “familiarity,” the paradoxical but anagrammatically-practicable “novelty” of “old objects.”⁹⁰ And another opposition that is settled into “order” on a latent rhyme,

⁸⁹ That is, three rhyme-words distributed across as many clauses. Not to waylay the exposition with a point that may be too obvious for demonstration, I will provide it here: “The poet...brings the whole soul of man into *activity*, with the subordination of its *faculties* to each other, according to their relative worth and *dignity*.”

⁹⁰ Four letters in the first word (“*novelty*”) are dispersed between the *ol* of “old” and the *e[c]t* of “objects.”

a *more* than usual state of emotion, with *more* than usual *order*

These are the first returns on an affective exchange which Coleridge is driving home, on every level, through the remainder of the chapter; resuming with a very subtle sonic-mirror imaging of affect and rationale, “judgement” and “vehement (feeling)” echoing across the nearer juxtaposition of “self-possession” and “enthusiasm”⁹¹ The rest, I trust, speaks for itself:

judgement ever awake and steady *self-possession*, with *enthusiasm* and feeling profound or *vehement*; and while it blends or harmonizes the *natural* and the *artificial*, still subordinates *art* to *nature*; the *manner* to the *matter*; and our *admiration* of the *poet* to our sympathy with the *poetry*. (174; my italics)

And now, a culminating “turn” on the feminized “poetic imagination,” quoted from Sir John Davies’s *Nosce Teipsum* (1599): “Doubtless this could not be, but that she turns / Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange, / As *fire converts to fire* the things it burns.”

And the product is the poem. The poetic form, specifically, which turns on the Romantic double-axes of psychology and soul, or mind and body, the heart and the brain, and (branching off the latter pairing, an epistemic juncture we’re discovering all over again in Coleridge’s scientific and literary moment) post-Renaissance cardiology and pre-Freudian neurology. If “meter” is the middle term, we might say Davies’s poem serves as the symbolic nexus between Coleridge and the man who, for all intents and purposes, gets this centuries-long dialectic rolling. William Harvey, as we’ve remarked in Chapter 1, comes quite uncannily near Coleridge’s system of “harmonious adjustments”—effectively entrusting to the pulses the same bodily-

⁹¹ Beyond the morpheme that the former pairing have in common (*judgement*, *vehement*) I would argue for the assonantal schwas of *judgement* or *vehement*, and the open e’s and alliterative s’s of “self-possession” and “enthusiasm.”

immanent but ultimately cosmic-scale dynamic equilibrium which the Romantics later foisted on the poet. Whether or not the poets were in their turn reading Harvey (I wouldn't put it past the man-of-all-trades Coleridge to have approached this literature, if not at first hand, then through its major reinterpreters in eighteenth-century physiology⁹²) it is also possible that Harvey had consulted Coleridge's source in Davies's poem, which precedes by thirty years his own *De Motu Cordis* (1628).

Be that as it may; Coleridge either retroactively anticipates Harvey's physiological metric, or (a likelier spelling of the same essential point) he reenacts on his own disciplinary grounds a certain pattern that's been showing up at nearly every revelatory turn, and every counteractive *return*, of post-renaissance epistemology.

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! who can tell how all will end? (103)

Very much where it began, as Tennyson suggests in this late poem which, incidentally, was in itself a career-capping return on former premises ("Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," 1886).⁹³ We have seen, and will again at closer range, what the interim seventeen-years' training of his elegiac epic had contributed to the science, or at very least the syntax, that makes a "cosmos" out of chaos—and a literal return upon his loss in Hallam. Suffice it, for now, to say that Tennyson makes one more on our growing list of writers who, like Harvey and Coleridge (Wordsworth, Meynell, Keble and another name to be resumed at this stage, Keats) surveilled the facts and came down on the side of meter.

⁹² The surgeon John Hunter, for example (1728-93): no doubt the exemplar among those we might call Harvey's scions into Coleridge's day.

⁹³ The original "Locksley Hall" was published in 1842.

III

To resume, then, with this chapter's epigraph:

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain. (V.5-8)

The question is, whether Tennyson's narcotic measures are indeed the "numbing" of the pain, or (the near-participial proximity just allows) the numbing pressure of a pain that's receded, at measured intervals, back into the poet's post-traumatic apathy,

numbing pain.

And where, exactly, lies this "pain" that rhymes on one hand with the "brain" but presses its persistent case in "measures" that are unmistakably the motion of the heart—

the **unquiet heart** and **brain**,

...

Like **dull** narcotics, **numbing pain**

—and disappears, the while, somewhere along this poem's labyrinthine interface of veins and valves, capillaries and nerves?

...this electric force, that keeps

A thousand pulses dancing... (CXXV.15-6)

Consider, for starters, that this psychophysiological trauma effectively ups the ante on a game we have, so far, been following through Coleridge—resumed by Tennyson under personal duress—of microscopic metric calibrations back and forth between the shifting centers of the heart and the brain, the nervous system, and a “pulse” that seems to take its information from all systems at once. (A few more instances will help us get a feel for how this translates into the elegiac language of the Victorian poet.)

Lo, as a dove when up she springs,
To bear through Heaven a tale of woe,
Some dolorous message knit below

The wild pulsation of her wings;

Like her I go; I cannot stay;
I leave this mortal ark behind,
A weight of nerves without a mind

...

And forward dart again, and play
About the prow, and back return
To where the body sits, and learn

That I have been an hour away. (XII.1-7, 17-20; my italics)

This “returning” to the self is another, and a more obvious, connection between Tennyson and his forebears in poetic anesthesiology; Coleridge not the least of them. Staying a moment longer, though, with our neural/sanguinary “pulses,”

Be near me when my light is low,
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
And tingle; and the heart is sick,
And all the wheels of Being slow. (L.1-6)

We could say was Tennyson weighing out his metric options on the compound physiological terrain of mid-Victorian medical science. “I **think** we **are** not **wholly brain**,” is his eventual decision; apparently falling back on old iambic premises as he considers in its starker view the Cartesian nightmare of “Magnetic mockeries...only cunning casts in clay” (CXX.2-5). Taking the “pulse” in its extended sense, however, as a *multiply*-embodied throbbing chord of pains and remissions, narcotic lapses and restorative returns—the therapeutic dialogue, as it were, carried out in reflex-time and at microscopic, neuro-cardiovascular resolution—thinking just far enough ahead to see in it one more bodily rendition of Freud’s *fort-da*, we might insinuate this poet back into the overarching, undergirding project he exemplifies at its historic midway point.

Having pursued Harvey’s legacy in Coleridge, and suggested Coleridge’s rhythmic (therapeutic) afterlife in Tennyson, I should solidify this nexus through one more figure who, for all intents and purposes, stands squarely in their midst. Keats—poet-practitioner par excellence, popularly known as Tennyson’s primary forerunner in the “sensation” school—runs accidentally into Coleridge in 1818. Their conversation, as reported later on (or rather dispatched, in Keats’s humorously telegraphic shorthand, to his brother George) should justify itself within this context soon enough.

Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical sensation – Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch –

single and double touch – A dream related – First and second consciousness – the difference explained between will and Volition – so m[any] metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness – Monsters – the Kraken – Mermaids – southey believes in them – southeys belief too much diluted – A Ghost story – Good morning – I heard his voice as he came towards me – I heard it as he moved away – I heard it all the interval – if it may be called so. (Motion 366)

This conversation is uncanny on so many levels (more than we can properly address⁹⁴); only beginning with the suggestively coupled “Nightingales, poetry,” coming back on Keats’s hearing like the prognostication of the poem he must write, in fact, a year and one month later.

My heart aches, and a drowsy *numbness pains*

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past... (“Ode to a Nightingale” 1-4)

This poem predicts, and at the same time goes full circle on, Tennyson’s narcotic measures: the “numbing” of the pain and/or the numbing *pain* which hyperextends into the painful numbing, as Keats would have it, the mental pins and needles of a sleeper who’s been drowsed too long in one position (“a drowsy *numbness pains* / *My sense*”). Take this as you will; Keats must have registered at some point in the course of the conversation which I’d like to say inspired his poem (and by extension, Tennyson’s) that he was speaking to the author of “Kubla Khan” (1798);

⁹⁴ Accordingly I will just mention, with some amusement, the advance-cameo appearance of Tennyson’s 1830 “Kraken.”

famously delivered and, by Coleridge's own account, more than half-lost in the waking intervals of an opium dream.

[T]hough he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had *passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the restoration of the latter*[.]
(Coleridge 296; my italics)

Coleridge's wakening bears out eventually, repeatedly, across the multiply-fractured metaphysical dream sequences of Tennyson's elegy ("At length my trance / Was cancelled, stricken through with doubt": XCV.43-4). Add to that the incumbent "sense of touch" which, as Keats reminded us in Coleridge's words, is always one half of the Romantic dream of absence—

...Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch – single and double touch – A dream related...

—and more than one half of the Victorian dream of death,

So word by word, and line by line,

The dead man touched me from the past... (XCV.33-8)

And in my thoughts with scarce a sigh

I take the pressure of thine hand. (CXIX.11-2)

Let's zoom out a moment—reflecting back upon the shimmering metaphysics we've been following on some level since Carlyle, and revisiting through the cosmically embodied to-and-fro which Harvey tried upon the pulses and which Freud translates, at the other bookend of our

medical and literary history here, to the psychoanalytic conversation of unconscious minds. Scaling back down, as far as imaginatively possible, to the tactile/anesthetic ebb and flow I want to say is Keats's greater legacy in Tennyson—and as always, thinking forward to the rhythmic “oscillation” we will revisit presently, as Tennyson endeavors to transcribe the silent overtones and the equal, painful absence of his late friend's voice—consider again how this accidental conversation of two poets closes off in Keats's rendering.

Good morning – I heard his voice as he came towards me – I heard it as he moved away – I heard it all the interval – if it may be called so.

“Telegraphic” was my term for this, although Freud's telephone might be nearer the mark, as Keats transcribes the oscillating sound waves of a voice that's reached him in real time across impossible distances (bearing in mind Keats's playful reverence⁹⁵ toward the older writer, well established in a literary circle Keats is barely entering at this point). There is perhaps a touch of the uncanny here, given the grotesque and “ghostly” themes of the foregoing conversation;⁹⁶ but the effect most critics would be reading for, if it were Tennyson reporting, is a certain melancholic there-and-back-but-not-gone cycle that is, we are repeatedly reminded by Auden and his cohort, the keynote of his elegy. “Thy voice is on the rolling air...Far off thou art, but ever nigh; / I have thee still, and I rejoice; / I prosper, circled with thy voice...” (CXXX.1, 13-5).

In fact there is a good deal of the uncanny in this too. And besides that, one more Freudian ingredient that's been promised in Tennyson's prosodic mix—to reveal itself across a series of close readings which, taken in against the backdrop and sometimes against the grain of

⁹⁵ See esp. Andrew Motion's parsing of what Keats reports on this exchange (366).

⁹⁶ “Nightmare...Monsters...A Ghost story[.]”

what the psychoanalytic critics have been hearing by and large, should take up the balance of our work in this chapter. Here, to get us started, is the famous semi-revelation of Hallam's voice beyond the grave:

And strangely on the silence broke
The silent-speaking words, and strange
Was love's dumb cry defying change
To test his worth; and strangely spoke
The faith, the vigour... (ll. 25-9)

I will defer to Herbert Tucker⁹⁷ on the “caduceus magic” of these variously-positioned repetitions of the same essential phrase (1988; 372). “Strangely,” in this instance, emerges near the front of the top line, advances to an end-rhyme in the next, skips a line and recedes by a foot—zigzagged across our visual field and, I would suggest, oscillated in and very nearly out of hearing on this poet's finely calibrated, rightward-leaning iambic tetrameter quatrain. Say that Tennyson was amping up in prosody the sonic-brainwaves we just now found Keats trying out in prose: a kind of “fluctuant alertness” (in Tucker's phrase) which enwraps the reader's ear, and his attentions, in an “alternating current of focus and blur, thesis and arsis, message and remission” (Tucker 2010; 122-3).

Freud's *fort-da* is, naturally, where I am going with this—inasmuch as Tennyson deploys these same effects to get around the absence, and very possibly the total silence, of a man who speaks (if he *does* speak) from somewhere beyond the grave. Consider the strategically

⁹⁷ Responding to a comparable pattern in Tennyson's “Come Down, O Maid” (1851). The ensuing observation, on the “fluctuant alertness” of Tennyson's verse, comes out of Tucker's reading of the “The Lotos-Eaters”—arguably the most explicitly narcotic lyric of Tennyson's oeuvre, albeit without the specific elegiac overtones of the present lines from *In Memoriam*.

implanted verbs of utterance (*broke, speaking, spoke*), the first and third positioned on a rhyme, the second retracting midline to a speaking “silence,” holding silence through the middle of the next line—

The *silent*-speaking words, and strange
Was *love's dumb cry* defying change

—the silent words, and the silent (“dumb”) cry shaded just out of hearing, as it were, behind the stronger rhyming resonances of “strangeness” and “change.” So, when the spoken word returns (“strangely”) one line down upon a rhyme that ends, or rather suspends the quatrain on a promissory note of something lasting,

...defying change
To test his worth; and *strangely spoke*

The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell,
On doubts that drive the coward back (27-30)

Tennyson is still working quietly, left-handedly, to sustain the conversation. Notice the voiceover: “love’s dumb cry” becomes the speaking “faith, the vigour.” Spoken by Hallam, or the poet in his own voice? I am inclined to say difference is by now effectively elided—mooted, or at very least *muted* out—upon the shifting vocalic premises we will see much more of in the pages ahead, and well beyond the present lyric. Right here, though, we might observe how this stanzaic to-and-fro plays out next across a fluctuating scale of verbal and vocal exchanges,

spiritual rotations (“flashed on mine, and mine in this was wound, and whirled”); culminating in the inevitable “pulsations” that will fold this conversation back in silence.

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touched me from the past,
And all at once it seemed at last
The living soul was flashed on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirled
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Aeonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
The blows of Death. At length my trance
Was cancelled, stricken through with doubt. (33-44)

This lyric was (recall from Section I) our first foray into the fractured lifeline, inscribed upon the fractional poetics of Tennyson’s forerunner Keats. Going back to the experimental Sonnet to Haydon, for instance,

And other spirits there are standing apart
Upon the forehead of the age to come;
These, these will give the world another heart,

And other pulses. Hear yet not the hum
Of mighty workings?—

Listen awhile ye nations and be dumb. (11-4)

Keats's caesural impact carries but resolves, at last, into the microtonic currencies, *i.e.* the silent-speaking promise of return, which Tennyson could as well have learned from that same poet.

Even when that poet writes in prose. “**I heard his voice** as he came towards me – **I heard it as he moved away** – **I heard it all the interval...**” Keats assumes the same measure on Coleridge as Tennyson on Hallam: “**So word by word, and line by line,...** flashed on **mine**, and **mine in this was wound, and whirled....**”

By now readers have surely “caught on”—two lines down in Tennyson—to the “deep pulsations” which predictably round out this extended game of acoustical/metaphysical *fort-da*. Thinking back on Coleridge and Harvey (and forth again to Barthes) this makes a good place to reemphasize, briefly, that Tennyson's “empyrean” circumnavigation ultimately comes right back down to the basic binary rotation whose prosodic *sine qua non* is, still, the well-tempered iamb. Reversing that claim to fit the major premise of this chapter: Tennyson's iambic heartthrobs disclose the very circumspective balance that's been denied him by his readers, by and large, upon those same prosodic grounds. Funneling in again to that key point where postromantic rhythm joins with proto-Freudian psychotherapeutics, a certain irony is shaping into focus—inasmuch as the Freudian *fort-da*, the rhythmical pre-empting of traumatic loss, begins to complicate and potentially to overwrite the dominant chord of Freudian criticism in Tennyson studies. *Viz.* the invariable cyclicity which “melancholia” technically requires. Repetition is *unconscious* by that logic; artistically unaware in ways that frankly do not tally with the kinds of

programmatically, micromanaged repetitions-with-a-difference we have so far discovered in this poet's oeuvre.

Unless, that is, we take a hint from the “uncanny”—allowing that the repetition comes around with just sufficient “strangeness” not to be recognized up front—and hypothesize on those premises that Tennyson's returns are taken in (read, if not authored) on some half-hearing, semi-comprehending stratum of the *critical* unconscious. James Richardson is a professed case in point, as he grapples with the unplaced assonances of Tennyson's quasi-rhymed “Tears, idle tears” (1847). “The end pauses,” as Richardson finds, “vaguely remembering the beginning,” thus leaving the reader momentarily, uncannily caught out in the same position Richardson will later foist upon the author: “one finishes each line having missed something, having not quite focused” (23). Déjà vu, all over again. Readers have indeed “missed something,” by and large, which—if we can pin this down along the sliding acoustical scale of stresses and slacks, ending rhymes and inner resonances which the *In Memoriam* stanza so exemplarily exploits—possibly affords another clue into the Freudian ideas that have built themselves on Tennyson's own formal grounds.

Closing in one last time on Tennyson—closing gradually *out* of a tradition which turns over, at this point in the dissertation, from the Keatsian “pulse” to the neurological vanguard that has been quietly developing in the background—I should propose up front that readers are discovering in terms of trauma theory what should, by now, reveal the deeper legacy of the psychosomatic “double-timing” which the pulses helped engrain within the post-renaissance consciousness. Dickens is just around the corner at this midcentury juncture: one more prose-prosodic stylist who (like Carlyle) reconstructs on Romantic grounds the proto-Freudian signage which declares its shocks and traumas in the rhythmical minutiae that crop up, incidentally, to

remind us of some fleeting premonition we (might) have picked up somewhere on a page we can't remember anymore. Here, to get this segue started, is another silent-speaking intimation out of Tennyson, thinking back on the belated Arthur Hallam:

But brooding on the dear one dead,
And all he said of things divine,
(And dear to me as sacred wine
To dying lips is all he said) [...] (XXXVII 17-20)

Henry James gently anticipated the psychobiographical critical line—Auden especially—when he remarked of Tennyson's style that "the phrase always seems to me to pause and slowly pivot upon itself, or at most to move backward" (171). Ricks concurs, in effect, that "the *In Memoriam* stanza (*abba*) is especially suited to turning round rather than going forward" (to which observation he appends a crucial side-jab, *pace* Auden,⁹⁸ at those who would infer from this "that somehow he is stuck there in a half-complacent, half-morbid tangle from which we know—know so uncomplacently—that we have escaped": 222). Likewise Charles Kingsley, commenting in a very early review of Tennyson's elegy that "the mournful minor rhyme of each first and fourth line always leads the ear to expect *something beyond*, and enables the poet's thoughts to wander sadly on, from stanza to stanza and poem to poem" (183; my italics). It's hard to know just what that "something" was, that Kingsley couldn't quite discern—or Tennyson quite get at, or over—in his writing. But the stanza just quoted does extend, and at the same time contrives to withhold, a very definite something that has apparently been haunting critics ever since. Let's take a closer look at Tennyson's speaker,

⁹⁸ Whom Ricks tactfully does not name at this point—although his opening-page response to Auden's nominating Tennyson as "Poet of the Nursery" seems to be quietly suggested here (1).

...brooding on the dear one *dead*,
And *all he said* of things divine,
(And dear to me as sacred wine
To dying lips is *all he said*)...(17-20)

The second line announces “all he said”; the fourth concludes with “all he said...” Said what, exactly? The verb defaults upon its promise, and the stanza defaults on a rhyme: a dead (*i.e.* flat) rhyme, that repeats but doesn’t tell us what the dead man “said” (but reminds us, after all, that he is “dead” and won’t repeat it).

“Where is the voice I loved?” This, according to Eric Griffiths, is the poem’s driving question: its ordinary silence and memory-lapse, the traumatic shudder underlying every semi-discernible trace of verbal and thematic and phonetic repetition. So many variations on a theme this poet cannot (in Griffith’s unmatched formulation) “get out of [his] mind or into focus” (133, 167). Meanwhile, Richardson’s comments on the Tennysonian *déjà vu* (quoted first in section I) grow all the more suggestive in this context:

Tennyson, because he was a guilty soul, and because his failure to distinguish moments must have meant that more of them were lost to the vague unknown, was probably more vulnerable than most to the beckoning of lost originals. The unfinished past repeatedly imposes itself on his present, trying to end, but all he clearly knows of it is unfocused regret and objectless desire, or, as he himself put it, ‘immeasurable sadness.’ (83)

What “beckons” here is a past, which—adding to our growing list of subliminal and subterranean origins, historical and psychobiographical alike—we might translate now into the acoustical,

mnemonic subtonics of a voice just out of hearing, an echo sufficient to disturb but insufficient to be recorded and put to rest in Tennyson's mind. Richardson expounds how "[m]any shocks of 'mystical similitude' might be found to spring from such unhappy origins did their trails not vanish as we traced them toward the unconscious" (83). The fact is—if I might play out this game of psychopoetic fort-da on the critics' own acoustical terrain—there is always the chance that something would turn up if we just "traced" this poem back, or rather leftward, on the page, to that unrhymed and/or unstressed syllabic dark spot where we, *i.e.* the critics, heard something dimly and so forgot (or half-remembered) what we'd heard. I have already cited Richardson's admission that "one finishes each line having missed something, having not quite focused." Richard Cronin is another case in point—if only because he is so very painfully near the mark—when he compares the *In Memoriam* stanza to the comedic flatness of Tennyson's contemporary, Edward Lear. If the closing A-rhyme rings a little hollow, Cronin argues, "so too does Lear's limerick in which the final line ends by repeating the last word of the first line" (271). He doesn't seem to notice how many rhymes in Tennyson are quietly—and sometimes volubly—pre-empted by some midline iteration. "And all he *said* of things divine...To dying lips is all he *said*" (we will see more of this effect before we're done). Nor Aidan Day, whom we have followed on his geological expeditions through this poet's compulsive n's and s's—who talks of the return of the repressed and, as we will discover soon enough, has managed to ignore the blank return of the copula on (yes) another rhyme that's really a repeat.

Meanwhile, if we can push the lineal logic of Hallam's unforthcoming "all he said" to the professedly inarticulate "cry" we've all remembered, gratis Auden—

So runs my dream: but what am I?

An infant crying in the night:

An infant crying for the light:

And with no language but a cry.

—we might get to understand, at closer range, how Tennyson programmed the very diagnosis readers have “discovered” in this writer in the century or so since Freud. Start with the obvious: another dead rhyme, amplified in this case by a dying cadence on the vocalic “y.” This much I grant that Auden must have noticed. The effect runs deeper, though—and melancholia begins to look very much like the return of something repressed within the critic’s finer hearing—if one considers how this “cry” has been silently manipulated throughout the foregoing stanzas. Here is that lyric in full:

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;
That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another’s gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
 I can but trust that good shall fall
 At last—far off—at last, to all,
 And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
 An infant crying in the night:
 An infant crying for the light:
 And with no language but a cry. (1-20)

“And with no language but”...but with plans to pick one up, perhaps? The clause ends bleakly (no language *other* than a cry) but starts off with higher ambitions, which is to say that the prepositional “but” (*i.e.* only) makes for a convincing, though short-lived, conjunction—like the conjunctive “but” from three lines ago. (“But what am I?”) That first “but” had shaken our confidence; another conjunction might reverse the damage.

This is, in fact, only the last in an extended line of would-be conjunctions: a quietly interwoven series of but’s and yet’s that signify “only” and “invariably,” but want to say much more. The first of them opens the lyric: “Oh yet we trust that somehow good / Will be the final goal of ill” (ll. 1-2). This is likely an adverbial *yet* (*i.e.* “we *still* trust” that good trumps ill). But then, the preceding lyric (LIII) wasn’t at all so sure; and to this extent the adverb doubles as a conjunction, as if to mark an exemption (“But *wait* a minute—we trust in good *nonetheless*”). A later quatrain (eventually deleted) settles for the adverb and, at the same, reveals its true conjunctive genealogy in the stanza that was saved. Tennyson’s Trinity manuscript yields the following after line 12

For hope at awful distance set
Oft whispers of a kindlier plan
Tho never prophet came to man
Of such a revelation *yet*. (qtd. in Sinfield 190; my italics)

Either we take this as a bleak summation (“no prophets yet”) or, at best, a weak but hopeful voucher (“...but maybe tomorrow?”). And the latter “yet” sounds a little like its conjunctive twin—like a last-minute “except,” as in, “Still no prophets...yet Behold!” And that’s precisely where we are headed: “Behold, we know not anything...” (13).⁹⁹

Next we come upon a prepositional “but” that, partly on account of its apparent grammatical independence (it starts the line and follows a semicolon) presses, ever so faintly, toward another conjunction: “But that I would that good shall fall.”¹⁰⁰ Only, Tennyson revised that line, as well, to what we now read in its place: “I can but trust that good shall fall...” (14). Between draft and fair copy, the preposition dropped to an adverb, and the protest (a reprise of the opening “Oh *yet* we trust”:1) shrank to a qualifier (now closer in spirit, as in grammar, to the hope of the previous quatrain, that “not a moth...*but* subserves another’s gain”: 10-2).¹⁰¹ And the lyric is well poised, now, for the culminating defeat we have absorbed from its last quatrain: a penultimate “but” that recapitulates the conjunction in grammar, and the qualifier in mood (“but what am I?”), and a concluding “but” that suspends all mood and grammar (“with no language but...”) until the final “cry.”

⁹⁹ Tennyson eventually swapped the exclamation point for a comma (Sinfield 190).

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Sinfield (190).

¹⁰¹ I am indebted to Sinfield, once again, for noticing the parallelism of lines 1 and 14 (p. 190). He hears a stronger echo in the revised line 14 (“I can but trust”) than in the original (“But that I would”). I agree with Sinfield that the revised line is closer, in wording, to the opening (“O yet we trust”); but the original line is closer in sense.

Auden's melancholic circuit ultimately refracts, under inspection, into something far more complex—and at the same time, less unfathomable than he seems to have presumed—in what might be described as a minor grammatical fugue of undercurrent particles, a canon of would-be conjunctions over a ground tone of qualifiers, ultimately keyed back to same essential questions and doubts that Tennyson articulated clearly at the very outset of this elegy. Pressing deeper, there is perhaps a greater lesson to be extracted on the paradoxical double-motion which Tennyson's elegy properly entails in critical analysis: expanding well beyond the personal circumference which “melancholia” properly allows, our investigation finds itself simultaneously contracted to the fleeting poetic *je-ne-sais-quoi* of this lyric's well-wrought phonetic and prosodic minutiae, the microtonic oscillations of particles heard, unheard, half-heard, half-remembered and mainly (on our first reading, anyhow) unheeded.

Wedding all this information back to the trauma that effectively got this conversation started—Day's “return of the repressed,” on the repressed agnostic knowledge of what doesn't apparently return in geological time and space—let us take in another section from that sequence. Lyric XXXIV opens thus:

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is... (1-4)

Tennyson's backward-reeling writing (as James would have it, and Ricks as well) is once again well visualized in this calculated, line-by-line retreat into the here and now. Notice how the verbs line up: a feebly hopeful subjunctive (“should”) motions toward a future (“shall”), then

collapses into the bleakly secular “all that *is*.” Closing the quatrain, “is” chimes a distant off-rhyme to the demonstrative pronoun (“this”) of line 1. Much closer though—closer on the page and identical in sound—lurks the copula of the previous line, “earth *is* darkness.” We’ve examined a few such cases where the rhyme dimly recalls some earlier midline premonition. Here the terminal rhyme starts life as a mere linking verb (“earth *is* darkness”); mid-line, unstressed, all but invisible. And yet this minor verb is strangely, mysteriously resonant in itself—partly on account of the foregoing assonantal pattern of short vowels followed by a fricative, “this” (in line 1), “live” (l. 2), “is” (l. 3). Notice also the gradual diminuendo: a sharp but lingering sibilant (“this”), mellowed to a voiced consonant (“live”), echoed by a second voiced consonant (“is”). Meter redoubles the effects of this syllabic soft-peddalling: “this” tolls the line and the clause; “live” drops back to mid line; “is” sits further leftward, and on a slack. Metrically, the sequence recedes; grammatically, it strains the other way. The demonstrative advances the creed (“teach me this”); the creed proffers a future (“that life shall live”); “live” advances that future toward a fleeting eternity (“...for evermore”). Lastly, “is” promises a predicate (if very little else): “earth is....” Not so in line four, where the terminal verb gongs a terminal present tense, and swallows all foregoing prospection: “dust and ashes all that *is*.”

Thinking back on Keble—inverting the Tractarian liturgical formula—we might say that Tennyson’s credo is quite literally losing its footing. Hope, faith, mere grammatical predication even, skid gradually backward and downward, left of rhyme and south of audition—with one hand outstretched, all the while, in the opposite direction, toward a creed, a future, or a complement. It’s a metrical quicksand, not unlike Day’s consonantal hiss, the sibilant that “dramatizes unstemmable physical erosion and psychological loss,” and all the while “opens onto an abject space beyond words” (82).

Of course, that loss lies not “beyond” the words but *in* them: in their stanzaic organization, their receding metrical status. Nonetheless we might allow, making way for Tennyson’s contemporary across the field in midcentury prose fiction—allowing Lyell’s evolution to enfold itself another notch within the Revolution that will spring up once again, like the return of the repressed Romantic consciousness, in Dickens’s rewriting of Carlyle’s history—that Tennyson is channeling a literary underground that lurks, indeed, somewhere just out of knowing.

CHAPTER THREE

THEME AND REVOLUTION

OR

DICKENS AND THE POSTROMANTIC BURDEN OF VICTORIAN PROSE

FICTION

For a period so near to us as the great French Revolution of seventeen hundred and eighty-nine—upon which a few octogenarians can even now, as it were, lay their hand—it is surprising what a dim veil of mystery, horror, and romance seems to overhang the most awful convulsion of modern times. While barely passing away, it had of a sudden risen to those awful and majestic dimensions which it takes less imposing events centuries to acquire, and towered over those within its shadow as an awful pyramid of fire, blinding those who look. It requires no lying by, or waiting on, posterity for its proper comprehension. It may be read by its own light, and by those who run; and is about as intelligible at this hour as it is ever likely to be. It is felt instinctively; and those whose sense is slow may have it quickened by Mr. Carlyle's flaming torch—flaring terribly through the night... Marvellous lurid torch that of his. Pen dipped in red and fire, glowing like phosphoric writing.

“The Eve of Revolution,” *Household Words*, June 1858

I

Whether Dickens was himself the author of this belated, unsigned, two-decades-after-the-fact review of Carlyle's work—or merely saw to its publication at an opportune moment in his magazine *Household Words*—we have at least some evidence of Dickens's major interests at the time. “Reading that wonderful book the *French Revolution* again, for the 500th time,” as he

reported to his friend John Forster in 1851 (*Letters* VI.452); and meanwhile, reminding readers that this was indeed, in every sense, a book to be reread, ideally with Dickens's underwriting guidance.

The upshot, one year later, was *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Dickens's compact-fictional edition of an historic psychodrama most students in our century will confess to having read first—or only—in that abbreviated form. To make an argumentative virtue of curricular necessity (Dickens's single-volume digest obviously likelier to appear on high-school syllabi than Carlyle's nine-hundred-pages-plus) I shall submit that these two authors write large, in literary-canonical time, the double-register that is so meticulously built into this century's signature works. From the generously signposted motivic recurrences whereby Carlyle and Tennyson make an epic whole out of the panoramic shocks of history at large, down to the microscopic lexemic and phonemic post- and premonitions that reveal and/or assuage the impact on an unprepared mind, we'll find that Dickens is in every sense the heir (and Tennyson's contemporary) in the art of the retelling, and the re-reading of what requires indeed to be read—well, maybe not “five hundred” times, but surely more than once.

Psychoanalysis would eventually come to grips with the sort of double-time, or double *take*, which Carlyle's Revolution had unleashed within the annals of modern historic reckoning: “precisely permitting *history* to arise,” in the words of one trauma theorist, “where *immediate understanding* may not” (Caruth 11; author's italics). To “arise” and then relapse (Dickens, or his anonymous contributor, seems to allow) in this extended “shadow” play which modulates the trauma of direct historic witness.

So near...a dim veil...passing away...risen...a shadow...of fire (589)

...and at that, a “blinding” fire which sets the mind’s eye back in shadow again. Barthes’s oscillation, as we might as well describe it, has been taken up by Dickens in historical fast-forward; or better yet, Freud (and Barthes himself) would append to this the child’s “fort-da,” translated here to psychovisual terrain as Carlyle’s revolution plays its game of (mental, visual, mnemonic) disappearance and return. “So near...” yet never *quite* at “hand,” as Dickens says.

What’s changed between these writers should, meanwhile, begin to show itself in what’s ostensibly sustained. The *pulse*—the circumspective principle we have so far, following Carlyle, drawn around these fractured signs and shimmered revelations—has effectively collapsed into the psychedelic motions of the modern brain. Rhythm has devolved from Harvey’s cosmos to Descartes’s concentric ego, funneling in on the traumatic locus Freud eventually attempts to diagnose in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920); a work that tallies strangely, I think we’ll find, with Dickens’s reading of Carlyle. Consider the high-res-optics Dickens records above (“an awful pyramid of fire, blinding those who look...”) and the retinal blur which sustains across our retrospective vision of Carlyle’s book (“...flaring terribly through the night...like phosphoric writing...”).

There is other subsidiary light, too, for such as look back—light from tens of thousands of pamphlets...read by mad wolfish eyes....by lamplight...An awful, repulsive cloud, darkening the air for such as look back at it... (Dickens 589)

Carlyle’s “*awful* pyramid of fire” is thus sensorily (and grammatically) enclosed within that “*awful* cloud” which darkens our enlightenment—but keeps our nervous systems more or less intact. So says Freud: “*Protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of* stimuli” (XII.27; Freud’s italics). That initial “blinding” flash

in Dickens should, then, be the necessary *blind* which stays the stimulus on impact; or (Freud's variation on the same metaphor) a sort of protective mental fire-branding.

[The outer cerebral cortex] would at last have been so thoroughly 'baked through' by stimulation that it would...become incapable of any further modification...By its death, the outer layer has saved all the deeper ones from a similar fate—*unless*, that is to say, stimuli reach it which are so strong that they break through the protective shield. (26-7; my italics)

Freud says “unless,” and trauma theory says “at last”—and literary scholars will declare the first *and* last, as it were, the double pro/analeptic abruption that ultimately registers as postromantic rhythm. Our work begins just there: on the other end of Freud's qualifying clause, which considers that perhaps the stimulus, the “flash,” has actually ricocheted into the *flashback*—the hallucinatory persistence of that event which did in fact break through, “bypassed perception and consciousness” thence to reproduce within the deeper mnemonic folds of the unconscious.¹⁰²

Dickens's “retinal blur” should be re-designated, then, as the cognitive “reverb” of what indeed he saw with instant, shocking clarity. “It requires no lying by,” as he said about the Revolution, and Carlyle's writing of it, “or waiting on, posterity for its proper comprehension. It may be read by its own light, and by those who run; and [*yet*] is about as intelligible at this hour as it is ever likely to be...An inexhaustible study!” Registered so quickly that we haven't, paradoxically, got our heads around it yet. And that's where trauma theory properly begins. Traumatic *rhythm*, for our purposes—in this psychosensory loophole which eventually caught Freud's ear, and meanwhile pressed its case throughout those prose-prosodic doubling times, and

¹⁰² Hartman 537.

“double takes” which postromantic literature apparently does best. With an eye to the poets, Geoffrey Hartman explains:

[T]he knowledge of trauma, or the knowledge which comes from that source, is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced...The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a *perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche*.
(537; my italics)

“Splitting” is psychoanalytic shorthand, of course, for the vast and variegated repertoire of rhythms and rhymes, double-entendres and narrative refractions—a turn of phrase, a phonetic or metrical stutter, the tics and shadow vowels, *i.e.* alliterations and assonances—that make poetry as we know it. Specifically, Hartman has in mind the “exaggerated” ballad beats, and the “viva voce” pyrotechnics whereby conscience (not quite conscious) tells its pressured tale in Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner”; or Wordsworth’s famous “spots of time,” perhaps the century’s first spelling of the flashback we’ve been tracing forth to Freud (542, 547). Adding to Hartman’s list, we might summon up the multiple anagrammatical analepses of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”:

—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur... (83-6)

The “past” returns in *raptured* vision two lines down—or would return, if it had ever been released from Wordsworth’s heavy retrospective, *i.e.* retro-auditory verses. Notice in this case

the quiet interweave of a's and o's; in effect recapturing the "past" within the assonantal "And" of both ensuing lines, rounding its impressions through the graduated vocalic closure of "*all its aching joys...now no more.*" No more, and *evermore*, true to Wordsworthian form; what with the internal rhyme (one line down, "Not for") and then, a culminating feat of anagrammatical retrogression, "nor mourn nor murmur."

If this is trauma—*troping*, in Hartman's phrase, as opposed to plain poetic reminiscence—then we might also pay attention to the slight but growing pressure of the negative, the *unmourned* lining up with certain foregoing indications of the "unremembered" (34), the "unintelligible" (41) or "half-extinguished thought,"

With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity. (58-60)

Add to this list of negatives the un-past tense Wordsworth effectively declared at the very outset of this journey: "Five *years* have past; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters! and again I *hear* / These waters..." (1-3; my italics).

This brings us obliquely back to Dickens and Carlyle. "Five years," three times over in as many half-lines, caught again upon our "*hearing*" in the fourth, contrives to press on our minds' ears the dark unstated annum Wordsworth and his readers hadn't fully figured out. 1793.¹⁰³ The Revolution devolved into the Terror; the Rights of Man reneged on former promises. Poetry turned inward, so the saying goes; the Romantic school was born. These are the standard explanations—if not by rights the truest—that history provides us in the diagnosis of

¹⁰³ Subtracting five years from the date of writing, provided in this poem's subtitle ("Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798").

what has, in any case, gone quietly awry in Wordsworth's retrospect. When history decays into a trope—time and space redoubled and collapsed upon a resonance, a “five-year” interval which encodes the cognitive hiatus whereon this poem finds its energy—we have Freud's blessing to suspect that something wasn't fully figured out along the road that gets us back to 1798.

Granted, this risks repeating with few variations a theme that's comprehended to a fault in Tennyson studies (intuited, if less schematically pinned down in Dickens) regarding rhythm's post-traumatic origins: the equivocal “inspira[tion]” Auden conjectured, of “some single and probably very early experience” or, in Perry's borrowed phrase from Larkin, “some violence / A long way back.”¹⁰⁴ Putting momentarily aside the “flash” that gets us back there—and the psychosensory optics that will be unavoidable as we follow Dickens on his famous backward flights to Carlyle's France and well beyond, throughout his 1850s prose—I'll take this prefatory opportunity to carry out some pages further, on its own grounds, the “long way back” where deep history joins with deep psychology, in a rhythm that apparently devolves upon some eternally underlying (prehistoric) crux. Still admitting the limitations of an argument that tends to pathologize—and to reduce to straight repetition—the managed modulations that will bear out again, I trust, in Dickens's high-styled historicizing prose, I should acknowledge up front what the trauma theorists have decidedly got right in this context. “Narrative is linear, Action is solid,” Carlyle prophesied (“On History” 89); which is to say that history is, indeed, intrinsically resistant to the normal narrative logic that the novel-genre properly imposes on its subject matter. “Five years...five summers...five long winters...” Wordsworth conveys the paradoxical periodicities whereby history speeds onward and, at the same time, seems only to reinforce the preordained (and still-mysterious) underlying structure of events. “Thirty other years have come

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 2, pp. 76-7.

and gone,” Carlyle begins his *Revolution*; impressing in his prose (anaphora combining with the extra assonantal pressure of the *days* and *May’s* of feudal France) the deep epochal rhythm that’s unfolding, silently, across the final decades of Louis XV’s reign:

At most, in the immeasurable tide of French Speech (which ceases not *day after day*, and only ebbs towards the short hours of night), *may* this royal sickness emerge from *time to time* as an article of news...But for the rest...the *May* sun shines out, the *May* evening *fades*; and men ply their *useful and useless* business as if no Louis *lay* in *danger*.

Dame Dubarry, indeed, might *pray*... (I.3-4; my italics)

Thirty years of Old Regime stability have quietly expired, meanwhile, bringing Carlyle’s history to its proper starting point in 1774. Dickens takes this up in 1775, incidentally; thus to ride out Carlyle’s epochal engine to its inevitable Revolutionary destination. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...It was”—in short—“the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five” (5).

There has been plenty said on the Carlylean rhythmical antitheses of “bests” and “worsts” and “winters” and “springs”, and so on (though this paragraph has never, to my knowledge, been tracked down back to its source in Carlyle’s opening¹⁰⁵). *Wordsworth’s* legacy folds in just

¹⁰⁵ C.f., above, Carlyle’s diurnal rounds “day to day...time to time...the May sun shines out, the May evening fades,” and his mundane juxtapositions of “useful and useless business.”

where we stopped, on the historic trigger point—also the point of syntagmatic repetition and return—of “Years of Our Lord,”¹⁰⁶

...one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five (5, 7)

...one thousand seven hundred and eighty (55, 56, 57, 112)

...one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine (221, 230)

...one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two (243-4, 255)

Finally: “the Year One of [*not* our Lord, but rather] Liberty” (283). Time collapses on itself at last in this official “first year” of the Revolution—1793 in standard time, Wordsworth’s “five years ago” revisited from the other direction—recoiled another notch in Dickens’s vision of perpetual diurnal/nocturnal ambulation. “Though the days and nights circled as regularly as when time was young, and the evening and the morning were the first day, other count of time there was none” (283).

Time stops, I should say, and rhythm begins all over again in Wordsworth’s spirit, on Carlyle’s historic grounds, and as near as possible to Carlyle’s *footing* as the novelist could take up short of plagiarism. What happens here, as the Revolution comes to its inevitable crisis in *A Tale*—accelerates through Carlyle’s calendar and flashes back, with doubled force, upon the psychosocial axes Dickens’s novel has developed in the quiet interim—needs about a paragraph or two to summarize, and the better part of this last chapter of the dissertation to explain in satisfactory rhythmic and psychological detail. We’ll start with something that should look familiar from our work on Carlyle at the end of Chapter 1: the guillotining of the famous

¹⁰⁶ As quoted, with minor variations, across the pages listed in brackets.

Girondins. “Twenty-two friends of high public mark,” Dickens reminds us, “twenty-one living and one dead, it had lopped the heads off, in one morning in as many minutes” (284). Or in Carlyle’s broken-anapestic-iambic rendering (recall), “**one** head per **minute**, or **little less**. The **chorus** is **wearing weak**; the **chorus** is worn *out*;—farewell for **evermore**, ye **Girondins**.” Their pulse, their “weary” tread are not elided out of Dickens’s *Tale*, but merely transferred to the worn-out old man whose story shall emerge, in full, six chapters later. “I am weary, weary, weary—worn down by misery. I cannot read what I have written with this gaunt hand” (342).

A quick plot-summary may be in order here, sufficient to elucidate (if not to unravel) the multiply interwoven, intertextual plotlines that are gathered to this weary-trodden throughline from Carlyle. Alexander Manette, the writer in question, was a victim of the Old Regime; his story effectively began a revolution (in Dickens’s psychodramatic digest of historical reality); and the document he is “wearily” transcribing ultimately seals the fate of one young French expatriot (Charles Darnay, son of the same noblemen who saw to Manette’s eighteen-years’ confinement in the Bastille); or *would* have sealed his fate, but for the fortunate coincidence that Darnay is eventually replaced upon the scaffold by his English lookalike. Sidney Carton—the most memorable and very possibly the least developed hero Dickens ever wrote into the quotable annals of Victorian literature—finds in this ultimate self-sacrifice the “far, far better rest” (390) that’s been denied him so far, in his busy bourgeois-lawyering existence. (“Lawyers too,” as Carlyle described the twenty-two fair-spoken, hard-working Girondins of that same soil where, incidentally, their contemporary Carton had carried out his legal training (II.326). *Farewell for evermore, ye Girondins...*)

“Farewell, dear darling of my soul. My parting blessing on my love. We shall meet again, *where the weary are at rest*.” (346; my italics)

That's Darnay—not Carton—speaking to the wife whom Carton shall reclaim from him, spiritually if not in fact, when he goes to “rest” in her own husband’s name. Meanwhile, Carton is out wandering the streets of Paris: “the night *wore on*, the words [the ‘resurrection and the life’] were in the echoes of his feet...The night *wore out*” (326; my italics). *The chorus is worn out*, as Carlyle said; but not without a silent parting (and a metaphorical salute from Dickens to his predecessor) on the scaffold.

She [the seamstress Carton meets along the way] kisses his lips; he kisses hers; they solemnly bless each other...She goes next before him—is gone; the knitting women count Twenty-Two. (389)

Carton’s death is subsequently, unsurprisingly absorbed within the “Twenty-Three” (389) that brings this group, and (I believe there is no coincidence in this) *another* “twenty-two” whom most readers should have remembered, to their well-earned restful eternity in Dickens’s novel.

“There is no time there,” Carton reassures the seamstress; if only to remind us once more of that underwriting, deep historic space where Dickens’s narrative relaxes into Carlyle’s epochal groove. Deep *psychology* is (barely) suggestible, taking in one stride the death-marching Girondins and the mysteriously thanatic and professedly “repressive”¹⁰⁷ Carton and Manette. More broadly—and I think more appropriately—we might say Dickens’s Revolution at its crisis has been flashing back upon the pressure points of Carlyle’s tome: the prose-returns of the repressed poetic register¹⁰⁸ that might, at the very bottom of it, be called the rhythmic throughline which connects these authors back to Wordsworth’s versifying praxis at one end of

¹⁰⁷ “Repression” is Dickens’s exact term (1280).

¹⁰⁸ I paraphrase—a formulation to be addressed head on in Section III of this chapter—from Garrett Stewart’s psycho-formalist analysis of the novelists at midcentury (*Death Sentences* 78).

this century, and Freud's revelations at the other. *Poetry*, in its deeper Freudian sense¹⁰⁹—rhythm and rhyme, repetition and return—is how the inner, unknown psyche presses its unspoken case against the normal narrative logic these writers tenuously sustained in their respective prose mediums. This much we know from our investigations on Carlyle (specifically, Carlyle's prose-transcriptions of Goethe's caesural metric); so much should reveal itself again, as Dickens focalizes Carlyle's unconscious/inarticulate masses round the psychogenetic burdens of the very few on whom his *Tale* properly turns.

The balance of our work is in the second half of that equation—*viz.*, the quietly centripetal direction of a Revolution which, at least in rhythmic outline, loses none of Carlyle's democratic ranginess. "Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death—the last, much the easiest to bestow, O guillotine!" (378-9). We'll take this as our closing instance for the present—to be resumed in future sections—of a People's Revolution turned upon the revolutionary crisis of a person. (*Three* people, to be precise: Manette, and the two women implicated in his prison memoirs.) Notice how Carlyle's catchphrase modulates, some chapters later in the final book of Dickens's *Tale*, into the hysterical lament of the peasant woman Manette tended in her dying hours. Thus—

[S]he constantly uttered piercing shrieks, and repeated the words, 'My husband, my father, and my brother!' and then *counted up to twelve*, and said, 'Hush!' For an instant, and *no more*, she would *pause* to listen, and then the piercing shrieks would begin again..

¹⁰⁹ Again, we might bear in mind Lionel Trilling's comment (quoted in the Introduction) that Freud "makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind" (52).

A running Carlylean joke on the Republic of “fraternity or death” accordingly refracts into the mantra of a dead-and-dying father and brother—and repeats again, two chapters later, in the psychopathic fury of their one surviving sister, Thérèse Defarge.

[T]hat husband was my sister’s husband...that brother was my brother, that father was my father, those dead are my dead... (354)

Dead, but never *gone* from the historic DNA that’s finding new life in the bourgeois muscle memories of Dickens’s plot. Taking Manette’s disclosures as the fulcrum, not at all the full extent, of this novel’s variegated semi-tacit signals of domestic trauma, intergenerational overreach and second-generation guilt,¹¹⁰ eros mixed with thanatos and sibling rivalry-cum-Oedipal aggression all at once¹¹¹—and the perpetual neurotic gesturing that is at once the language and the bodily geometry of this very literal “revolution” of the people of France—we might fairly say that Dickens ups the ante on the rhythmic hand-me-downs of Carlyle’s history.

More importantly (and vice versa) this chapter considers how the novel’s perpetual whisper of interiority helps to sharpen up the rhythm readers sometimes didn’t hear till Dickens pinned Carlyle’s epochal motions to a person, and a trauma, the unarticulated origins we would now (since Freud) refer to as a “case.” *There*, of course, we have the missing prefix and the inevitable destination of the so-called “history” that was never generically the same after Carlyle and Dickens tried their hands at it. This much has been effectively acknowledged in the last two decades or so of Victorian prose studies. Building, accordingly, on a transition which has successfully been framed upon the interdisciplinary grounds of genre studies and scientific

¹¹⁰ See esp. Hutter’s essay on the Oedipal dynamics in *A Tale*.

¹¹¹ Carton is exemplary once again: laying down his life to prove his worth to the woman who could only love his doppelganger, and one-upping the woman’s father while he’s at it.

history¹¹²—an emerging fictive-biographical “ego” joined to that century’s ever and increasingly concentric vision of the brain—I’ll bring to bear this dissertation’s usual investigative combinations of close reading, contemporary clinical prose, and the occasional suggestions from Freud’s scions in the field of Dickens studies.

Section II considers, specifically, how Dickens’s “flashback” history absorbs (in fact, as in form) the patterned brainwaves and mnemonic coils of the contemporary physiological psychology. Section III reincorporates the knowledge—and the acoustical biases—of the modern psychoanalytic criticism which, I think we’ll find, confirms and in some ways contributes to the purported inward determination of Dickens’s beat (including, but not limited to, the proto-Freudian currencies that are most widely inferred from the *Tale*). That, of course, is one more spelling of a theme we have been following since Tennyson. History craves a center-point; and so does rhythm. Inasmuch as Carlyle’s inward-turning history (and Wordsworth’s inward turn *from* history) find their natural expression in the history that Dickens wrote, true to novel form, from *within*, so we shall find (our major thought experiment in Section III) that Carlyle’s rhythmic language, *i.e.* Barthes’s oscillation, has migrated in critical hearing round the psychoanalyzable crisis points which Dickens has provided in his life and works. Section IV enfolds these rhythmical conjectures back into the broad array of comparative analyses on Carlyle and Dickens, ultimately to consider how Carlyle’s under-the-radar messaging needed Dickens’s novel genre to explain itself; and more broadly, what in Carlyle’s postromantic poetic legacy needed, paradoxically, one more *prose* writer to complete its pre-Freudian work.

¹¹² We will consider the work of two signal contributors, Nicholas Dames and Jill Matus, in Sections II and III (respectively) of this chapter.

Against this conceptual sounding-board we shall, meanwhile, pursue the modulations of a delimited but long-lived line of rhythmic common denominators whereby one revolution makes its way toward another. Barthes's oscillation is unavoidable, of course. And its first vehicle in Dickens is, in fact, not the Revolution but the daily small-r revolutions he'd been working out throughout his 1850's prose—spinning back and forth, daily and hourly, between historic progress and a-historic rhythmical recalcitrance—the flashback journey most readers had experienced at first hand, long before they took the trip with Dickens back to Carlyle's France.

Dickens's railway has been trauma theory's principal, possibly its only genuine, leverage in Victorian prose studies. And a closer glance reveals its impact—just where trauma theory made its entrance in this chapter—on the flashback-revolution Dickens (or his anonymous reviewer) was rehearsing in the preparatory months of the *Tale*. We will establish this point properly at the top of the next section. For now, to get things running—bearing in mind the psychic “troping” Hartman laid down as the Wordsworthian correlative to the Freudian flashback-*in-vitro*—let's take another glance at Dickens reading Carlyle,

quickenened by Mr Carlyle's flaming torch—flaring terribly through the night.

Note the assonance (“*Flaming...flaring terribly...*”) and the rhyming which unfolds,

through the *night*. He *might* have been looking on...that wild *night*...in the little
French posting *town*, as the sun went *down*...

—as Carlyle's flame decays into the nocturne which persuades our deeper vision of events in France.

Hawked about, too, by hoarse-mouthed men and women, to such horrible tune as *Le Père Duchesne*...An awful, repulsive cloud, darkening the air for such as look back at it. Vast shower of ribaldry, insane songs, diatribe, declamation—all shot up from that glowing crater.

“Shot up” in a flare that is by now (a perfect turn of postromantic synesthesia he’d been practicing throughout his railroad prose¹¹³) much more the shadow, *i.e.* the rumor, of events which didn’t register in sight and so dispersed themselves in sound: redoubled in the mind’s ear, refracted on the brains of France, re-echoed through the memories of Carlyle’s English readers (still reading and re-reading him, “perpetually,” as Dickens said) another two decades since this history first hit the shelves. Carlyle was uncannily correct about the retroactive resonance that period discovered. The reports about those “thrice-famed Brigands,” for example, in Book I of *The French Revolution*,

an actually existing quotomy of persons; who, long *reflected and reverberated* through so many millions of heads, as in concave multiplying mirrors, become a whole Brigand World;

(revolving through the brains of France in perfect dactylic dimeter rotation, another rhythm which transports to Dickens’s rails)

¹¹³ The Romantics are famous, of course, for this decay from sight to sound; especially in the more psychedelic passages of Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge. As Thomas Frosch explains (with an eye to these same poets) “The new auditory state is often one of radiance, glimmerings, fanciful appearances, and sequences of scenes that do not obey the temporal and spatial expectations of normative sight” (380). See also Herbert Tucker (1983) on Tennyson’s postromantic visual dissolves.

The **Brigands** are **here**; the **Brigands** are **there**; the **Brigands** are **coming**!¹¹⁴
(I.132-3)

The flashback is at first and last a *rhythm*, Hartman said. And Carlyle’s “multiplying mirrors” are the start of a transition we have been pursuing right across the postromantic soundscape, as reality decays into rhythm and rhyme, and history is folded and re-resonated into literature.

What’s barely missing here—the centripetal force whereby these psychosensory fractures should coalesce upon the diagnostic axis of a *trauma*—is the invention of Victorian speed.

II

Reading Carlyle “on the run,” as Dickens said—or better yet, by rail. We haven’t yet considered Dickens’s *first* escape to Revolutionary France—his railway “Flight” of 1851, a whimsical travel piece that shows up in *Household Words*, seven years before his review of Carlyle in that same journal—best represented by such time-warping, physics-defying sentences as these,

Where are the two-and-twenty *weary hours* of long long day and night journey...?
(532)

Here *we are*—no, I mean there *we were*, for it has *darted far* into the *rear*... (530)

“Where are we?” resounds and alliterates at every turn of Dickens’s journey, those passing yet returning *weary hours* and *here’s* and *there’s* his prose is perpetually racing to record. And there are other flashback resonances forming here (to resume where we left off): “Flash! The distant

¹¹⁴ Here and throughout this chapter, I will be using bold face to indicate stresses, and italics for sound patterns (assonance, alliteration, etc.; as I have done so far in the passages quoted from Dickens and Wordsworth).

shipping in the Thames is gone. Whirr! The little streets of new brick and red tile, with here and there a flagstaff growing like a tall weed... Whizz! Dustheaps, market-gardens, and waste-grounds. Rattle! New Cross Stations. Shock! There we were at Croydon. Bu-r-r-r! The tunnel. [And now, the key-turn,] I wonder why it is that when I shut my eyes in a tunnel I begin to feel *as if I were going at an Express pace the other way*" (530; my italics).

Expressly backward, then, from mid-Victorian England to late-eighteenth-century France. We will join Dickens there eventually: at the conclusion of the present "Flight," and again at the commencement of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Meanwhile, another engine-in-reverse is pressing far more seriously in the psychic background of this passage. Here is the eponymous Dombey (1848) on his railway ride to Brighton:

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind *the motion seems reversed*, and to tend furiously backward...Away once **more** into the **day**, and through the **day**, with a shrill **yell** of exultation, roaring, **rattling**, tearing **on**, spurning everything with its dark breath, sometimes **pausing** for a **minute** where a **crowd** of faces **are** that in a **minute** more are **not**... (298; my italics)

Even as the writing picks up speed—locking into the paeonic measure Dickens had perfected in his railway prose¹¹⁵—a closer glance reveals that Dombey is still moving backward. *Flashing* back, that is, upon the image he's tried hard to leave behind:

¹¹⁵ It's even more pronounced, I find, in the ensuing paragraph. For instance: "There are **jagged** walls and **falling** houses **close** at hand, and **through** the battered **roofs** and broken **windows**, wretched **rooms** are seen, where **want** and fever **hide** themselves in **many** wretched **shapes**..." (299).

There was a **face**—he had looked upon it, on the **previous** night, and **it** on him with **eyes** that read his **soul**...that **often** had **attended** him in **fancy**, on this **ride**.

He had seen it, with the expression of last night, timidly pleading to him. (299)

That's yet another spelling of the something-missed-in-transit mode which Dickens inherited from Wordsworth and the Revolution-era poets,¹¹⁶ carried somewhat nearer Freud's terrain of death and trauma, thanatos, domestic repression. The point is *Dombey* *didn't* see it then, "last night" when the daughter's visage only registered, if at all, for Dombey's later recognition—the belated recognition of a love, and an uncomplaining filial devotion that finally asks to be acknowledged after years of paternal hostility. "Let him remember it in that room, years to come," as Dickens predicted on the night in question (two chapters earlier). "It has faded from the air, before he breaks the silence. It may pass as quickly from his brain, as he believes, but it is there" (272). *There in the air*; there again in this rolling audiovisual *fade of faces* that is the deeper rhythm—and more precisely, the assonantal through-line—of these and other passages of Dickensian remembering. Continuing with Dombey's railway ride (closing the aerial fadeout on a complementary *persecuting* circuit) "he once more saw that [expression] *fade away* into a desolate *certainty* of his dislike...Because the *face* was abroad, in the expression of defeat and *persecution* that seemed to *encircle* him like the *air*" (299-300).

Call this the "express" return upon an unperceived "expression." There will, of course, be other flashback faces in the decades after *Dombey*: most of them genetically encoded (like Florence's) in some dark corner of domestic or filial half-recollection. In *Great Expectations* (1861), for example, we come upon the famous parting (by no means final) glance between Pip

¹¹⁶ In particular, Wordsworth's complaints in the *Lyrical Ballads* about the mental strains of modern life, "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities..., [their] craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies" (395).

and the convict, whose near-paternal claims Pip spends the better part of his young life repressing.

[H]e gave me a look that I did not understand, and it all passed in a moment. But if he had looked at me for an hour or for a day, I could not have *remembered his face ever afterward*, as having been more attentive. (38)

Meanwhile, in the Dickens's *Tale*, we stumble into the "to-be-remembered" face of the spy Barsad (much to his own dismay, now that the lawyer Sidney Carton threatens to blow his cover).

"You have a face to be remembered, and I remember faces well." (309)

Almost immediately, Dickens turns the observation back on Carton himself:

Miss Pross [the sister of the spy Barsad] *recalled soon afterward, and to the end of her life remembered...*as she pressed her hands on Sydney's arm and looked up *in his face...* (310)

Carton trumps them again, though, with this famous dying "flash" of recognition from the scaffold: "The murmuring of many voices, *the upturning of many faces*, the pressing on of many footsteps in the outskirts of the crowd, so that it swells forward in a mass, like one great heave of water, *all flashes away*" (390; my italics throughout).

Flashed but not gone. Readers know well that Carton's vision will declare itself posthumously—on the other side of history and death—in Dickens's culminating exercise in prophetic remembrance.¹¹⁷

“I see Barsad, and Cly, Defarge.... perishing by this retributive instrument... I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, ... I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.”

Homing in now, on this novel's principle characters:

“I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her [Lucy Manette], an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day....

“I see that child who lay upon her bosom... foremost of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place [the Place de la Concorde, where the guillotine was stationed through the Terror]—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and *I hear him tell the child my story*, with a tender and faltering voice.” (389-90; my italics)

Dombey's “Let him remember it...years to come!” makes good on itself in the *Tale's* persistent “It was remembered long afterwards”: a prophecy which Dickens was if anything better equipped to realize, now, within a prose that is persistently flashing out the signals of domestic

¹¹⁷ I borrow the term from Garrett Stewart. In his reading: “Carton has at least in death earned the right to have his legacy appear before him with the strange declarative certainty of the (the paradox seems inescapable) prophetically remembered” (*Death Sentences* 89).

repression, trauma, intergenerational conflict and neglect. There is, as always, more to be said¹¹⁸ about the underground psychogenetic beat of Dickens's Revolution. Suffice it to say, for now, that history's passengers¹¹⁹ are rushing onward in this novel—like Dombey in his railway car—against the skid-marks of forgotten lives, the fractures of amnesiac memory, and the scars of filial and erotic separation. From start to finish of the *Tale*, well beyond Carton's memorable foretelling from the scaffold, we're told of things "remembered long afterward" in history; words dropped into the ear for later recollection; signals flashed upon their minds but only registered in retrospect.¹²⁰ "All this was seen in a moment," as the narrator explains in one dark demonstration of the masses, "as the visions of a drowning man, or of any human creature at any very great pass, could see a world if it were there" (273). As Dickens said about the Revolution years in general: "There was no pause, no pity, no peace, no interval of relenting rest, no measurement of time...[T]he time was long, *while it flamed by so fast*" (283; my italics).

Consider where Dickens enters in this century that was, in effect, bookended by the syncopations of historic and psychological time: almost exactly half way between Wordsworth and Carlyle on one side, Freud on the other. That is, between the Revolution of 1789 and its belated psychological explanation, for our purposes, at the other end of the Great War. I will submit upon these premises that Dickens's era was blindsided at both ends—with an extra,

¹¹⁸ At the end of the present section, and again in Section IV.

¹¹⁹ The "passenger" metaphor comes to life at the end of the first chapter, as the year of 1775 rolls round to "conduct...the creatures of this chronicle...along the roads that lay before them" (7).

¹²⁰ Take the scene where Lucie first learns of her father's sufferings in the Bastille: "It gave her a strange and new sensation while his words were in her ears; and *she remembered it long afterward*" (196). Carton provides another and richer instance, when he delivers this coded message on her unconscious hearing (later related by her overhearing daughter): "*It was remembered afterwards* that when he bent down and touched [Lucie's] face with his lips, he murmured some words. The child, who was nearest to him, *told them afterwards*, and told her grandchildren when she was a handsome old lady, that she heard him say, 'A life you love'" (349). Or better yet, Carton delivering his remembrances through the near-unconscious Charles Darnay, before he changes places with Darnay in prison and at the scaffold. "*If you remember,*" said Carton, dictating, "the words that passed between us, long ago, you will readily comprehend this when you see it. *You do remember* them, I know. It is not in your nature to forget them" (365; my italics throughout).

passing shock at the Revolutionary midway point of 1848, when his mature writing also happened to be getting underway—by events which so far strained the speed of comprehension that they turned backward and, as it were, recoiled into the psychoanalytic *contretemps* ultimately defined by trauma theory. This was indeed, notoriously, the age of speed; the coincidental symmetries of war and revolution spelling out the deep connective rails that shuttle forth, at breakneck pace, from 1789 to 1914. And yet, between Dickens and Freud, we have begun already to discover how the rush of War and Revolution (the small-*r* revolutions too, of urban insurrection and demographic shift, global commercial opportunism and, never least for Dickens, industrial-strength runs of page and print) tends nonetheless to write itself across the mental backbeats of a generation that was still catching up.

Catching up, that is, along the rails and reels and telegraphs that are at first and last the inward/backward vehicles of neurosensory registration. Dickens's train is always—just what we've seen in *Dombey* and "A Flight"—a train of thought, extended on a visionary blur, a mental soundtrack (forgive the pun) on perpetual rotation. "What a Junction a man's thoughts is," said Mr. Toodle, another of *Dombey*'s lighter characters,

I starts light [thinking of] Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. (565)

I trust we will continue to discover why it is that trauma theorists are so much invested in Dickens's train—that epitome of speed which always turns (on a phrase) back inward on the mind. The mental "juncture," the train of thought; etymology conspired in Dickens's favor. So does Victorian psychology; indeed, a sidelong glance at Dickens's contemporaries in brain

science confirms that Toodle's train of thought (or "association" or, as Carpenter would say, "ideo-motor action") was always somewhere in the background of the railway sort. For instance, Carpenter explains,

as our ideas are thus linked in 'trains' or 'series,' which further inosculate with each other like the branch lines of a railway or the ramifications of an artery, so, it is considered, an idea which has been 'hidden in the obscure recesses of the mind' for years—perhaps for a lifetime,—and which seems to have completely faded out of *conscious* memory...may be reproduced, as by the touching of a spring, through a *nexus* of suggestions (429-30; Carpenter's italics)

E.S. Dallas describes the "unobserved traffic" of conscious and unconscious ideas, "Trains of thought...continually passing to and fro, from the light into the dark, back from the dark into the light" (I.207); thus continuing the train, and turning a latent pun that has been in the works, Dallas reminds his readers, ever since James Mill's 1829 *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (a precocious high-speed upgrade, in two volumes, on the Lockean "associationist" school we have had some acquaintance with, gratis Wordsworth's reinterpretation of Locke's successor Hartley). Witness Mill's extended "train of predications,"

If this, for example, were the **train**, **smell** of a **rose**, **sight** of a **rat**, **sound** of a **trumpet**, touch of velvet, **prick** of a **pin**, these names in order might denote the order of the sensations.

In the greater number of instances, however, it is necessary to mark the train as the train of somebody; and for this purpose additional machinery is required. Suppose that the train I have to mark is the train of John, a train of the

sensations of John... I say “John is seeing,” and the first sensation of John’s train is now sufficiently denoted. In the same manner I proceed with the rest; **John** is smelling, **John** is tasting, **John** is hearing, **John** is touching. (172-3)

I’ve cast in bold the inklings of a railway rhythm we have heard, and will be hearing much more of, in Dickens’s prose: a short run of dactylic dimeters in the first paragraph, brought out by the assonantal back-and-forth of s’s and (t)r’s,¹²¹ gathering speed into the second paragraph as Mill runs down the list, in effect to recreate, the straight (metrically paeonic) flush of psychosensory stimuli. The keynote of this passage, the psychic crux and, by extension, the common rhythmic ground between Mill’s mental calisthenics and Dickens’s psychoanalyzing physics, emerges in this next (and last) excerpt on our brief scientific detour: “What happens at the moment of memory? The *mind runs back* from that moment to the moment of perception. That is to say, it runs over the intervening states of consciousness, called up by association...and in this case, we *associate them so rapidly and closely, that they run, as it were, into a single point of consciousness*, to which the name MEMORY is assigned” (Mill I.331; my italics).

“Memory” or, better yet, the central *I* that is still and increasingly the author of Victorian perceptual reality. Psychology so far reinforces the concentric character-developmental axis that’s shaping up in Dickens’s genre. According to Nicholas Dames, “What is remembered, so the associationist claim runs, is remembered only insofar as it confirms this monad that I call my self... Starting with Mill’s *Analysis*,” and continuing (says Dames) into the fictional histories and autobiographies then developing through Dickens and his cohorts,

¹²¹ Varied slightly by the p(r)’s in the final pairing.

the idea of memory as the immediate link between what Mill calls “the idea of my present self” and “the idea of my past self” is...emphasized continually by association theorists; and, of course, it is the operations of the memory along *the axes of relevance and concordance that help to guarantee that the link between the past and present* is not at all frayed. (Dames 137; my italics)

These are the proto-Freudian grooves of nineteenth-century historical cognition, as Dames suggests; the Victorian experience of time and space thus “linked” and rearticulated, trained (in every sense) upon the “axis” of that single, motive self of nineteenth-century prose fiction.¹²² For Dames, this is a point of memory—and history—returned upon the psychogenetic locus that’s evolving in the decades between Dickens (and Thackeray, George Eliot, et al.) and Freud.

The destination, needless to say, is Freud’s therapeutic *case*-history. And the route was, very literally (in more ways than I can properly address, though others have pursued this line with admirable rigor¹²³) the modern railway, which not only contributes signally to the traumas Freud inherited but, in the interim, distributes and transports the growing readership that Dickens (and Freud eventually) was gaining in these decades. Dickens was, in every possible way, writing on the rails—about the rails, for readers who would increasingly be taking him along for railroad entertainment. For palliation too, perhaps, inasmuch as Dickens helped negotiate the brain’s recoil against the shocks of modern speed and (when we come to the *Tale*) the forward clip of history’s unfolding.

¹²² Granted, I’m stressing the potential railway connotations Dames himself leaves latent in these associative “links” and “axes,” etc.

¹²³ Notably, John Picker and Jill Matus. Their observations on Dickens’s railway rhythms, and traumas, (respectively) will inform a good part of Section II of this chapter.

Dames reminds us of “the amnesiac Dr. Manette from Dickens’s 1859 *A Tale of Two Cities* as a further instance of the collision of personal amnesia with historical reconstruction” (275 n.7). A closer glance reveals, beneath the “collision,” a deeper coalescence: the “case” that’s always forming at the center of the history that has not (at least since Carlyle) moved straightforwardly in literary time. Indeed Manette’s case—the culminating *involution* of the *revolution* which has declared, at last, its mental turning point within the trauma he reports—is one way to address the central contradiction Freud has eventually to explain at the turning of this century. And Dickens’s railway gets us there directly (howbeit circuitously). Like Mill’s concentered trains of thought; or Toodle’s “Junction,” an associative branching out that’s nonetheless, by equal rights a mental *joint*, by definition; indeed like Carpenter’s “inosculating” trains of thought, the “springs and nexuses” that mobilize *yet merge* the brain’s unstoppable activity; and again like Mill’s associative networking, Dickens’s “train” conveys upon a pun the undergoing paradox of Victorian motility and speed. That is, by turns suggesting that our thoughts are keeping pace with the industrial velocities of modern transportation, mass-communication, *etc.*; discovering instead the inward/backward leverage whereon modern psychology is born.

Remember that Dickens’s flashback trip to Carlyle’s France began *by rail*, in the “Flight” of 1851.

Now, I tread upon French ground, and am greeted by the three charming words,
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. (531; Dickens’s italics)

Rushing forth to France, *back* in mind to the Revolution of 1789 (back again, incidentally, to the Arabian Nights).

Who would suppose we had been flying at such a rate, and shall take wing again directly? ...Monied Interest [Dickens's nicknamed seat-partner] repeats, as quite enough for him, that the *French are Revolutionary*, “—and always at it” (530)

So I pass to my hotel, enchanted; sup, enchanted; go to bed, enchanted; pushing back this morning (if it really were this morning) in to the remoteness of time, blessing the South Eastern Company for *realising the Arabian Nights in these prose days*. (533; my italics throughout)

So begins the psychedelic train that culminates, eventually, in Dickens's most extendedly regressive train of thought. I'm dashing out a broad stroke here, from Dickens's "Flight" by rail, through Jarvis Lorry's flight by mail at the beginning of the *Tale*.

Yet even when his eyes were opened on the mist and rain, on the moving patch of light from the lamps, and the hedge at the roadside retreated by jerks, the night shadows outside the coach would *fall into the train* of the night shadows within. (18; my italics)

Same route, same Revolutionary destination, same mental lag-time. And Lorry's mental relapsing, as it echoes Dickens's in "A Flight," also predicts the more dramatic pathological regress, the backward associative "train" as it were, of Dickens's central figure in the *Tale*.

"I believe," returned Doctor Manette [recording in clinical third person his latest episode of traumatic amnesia], "that there had been a strong and extraordinary revival of the *train of thought* and remembrance that was the first cause of the malady. Some intense *associations* of a most distressing nature were vividly recalled, I think. It is probable that there had long been a dread lurking in his

mind, that *those associations would be recalled*—say, under certain circumstances—say, on a particular occasion. (209)

“... I do not think...that anything but the one *train of association* would renew [this disorder].” (210; my italics throughout)

That train will take him back, perpetually, to Feudal France; specifically, the corrupted estate of the twin Evrémondes who, having raped one young peasant and stabbed her brother, enlisted Manette’s medical assistance before casting him in the Bastille to ensure he’d not bear witness. “Repression is the only lasting philosophy” quips the surviving Marquis Evrémonde some decades later (128). And true to warning, critics find the whole “larger action of the novel turns on seeing what was never meant to be seen” (Hutter 39); or in any case *not spoken of* (the elder brother’s warning to Manette).¹²⁴ For example—I defer to Robert Alter’s psycho-rhythmic rundown of the novel—“Doctor Manette’s desperate cobbling, the newly imprisoned Darnay’s compulsive counting of steps...The grim knitting of the wives of the Revolution, led by Madame Defarge, express[ing] in regular nervous motion the irresistible impulse of vengeance working within the women” (18-9).

Meanwhile the Revolution of ’89 is rushing forth to ’93 and, at the same (true to Dickensian railway form) working assiduously in reverse to the year of 1757, when all this nervousness apparently got started. Take this historic commentary as our first inroad—in more dimensions than we had room to explore in Section I—on the motivating core of Dickens’s *Tale*.

The new era began; the king was tried, doomed, and beheaded; the Republic of liberty, equality, fraternity, or death, declared for victory or death against the

¹²⁴ “The things that you see here, are things to be seen, and not spoken of” (340).

world in arms... There was no pause, no pity, no peace, no interval of relenting rest, no measurement of time. Though the days and nights circled as regularly as when time was young, and the evening and the morning were the first day, other count of time there was none. Hold of it was lost in the raging fever of a nation, *as it is in the fever of one patient.* (282-3; my italics)

Enter Manette, six chapters later: “I found a *patient in a high fever* of the brain...” We’ve met that patient, the hysterical reality behind the cry for “liberty, equality, fraternity, or death” (mourning the dead and dying father and brother whom that Republic did not arrive in time to save). We’ve not considered yet that Manette’s patient-report doubles as a diagnosis of revolutionary time at large. Notice, for instance, how Carlyle’s satire on the Revolutionary Calendar, the endless calculus of months and days¹²⁵ becomes the endless *recount* of that day when Manette’s patient lost her husband. (We’re told “he sobbed twelve times, once for every stroke of the bell [at noon], and died on her bosom”: 338). Time decays into psychology—ricochets *verbatim* through those “counts” and “pauses” and clockwork “regularities” which started out in history—

There was no *pause*, ...no measurement of time. Though the days and nights circled as *regularly* as when time was young... other *count* of time there was none.

...and resumed (ad infinitum) within the trauma of that moment whereon Dickens’s history devolves:

¹²⁵ “Four equal Seasons, Twelve equal Months of Thirty days each; this makes three hundred and sixty days; and the five odd days remain to be disposed of. The five odd days we will make Festivals, and name the five *Sansculottides*, or Days without Breeches” (II.311).

she *counted* up to twelve...There was no cessation, but the *regular moment's*
pause... no pendulum could be more *regular*...

At some point in this counting, this hysteric and very deeply a-historic tolling, we might remember Jarvis Lorry's observation on Manette: "the man whose life always seemed...to have been stopped like a clock, for so many years" (281).

We might as well recall—panning out across this postromantic century, and thinking our way back down to the finer rhythmic units whereon this Revolution got its start—the stop-light caesural metrics Carlyle translated from Goethe (which Dickens might as well have picked up on a dash from Tennyson or Keats,)

the shocks of chance— / The blows of death (XCV.42-3)

or the flashback rhythms we've been tracing to their common predecessor Wordsworth,

Five years...five summers...five long winters...

or the rhythmical eternity that Barthes calls an "oscillation" and Freud calls the unconscious.

Ultimately, Dickens's train joins Carlyle's revolution on a rhythm that refuses to go anywhere. (We only need, as far as trauma theory is concerned, to pinpoint that psychobiographical sticking point which Dickens was, by accident, much readier than Carlyle to provide.)

III

Rhythm wants a trauma to explain itself. We know this from Tennyson and his critics, and again through Dickens's reading of Carlyle. It turns out Dickens's readers in their turn—

trauma theorists curiously allied with the formalists in this respect—are determinedly looking for a point of psychological determination to explain why (and where to, exactly) rhythm keeps on coming *back*. Garrett Stewart, among the finest ears in Victorian literary studies, helps us realize all over again how poetry (taken in its broad sense) intrudes on prose like the return of something repressed just out of mind and memory, or at very least out of our hearing.

Indeed, what Carlyle absorbed under the versifying aegis of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats—apprenticed more directly under Goethe and company, on the German Romantic line that marks out Carlyle’s straightest route to Freud¹²⁶—Dickens apparently sustained among Freud’s novelizing predecessors, through

... a massive and unsaid paradigm shift that transpires in the rhetorical substratum of Victorian narrative textuality: a shift from philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics) to psychology (affect, its defenses and deflections, its willed transactions)... (*Dear Reader* 31)

By now we’re not surprised to learn psychology was born into the novel on a beat; “deflected and transacted” (*transferred* would be Freud’s term, though I’ll insist again that it’s been *trained*) upon the burden of a postromantic legacy that might be called the muscle memory of Victorian prose fiction. Stewart cites “the densened phonological effects of romantic verse, passed on in moderated form to the British novel, ...*the return of a repressed* aural register in the subvocal materializations of Victorian style from Dickens and Charlotte Brontë through Robert Louis Stevenson” (78; my italics).

¹²⁶ As discussed in this dissertation’s Introduction.

A deliberated Freudian slip suggests how far the silent-reading voice converged, in postromantic fiction, with the textual *vocation* (as it were) of the unspeakable, and the unspoken, I have so far been tracing out in Carlyle's history: *e.g.* the "weary" anapestic footsteps of the dying Girondins, the ballad beats of "inarticulate" Marseillaise peasants, the quasi-vocalized caesura of voices drowned by drums, and stopped forever by the guillotine. Dickens takes this up a notch—and *down* one level—to the compound vocal-psychological substratum of a man who has been buried, in all senses, for the better part of eighteen years. Describing the newly-released Alexander Manette:

The faintness of the voice was pitiable and dreadful. It was not the faintness of physical weakness, though confinement and hard fare no doubt had their part in it. Its deplorable peculiarity was, that it was the faintness of solitude and disuse. It was like the *last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago...* So sunken and suppressed it was, that it was like a voice underground. So expressive it was, of a hopeless and lost creature, that a famished traveller, wearied out by lonely wandering in a wilderness, would have remembered home and friends in such a tone before lying down to die. (42; my italics)

The "weary traveler" lies down and dies three volumes later with—true to Dickensian poetic justice—the necessary antistrophe upon his lips. "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord"; and so says Sidney Carton, four times over, before he dies upon the scaffold to redeem the crimes of France's feudal past. More to the present point, his death is the redemption of, and the culminating turn of phrase upon a running underground trafficking sustained by this novel's nighttime host of "resurrection" men: bodies posthumously exhumed and sold to keep the balance, in a darkly comic way, against those living bodies that are (like Manette's) "buried alive

for eighteen years” in the Bastille (19). That’s part and parcel of—and in Stewart’s formal calculus, frankly incidental to—a broader counterplotting that is always going on in Dickens’s phonetic underground, leading up in this case to the narrative “sea change” that’s leveraged by Carton’s ultimate self-sacrifice.

[T]hroughout the death scene, the violent revolutionary sea changes seem to set in motion a compensatory verbal rhythm of wavering and restitution. As Carton nears his and the book’s end, the Dickensian rhetoric detaches crucial phrases from within, releases words to each other in new ways, *submits the burden of the unsayable to the ebb and turn of surprising allusions*, nuances, and ambiguities...
(*Death Sentences* 87)

Stewart doesn’t quite say Dickens has inherited the “burden of the unsayable” of Carlyle’s silent-singing Girondins. That’s one “surprising allusion” that apparently lurks in a textual underground even Stewart hasn’t fully fathomed. Still Carlyle’s legacy spells itself out in ways soon (if not immediately) obvious, as Stewart goes on to list the major prose effects of Dickens’s oeuvre: “the bridgings of alliteration, the manipulation of ellipsis and elision, the pacing and grading of syntax, the elusive folds of simile, the increments of parallelism...the invincibility of death getting coded by its very invisibility in so many passages...*given over to as void [sic], absence reified as textual gap*” (60; my italics).

Think again on Carlyle’s fractured prose—and what this stands for in postromantic, proto-Freudian tradition—the mysterious psychopoetic turnaround of some foregoing, ongoing but still unforthcoming truth. Glancing forth again to Dickens: “We are offered, to be sure, a sequence of events,” as Taylor Stoehr observes of the *Tale*, “one thing leads to another, time

passes, the ground goes by under foot. But *there seems to lurk behind the façade of normal occurrences some secret meaning, every now and then intruding itself...* as isolated bits of another story somehow underlying the one that takes up the actual time and space of the narrative” (82; my italics).

Somewhere along this rhythmic throughline between Dickens and Carlyle—where death speaks in vocal stops, and silence makes its case on a caesura, and the unspeakable pushes out its tacit point in double-entendres—it seems we’ve fallen back upon the old common rhythmic denominator. *Viz.*, Barthes’s oscillation: a turn that’s gaining literal, if superficial, traction on the railway line that leads eventually to Carlyle’s *Revolution*. Reversing that equation, what we’ll discover soon enough on Dickens’s rails, examined alongside his other rhythms and the critical (formalist and psychoanalytic) audition thereof, is one more revelation of the rhythmic syncopations playing out between real-time history and psychological eternity. Coming back to Stoehr’s analogy: “These intrusions are woven into the pattern of ongoing events in such a way that the *train* is never broken...” (82; my italics). Consider that this secret “train” articulates itself, at first, on *Dombey*’s railway engines,

...bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the *secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them*, and strong purposes not yet achieved. (234)

Critics have absorbed this passage as the promissory note on what deep psychic signalling Dickens’s train—his rhythm generally, for that matter—will sustain throughout this author’s life and work. Stewart may have his eye on Dickens’s historic *Tale* when he enumerates (what we’ve just quoted) “the bridgings of alliteration, the manipulation of ellipsis and elision, the pacing and

grading of syntax, the elusive folds of simile, the increments of parallelism,” and so on. But his *ear* is tuned almost verbatim (howbeit unknowingly) to the famous railway flight that coincides with Dickens’s entry into the dark psychology of his latter oeuvre—the introversive pressure which declares itself in Dickens’s *Tale* but literally tracks down to *Dombey*’s rails. Start with the casual coincidences, like the “alliterative bridging” Stewart might have imported from the actual “crossing” bridges of *Dombey*’s maiden voyage:

Breasting the wind, and light, the *shower* and *sunshine*, away, and still away, it
rolls and *roars*, fierce and rapid, *smooth* and *certain*...massive bridges crossing up
above...

Then Stewart’s “expanding and contracting intervals,” played out in ocular effects,

...massive bridges crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad,
upon the eye, and then are lost.

Lost again, Stewart would say, in “the elusive folds of simile”—or metaphor,

...in the track of the indomitable monster, Death!

There’s your Dickensian “death sentence,” as Stewart calls it, the deep thanatic crux of *Dombey*’s voyage, four times reiterated in as many paragraphs which run down (every time) like the checklist of those prose-prosodic tactics Stewart named. The clausal “increments” and “parallels,” the “pacing and grading of syntax”—locking into something like blank verse, and accelerating gradually into the paeonic pattern we’ve already seen in this part of the novel.¹²⁷

Thus: “**Away** and **still away**, **onward** and **onward ever**: **glimpses** of **cottage-homes**, of **houses**,

¹²⁷ As quoted above, on pp.140-1 of this chapter.

mansions, rich estates of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small and insignificant as they are left behind: and so they do, and what else is there but such glimpses, in the track of the indomitable monster, Death!” (298).

Dombey’s death-drive is, perchance, the main bourgeois extension on that postromantic rhythmic line which shuttles forth to Freud upon the new Victorian technologies of speed, played out across the sublexemic pressures (“telegraphic” is the favorite term among close-readers of Dickens’s railway prose¹²⁸) which articulate nothing so surely as the deep centripetal *self*, in all its proto-Freudian complexity. “No stranger to psychically wounding experience,” as Jill Matus has explained, Dickens brings to bear upon his railway line the same traumatic pressures he’d been practicing throughout a long career of, say, “fictive reenactments of abandonment and childhood abuse,” of traumatic fixation and psychic splitting (“the uncoupling of event and conscious cognition, ...belatedness, repetitive and intrusive return”); and never least in Dickens’s thoughts, the underlying “mysteries of identity and death”¹²⁹ (84, 104, 106). Not to mention this author’s “previous and longstanding interest in mesmerism and trance, questions of *remembering and forgetting, possessing and losing the self*” (107; my italics).

As the formalists are keyed to Dickens’s train, we are beginning to discover the reverse—that the scholarship on Dickens’s train, the railway trauma in particular, is perhaps far more attuned to Dickens’s form than it is aware. Indeed what Matus is projecting onto Dickens’s railway is one part psychology, *two* parts rhythm, I’ll submit—with an ear toward those motions of “remembering and forgetting, possessing and losing,” which align in Matus’s syntax with a broader turn we’ve heard at large, and small, in Dickens’s praxis. Thinking back upon the

¹²⁸ And a term we will, accordingly, address in further detail before this section is out.

¹²⁹ This latter phrase Matus draws from Michael Hollington’s study on *The Mysteries of Edwin Drood* and “No Thoroughfare.” (See Hollington, “To the Droodstone,” *Q/W/E/R/T/Y* 5 (1995): 148.)

psycho-structural *fort-da* we have been following since Carlyle through Tennyson, consider again that Dickens's train seems to have caught our ears as an accelerated, amplified resounding of that same rhythmic intermittence readers seem to be hearing, if anything, for the first time in this novel context. Rosemarie Bodenheimer says it best: "The astonishing array of critical work that makes up Dickens studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century has become ever more attentive to the *revealing and concealing intelligence* that lurks somewhere—but where, exactly?—in Dickens's writing" (2; my italics). So in Garrett Stewart's reckoning of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for instance, we find

the contradictions generated between the motive to disclose (and luxuriate) and the tendency toward reticence...played out in the *oscillations* of discursivity itself[.] (*Dear Reader* 183; my italics)

So again in *Little Dorrit*, and right across the board of the Victorian novel (increasingly as that genre picks up speed) Stewart discerns the prose encryptions, joined to the prosodic counter-rhythms of a *subtext*—in the deepest sense of that term which, in Stewart's vocabulary, is never far removed from the Freudian subconscious. Specifically:

the lesser and inevitable counterplay that operates along the lines of any fictive response, including a whole range of metaphoric equivocations and reversals in the ambivalent slack of fictional language, its *oscillations* and ruses, its rhetorical saliencies, elisions, and outright silencings. (*Novel Violence* 34; my italics)

If this isn't "the return of the [subtextual] repressed" (Stewart ultimately rules against that coinage: 34) it *is* still the return, let's say, of something that refuses to *press onward* in obeisance to the laws of time and space, and normal narrative unfolding (in Stewart's words, "the often

searing logic of temporality in Victorian fiction...its actual grammatical momentum...the larger crisis of time at the base of the entire genre”: 27). Listen in, Stewart advises, and you will discern a certain undergoing “textural” perseverance,

the textured pace of the *written*, with its unruly skids and jolts, [written and read] against the overriding—the more abstract and immaterial—force of the *plotted*.
(34; Stewart’s italics)

And also, certain undertones of Dickens’s train in these ground-level “skids” and “jolts” and contra-verbal stops and shudders—the rhythmic damages which sent *Dombey*, for instance, reeling back upon the memory of domestic guilt, and his partner John Carker, backtracking and literally run over on the ruins of an attempted adultery,¹³⁰ and Dickens himself...

Well, *what* exactly? All this begs the question as to where Dickens was going with his readers, or rather trying *not* to go, across this culminating decade in his prose. Where—to phrase the question more specifically—does this railway line crash into something real?

We know Dickens will be joining with his readers on the rails that were at once the subject, the medium and the literal vehicle of prose circulation (expedited, as Picker reminds us, by a vast and growing enterprise of railway bookstalls and travelling libraries, catered to an audience that was both increasing, and increasingly on-the-move in Dickens’s writing heyday: 28-9). It follows almost logically, then, that this author should eventually part ways with us—in his culminating “reader apostrophe,” as Stewart says, the nearest and yet terminal conjunction of a writer and his public—down the line that ended, and very literally derailed, upon his last completed work. “I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I

¹³⁰ We will address that scene shortly.

was then,” as he explained by way of Postscript to that book (*Our Mutual Friend*: 1865); “until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book:—THE END” (800).

Or rather, “suspended...at last,” as Picker says,¹³¹ referring on one level to the railway car that *nearly* toppled Dickens—the man, the manuscript, and its imputed future readers—over the bridge in the famous Staplehurst derailment of June 1865. At the same time, Picker has packed in a double-entendre that incorporates in Dickens’s near-ending the “*suspended*,” i.e. extended circulation and conjunction which this near-ending incident has come to represent in Dickens’s oeuvre. Like any trauma worthy of the name, this one repeats itself uncannily (in his mind and in *our* ears) throughout the last two decades of his writing; from the premonitory thanatos of Dombey’s death-train (“the indomitable monster, Death!” as quoted on p.159) or Carker’s flashback death-ride several volumes later in that book, through the flashing but illegible railroad signs in Dickens’s “Signalman” (published one year after his own accident, in 1866) to, not least, the telegraphic intimations Dickens flashes on his readers right across his final work, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). We’ll follow up on this trajectory, after considering that for Picker (as for Stewart, more or less) it all comes down again to Dickens’s beat, the prose-prosodic inklings he was perpetually sounding out on public ears. Literally: “While he continued his reading tours, the volume of his writing after *Our Mutual Friend* dropped from a roar to a murmur. He instead propelled himself into reading aloud, where it seemed to him... ‘that a mere spoken word—a mere syllable thrown into the air—may go on reverberating through the illimitable space for ever and for ever’” (40). Reverberating, *and* of course returning. “In this round world of many circles within circles [Picker quotes here from one memorable ‘return-trip’

¹³¹ Quoting from Dickens himself.

in *Dombey and Son*] do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place?" (*DS* 525). All told, as Picker explains,

Riders on the round-trip journey of rail travel found in *Dombey* a circular journey of Dickensian narrative. The work that muses for so long on the problem of transmission [think again of those "secretive" railway engines, quoted some pages ago] ultimately *doubles back, repeats with a difference*, like the trains that mysteriously roll in and out of Staggs's Gardens, and the waves that Little Paul struggles to decipher on the shore. (37; my italics)

So Dickens's rhythms are exactly part and parcel of a broader turn that's happening, as ever, somewhere between Victorian technology and proto-Freudian psychology,

the 'massive *return of the past*' Marcus claims dominates this period of Dickens's life. In reenvisioning itself, the novel attempts to integrate the past with the present, or put another way, moves forward by going backward. (38; my italics)

Picker looks ahead to *David Copperfield*, "where [the author] goes on to forge the ore of his remotest memories into the lore of a fictional present." (I can't resist remarking on how Picker doubles the effect in his own verbiage, "to *forge the ore of...memories into the lore...*"; all the better if this says that critics have, perchance unconsciously, absorbed the deeper mnemonic work that's always going on in Dickens's prose.) And he comes back again to *Dombey*, the book wherein Dickens "points ahead to the perpetual transmission and revision of his canon in print and performance"—all the while cultivating a growing counter-currency of unknowns. "Like the conquering engines roaring and trembling with their mystery, or the waves always indistinctly

saying [this verb deliberately suspended in the intransitive], the novel hints at meaning but keeps secrets, challenging readers to track the *enigmatic persistence of its evolving reproduction*” (38; my italics).

Remember Stewart, with his subtextual “return of the repressed”; or as Bodenheimer puts it, “the revealing and concealing intelligence that lurks *somewhere*...in Dickens’s writing.”

Beneath this running game of psycho-rhythmic *fort-da*, Picker discerns the underwriting leverage of rails and reels—and telegraphic pulses—the joint technologies of circulation and distribution thus wedded to the deeper currencies of authorial occlusion. In fact, “telegraphy” might be the keyword here, inasmuch as Dickens’s railway always means to tell us something (inasmuch as this disclosure only pulses out by fits and starts). The invention of the telegraph did, actually, contribute signally in mid-Victorian railway technology, as “the mechanical transmitter of coded communication” (28). Or in Dickens’s rhythmic rendering,

...now, the **wires** of the electric **telegraph** are **all** alive, and **spin**, and blurr [*sic*]
their **edges**, and go **up** and **down**, and make their **intervals between** each **other**
most **irregular**: **contracting** and **expanding** in the **strangest** manner...

Dickens’s iambic-paeonic metrics are an immediate giveaway that this is being witnessed from his railway carriage (“...Now we **slacken**. With a **screwing**, and a **grinding**, [X] and a smell of **water** thrown on **ashes**, now we **stop!**”: “A Flight” 530). His prose bears out the literal, parallel rotation of the railway and the telegraph, one line transporting bodies, and the other—since its installation alongside the rails in 1842¹³²—sending their messages on ahead of them. “[T]o say

¹³² Walder (854).

that they were coming,” as Dickens quipped about those self-important Parliamentary passengers in *Dombey* (234).

All the while, Dickens on some level warns that *he* is coming to his final stop, and very nearly his life’s termination, on the famous bridge at Staplehurst. In any event, Dickens’s telegraphy runs deeply and more proleptically than he could have known when *Dombey* rode across his pages—which means we’ll need to glance ahead now to the one book that came out (fractured) in the years after this incident. Jill Matus has it right, I think, as she directs us to such passages as this one in Dickens’s career-capping but uncompleted *Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870):

Rosa’s mind throughout the last six months had been stormily confused. A half-formed, wholly unexpressed suspicion tossed in it, *now heaving itself up*, and *now sinking* into the deep; *now gaining* palpability, and *now losing* it. (232; my italics)

That’s from the chapter called “A Flight,”¹³³ so called as Rosa there makes her escape from Cloisterham to London—though Dickens’s other “Flight,” the railway article of 1851, is surely somewhere in the background of these fugal meditations. Note especially the telegraphic stop-start rhythms, the “ups and downs,” and the recurrent “now’s” that ricochet verbatim from that other passage; from Dickens’s train, that is, to Rosa’s train of dark associative thought. And another railway line will shape itself, perhaps, as we follow Rosa’s brainwaves to their reference point: the steely, secret, “unsuspected” (by now half-suspected) villain of this novel. *Not* the railway demon readers might recall from *Dombey*,

¹³³ Originally, “Divers Flights.” Forster apparently changed the title to focus on Rosa’s journey alone (Cox 312, n.2,4).

bubbling and trembling there, ...dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved (234)

—although the villain of *Edwin Drood* (John Jasper, namely) does his fair share of “bubbling” and “writhing” and “shrieking”¹³⁴ as he comes in for his crisis. Without enmeshing ourselves thoroughly in Dickens’s plotted build-up, *e.g.* Jasper’s dark attraction to Rosa, his very likely motives for the murder of her fiancé, the suspicions she *and* her guardian, Mr. Grewgious, have come to register against him—and a certain bit of information Grewgious is, now, testing out on Jasper’s conscience—see how Dickens ups the ante on this denouement, and effectively secures the interests of his trauma-theorist readers down the line, with this cruelly unforthcoming, quasi-telegraphic counterpoint of speech and observation on one side, revelation on the other

“I have a communication to make that will surprise you. At least, it has surprised me.’

...

“What is it?” demanded Jasper once more.

Mr. Grewgious, alternately opening and shutting the palms of his hands as he warmed them at the fire, and looking fixedly at him sideways, and never changing either his action or his look in all that followed, went on to reply.

“This young couple, the lost youth and Miss Rosa, my ward, though so long betrothed, and so long recognising their betrothal, and so near being married—”

¹³⁴ Readers won’t likely need reminding of *Dombey*’s “*shrieking* and roaring” railway engines (288-9).

Mr. Grewgious saw a staring white face, and two quivering white lips...

“—This young couple came gradually to the discovery...that they would be happier and better, both in their present and their future lives, as affectionate friends, or say rather as brother and sister, than as husband and wife.’

Mr. Grewgious saw a lead-coloured face in the easy-chair, and on its surface [*note the imagery*, as Jasper’s histrionics click into gear] dreadful starting drops or bubbles, as if of steel.

“This young couple formed at length the healthy resolution of interchanging their discoveries...”

And so on, to predictable effect, “*Mr. Grewgious saw...Mr. Grewgious saw* the ghastly figure throw back its head... *Mr. Grewgious heard* a terrible shriek, *and saw* no ghastly figure, sitting or standing; *saw nothing* but a heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.” All this, to the metonymic systole and diastole that Grewgious is conducting, literally, by hand. “Not changing his action even then, he opened and shut the palms of his hands as he warmed them, and looked down at it [Jasper’s body]” (190-2; my italics throughout).

That scene has surely earned the extra gravitas which critics tend to grant this latest work—indeed the *only* novel Dickens assayed after his near derailment in 1865. According to Matus, he “was perhaps brought through the Staplehurst accident to a sharper intimation of the nature of psychic shock and pain than ever before”; particularly, the psychosensory delays and replays, and (I believe this is the thrust of *Drood*’s telegraphic brain-games) the perpetual *returns* of certain unincorporated bits of information. Matus has an eye as well on Dickens’s “The Signalman” (1866), a gothic railway short which plays out, to tragic effect, the uncanny

resonances of an unheeded signal, and a voice that didn't register in time to save the speaker's life.¹³⁵ Thus Dickens "returns imaginatively to the site of the railway accident in order to master a stimulus that resists mastery. If he lost his voice in the Staplehurst accident [not only did he lose it; by Dickens's own report he 'most unaccountably brought someone else's out of that terrible scene'¹³⁶], he found it later in articulating, in this story of ghostly clairvoyance and hindsight, the characteristics of trauma barely broached in the medical discourse of nervous shock during the 1860s" (104).

Right enough; and Matus has compiled more than sufficient evidence of Dickens's compendious absorption and (as she suggests) preemption of the nineteenth-century state of the art of trauma studies. At the same time, this is where the trauma-theorist reading betrays its very Freudian determination to pin the theme (the railway rhythm, the telegraphic pulse) down to the scripted psychobiographical decoding offered by a crisis such as Dickens suffered. Indeed, a closer look at the scene just quoted reveals the graduated shockwaves readers have absorbed—and Matus too, implicitly—from Dickens's railway writing right across the '50s and '60s, up to and including his reported trauma on the rails. Bearing in mind Matus's description of the same, "the thrice repeated 'Mr. Grewgious saw,'" followed by "the fourth reiteration, which is a variation, for now Grewgious hears the shriek but no longer sees Jasper" (107), compare this climactic scene in *Dombey*, depicting the villain James Carker within moments of a violent death:

He heard a shout—another—saw the face [Dombey's, not unlike Jasper's in its sudden pallor] change from its vindictive passion to a faint sickness and

¹³⁵ Referring to the signalman's cry, repeated several times and by several different characters throughout the story ("Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!": 302).

¹³⁶ Ackroyd, 961.

terror...knew in a moment that the rush was come—*uttered a shriek*—looked round—*saw the red eyes*, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—
(823)

Following Carker backward on his journey, we might pick up the first notes of a mental oscillation that's just shown up at the other end of Dickens's oeuvre, with Rosa's storm-tossed train of thought ("now heaving itself up, and now sinking into the deep; now gaining palpability, and now losing it"). Likewise Carker:

The clatter and commotion echoed to the hurry and discordance of the fugitive's ideas. Nothing clear without, and nothing clear within. Objects flitting past, merging into one another, dimly descried, confusedly *lost sight of, gone!*
...Beyond the shifting images that *rose up in his mind and vanished* as they showed themselves. (811-2; my italics)

And while we're on the track of Dickens's mental oscillations (the proleptically-analeptically recirculating line that leads this railway ultimately forth, I should say back, to Carlyle's *Revolution*) here is one more passage to consider: Carker's first "vanishing" premonition of the train, and of his own death, wrapped within the telegraphic *fort-da* that's been our psycho-poetic keynote since Carlyle.

Some visionary horror, unintelligible and inexplicable, associated with a trembling of the ground, —a *rush and sweep* of something through the air, like Death upon the wing. He shrunk, as if to let the thing go by. *It was not gone, it never had been there*, yet what a startling horror it *had left behind*. (810; my italics)

Two decades later, now two years after the incident at Staplehurst, Dickens reports: “I have sudden *vague rushes of terror*, even when riding in a hansom cab, which are perfectly unreasonable and quite insurmountable.”¹³⁷ The first of several classic post-traumatic symptoms; according to Peter Ackroyd, “[h]e felt weak, ... a ‘faint and sick’ sensation in his head rather than in his body; his pulse was low, he felt generally nervous and when travelling by train he suffered from the illusion that the train was ‘down’ on the left side.” And he suffered in perpetual rotation, as it were: “forever reliving the old crash and forever *seeing* the crash into which he might again be plunged” (963; Ackroyd’s italics). Reflecting back on Carker’s journey—and the guilty, fugitive impulses Dickens must have shared with his villain on some level—Ackroyd ponders the uncanny circularity this accident seems to have confirmed in Dickens’s life and works.

Was it as if some terror from his own imagination had now come alive, just as the dead had surrounded him at Staplehurst even as he was writing a book about death itself?¹³⁸ Not only had he been involved in a crash but that accident may have injured Ellen Ternan [Dickens’s secret mistress] and certainly threatened to expose his “other life” with her. His own fears must then have loomed in front of him, and was there not also some sense of guilt and punishment following him as relentlessly as the train once pursued Carker? We only know that, as his son said, Dickens “may be said never to have recovered” and that he actually died on the fifth anniversary of the Staplehurst disaster. (964)

¹³⁷ Quoted in Ackroyd, 963 (my italics).

¹³⁸ Referring, of course, to *Our Mutual Friend*.

And by this remarkable calendrical coincidence (a favorite fact of Dickens studies) we have come to recognize again, writ large, the ongoing periodicity of a trauma that seems, indeed, to happen at every turn of this high-pressured prose. Or so we've heard it. From *Dombey's* train through *Drood's* extended trains of thought—accelerated and contracted on the telegraphic pulses, flashing forth and back along the line that ultimately crashes into trauma theory—scholars have discerned, in effect, the career-long repetition and reverberation of some intrinsic and ground-shaking psychological *event* in Dickens's life.

In any case, they've heard a rhythm—whatever the motive. Perhaps the trauma of derailment, or the guilt which this derailment brings to light. (Adultery? Eros, let's say.) Or the deep thanatic charm this author didn't totally abandon to the dead he was still writing on (Ackroyd notes) long after he'd ceased trying to revive the dying into life at Staplehurst. "Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!" says Jenny Wren, in a phrase that's often taken as the mantra of the book which nearly took her up on that (*OMF* 281). "Come *back*..." in any event; bearing in mind Stewart's "return of the repressed," the subliminal and/or sublexemic recoil that's encrypted on some level of Dickens's forward-throttle prose. At least the critics are still coming back, howbeit unconsciously,¹³⁹ to Dickens's beat. Barthes's "oscillation," I should say, is still alive and running in Carlyle's major scion at midcentury and, most importantly perhaps, alive in *our* semi-subliminal half-hearings of that writer's (dare I say Carlylean?) psychological depths.

¹³⁹ Matus herself is not explicitly aware of the compounded rhythmic and verbal parallels between those passages from *Edwin Drood* and Dickens's railway prose—notwithstanding her extended prefatory treatment of the same in Dickens's "Signalman."

III

“I think the business of art is to lay all that ground carefully,” says Dickens, regarding the development of Manette’s traumatic backstory in *A Tale*, “but with the care that conceals itself—to shew, by a backward light, what everything has been working to—but only to SUGGEST, until the fulfillment comes. These are the ways of Providence” (*Letters IX.128*). Carlyle is somewhere in the background of these “providential” telegraphs, to which I would append a certain passing joke on the man, just two days earlier in Dickens’s correspondence: “Though there is, as Carlyle says, *great virtue in the Silences*, I don’t judge of you by yours,¹⁴⁰ *but by your utterances*” (127; my emphasis).

Having proposed that the Barthesian oscillation has gained leverage since Carlyle, we might start with the very obvious acknowledgement that these “telegraphic” missives had by now an actual technological analogue in Victorian England. But Dickens’s playful metaphor is ultimately keyed to a very serious undertaking—“telegraphing” Carlyle, as it were—*i.e.* translating the silent-speaking currencies of the *Revolution* into the compact psychodramatic pulses and (here’s another twist) the “frantic” weekly numbers of the *Tale*. As he confides throughout his letters, “Nothing but the interest of the subject, and the pleasure of striving with the difficulty of the form of treatment...could else repay the time and trouble of the incessant condensation” (qtd. in Davis 35); “The small portions thereof, drive me frantic; but I think the tale must have taken a strong hold. The run upon our monthly parts is surprising, and last month we sold 35,000 back numbers” (*Letters IX.92*). Dickens succeeded then, in every sense; bringing readers up to speed, and raking in the speedy profits on a history that was, of course, impossibly (ironically) ongoing in Carlyle’s nine hundred some-odd pages. “In the French

¹⁴⁰ He is addressing his friend Wren Hoskyns.

Revolution [Dickens] found a subject worthy of his broadest conceptions,” as Charles Beckwith has observed. And yet, “[t]he very breadth of that prospect may well be responsible for the deliberate tightening and narrowing of scope in the *Tale*.... [N]o work of Dickens’s is more controlled (3).”

Certainly, none strives toward the epicentric force that Dickens somehow mastered on every level; from the delimited and quasi-allegorical cast of dramatis personae, the single-plot trajectory and the antiphonal division of chapters (*e.g.* “Monsieur the Marquis in Town”; “Monsieur...in the Country”; “A Hand at Cards”; “The Game Made”; “One Night” and “Nine Days,” etc.) down to their very sentence structure. All told, we come to the flash-forward sequel of the flashback logic that got this chapter started. Something in Carlyle’s history apparently needs Dickens’s high-velocity revision to impress itself on critics’s ears. Consider again the famous opening:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief... (5)

A single run-on sentence that keeps running back, ten times in as many separate clauses, on a certain undeclared historic “It” (and four more clauses on an unidentified historic “we”).¹⁴¹ That’s just the start of an extended counter-currency of syntagmatic cyphers, or (as Beckwith says) “the mixing of realism and rhetoric...that, in a variety of forms, runs through the whole novel—as for example in the monotonous repetition of the word Hunger early in the book, in the footsteps and the thundering around the Manettes’ house in Soho, in the knitting and the counting of heads at the climax” (1).

¹⁴¹ Beckwith pays tribute to the “paradoxical patterning” of this opening sentence (1) though I’m primarily indebted here to Joseph Jordan’s close reading (32).

Joseph Jordan has suggested that this novel ultimately turns, in every sense, on the mysterious Resurrection theme (and variations, the “literally hundreds of other non-substantive instances of people and things that fall-to-rise or rise-to-fall”: 27). One example should suffice:

The new Era began...three hundred thousand men, summoned to *rise* against the tyrants of the earth, *rose* from all the varying soils of France...in *fell* and forest [note the latent verb in “fell”]... What private solicitude could rear itself against the deluge of the Year One of Liberty—the deluge *rising from below, not falling from above*, and with the windows of heaven shut, not opened! (my italics)

Beyond the rise and fall, though, notice how this passage folds directly back into the dark epochal rhythms Dickens has been cyphering throughout this commentary:

There was no pause, no pity, no peace, no interval of relenting rest...
Though the days and nights circled as regularly as when time was young, and the evening and the morning were the first day... (283)

Meanwhile, the falling (“*fell* and”) forest should already have reminded us that Time is, still, building on the silent but inexorable work of Dickens’s “Woodman, Fate and Farmer, Death”—and the invention of the guillotine.

It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees... already marked by the Woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history. It is likely enough...there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and

roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution. But that Woodman and that Farmer, *though they work unceasingly, work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread...* (6; my italics)

Barthes's "oscillation" came to life on a caesura, as you may recall: the fractured language of the Freudian unconscious, undergirded by the shimmered language of the Gods and (what Carlyle heard) fleshed into roundness by the silent epochal periodicities of history itself. Dickens heard, loud and clear, Carlyle's prognostic: "The frightfullest Births of Time are never the loud-speaking ones, for these soon die; they are the silent ones, which can live from century to century!" (*FR* II.443). The guillotine, for instance, had been pulsing into life a full millennium ago: "The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it falls" (I.29). Likewise the Sansculottes, the Reign of Terror—and every other hue and crash and cry we should have heard in silent coming.

Such things were; such things are; and they go on in silence peaceably:—and Sansculottisms follow them. History, looking back over this France through long times, ...when dumb Drudgery staggered up to its King's Palace, and in wide expanse of sallow faces, squalor and winged raggedness, presented hieroglyphically its Petition of Grievances; and for answer got hanged...,—confesses mournfully that there is no period to be met with, in which the general Twenty-five Millions of France suffered *less* than in this period which they name the Reign of Terror! (II.442-3)

Take this as the “hieroglyphic” currency¹⁴²—the silent psychosocial downbeat, and the broader epochal resonance—of Dickens’s revolution, no less of course than Carlyle’s, whose *modus operandi* Dickens has so expressly made his own, in the passage just quoted. From the oak to the axe, to (Dickens’s signature rotation in this novel) the death carts—

Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter, Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilettes of flaring Jezebels...the huts of millions of starving peasants!...Changeless and hopeless, the tumbrils roll along. (385)

Again, we should have heard it coming. Perhaps we *did*. “Thanks to Dickens,” George Orwell declares, “the very word ‘tumbriel’ has a murderous sound” (100); reinforced, no doubt, by the extended preparation of “rumblings” and “grumbings” and “crumbings”¹⁴³ in the intervening chapters (thirty four, out of this novel’s total forty-five, before this vehicle will make its first appearance in the streets of Paris). And the tumbrils are, as ever, deeply coextensive with the undergoing turn of Dickens’s history. “The whole book is dominated by the guillotine—tumbrils thundering to and fro, bloody knives [sharpened on the “grindstone” Dickens made famous in the second chapter of the novel’s final volume], heads bouncing into the basket, and

¹⁴² “[A]s if,” Dickens rejoins, “observers of the wretched millions in France...had not seen it inevitably coming, years before, and had not in plain words recorded what they saw” (247). Dickens clearly shares Carlyle’s assuredness that history exceeds what’s gone on record. “No *ex post facto* enquiries and provings by figures will hold water,” he explained to Bulwer-Lytton, who’d taken issue on some points within the *Tale*, “against the tremendous testimony of men living at the time” (*Letters* IX.2 59).

¹⁴³ Starting in Chapter 2 of the first volume, with “the rumbling and labouring” of the Dover mail coach (10; see also Chapter 4, p.22). There’s a canny combination of “rumbling” and “grumbling” in the thunderstorm that foretells, by one chapter, the outbreak of the Revolution (221); see also the portentous “crumbling” towers of the Evrémonde estate (130) and, with that, the “crumbling fabric” of the feudal aristocracy (251).

sinister old women knitting as they watch” (Orwell 97). Just as Dickens predicted, in one memorable set-piece of historic devolution:

Darkness closed around, and then came the ringing of the church bells and the distant beating of the drums of the Royal Guard, as the women sat *knitting, knitting*. Darkness encompassed them. *Another darkness was closing in* as surely...So much was *closing in* about the women who sat *knitting, knitting*, that they their very selves were *closing in* around a structure yet unbuilt, where they were to sit *knitting, knitting, counting dropping heads*. (193-4; my italics)

From the past progressive, “was closing in,” to the perpetual participial present of Dickens’s nervous knitting women—one woman especially,¹⁴⁴ who is still knitting, counting, though not exactly *working* out the secret grievance that will send one noble bloodline to the guillotine—Dickens insinuates yet another, deeper curve in this epochal cycle of oppression and revenge. Time stops, or (Marx and Freud would put it this way) history returns upon the unsolved wrongs of man. “Evil engenders evil; terror creates terror,” as William Marshall has observed. “In Defarge and his wife [knitter-in-chief] we find ... [that] if we hate we become what we hate” (49). And if we destroy we must be destroyed, like Madame Defarge (“destroyed by her own pistol”: 49); like the feudal class she’d gone about extinguishing, the “Monseigneurs” upon the self-destructive rack of their misguided governance. “Thus,” as Dickens puts it, “the last drop of blood having been extracted from the flints, and the last screw of the rack having been turned so often that its purchase *crumbled*, and it now turned and turned with nothing to bite, Monseigneur began to run away” (236; my italics).

¹⁴⁴ Madame Defarge, the fictional embodiment of the Revolutionary *Tricoteuses* who (true to their name) sat knitting by the guillotine as they spectated over the executions during the Terror.

Tuning in again on Dickens's writing—and thinking forward several chapters in this history—I'll wager Monseigneur is running from the early “crumbling” premonitions of the tumbrils that will cart him, by the thousands, to his death four years from now.¹⁴⁵ And there are other wheels in motion here. Behind the guillotine, the grindstone and the rack, there is the going pressure of the feudal mill¹⁴⁶ and (what this exemplifies in Dickens's hands) the heavy narrative rotation of certain psychosocial warning signs:

Samples of a people that had undergone a terrible grinding and regrinding in the mill, and certainly not the fabulous mill which ground old people young, shivered at every corner, passed in and out at every doorway, looked from every window, fluttered in every vestige of a garment that the wind shook. The mill which had worked them down, was the mill that grinds young people old; the children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sign, Hunger.

(32)

Joseph Jordan would find instances aplenty in this paragraph of Dickens's rise-to-fall-and-back motif (*grinding and regrinding...ground old people young and young people old...worked them down...ploughed and coming up afresh*). Notice the anaphora as well,

shivered... passed... looked...fluttered...

at every corner...every doorway...every window...every vestige...every furrow...

Homing in, now, on the keyword of this passage,

¹⁴⁵ Beginning with the September Massacres of 1793. (The nobles were taking flight as early as 1789, when this chapter takes place.)

¹⁴⁶ My thanks to Marshall for picking up on this other premonitory “wheel” of Dickens's history (47).

Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses...Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood...; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street...Hunger was the inscription on the baker's shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock... (32-3)

(And just for good measure, here's another "sign" that's destined to return till heeded. Two paragraphs later,)

[T]he time was to come, when the gaunt scarecrows of that region should have watched the lamplighter, in their idleness and hunger, so long as to conceive the idea of improving on his method, and hauling up men by those ropes and pulleys, to flare upon the darkness of their condition. *But, the time was not come yet*; and every wind that blew over France shook the rags of the scarecrows in vain, for the birds...*took no warning*. (33-4; my italics)

Call it as they will, phonemic "alliteration"¹⁴⁷ or verbal "anaphora," or (here I'm expanding on Jordan's rising/falling/resurrection themes) a certain deep historical *chiasmus* that's always latent in the meaning, and indeed the very geometry, of this so-called Revolution; all told, critics will agree that Dickens's writing in the *Tale* is, as I have argued that his rhythm has done all along, sending its urgent signals against the normal syntax of historical development. "[T]he elements do not seem to add up or move in a particular direction," as Taylor Stoehr explains, "but rather to exist all at once, articulated without being integrated, ordered without being organized. The

¹⁴⁷ Jordan's word (39).

detail is not presented according to the principles that foster a sense of growth and change in time” (110). J.M. Rignall concurs, in effect:

Instead of progress there is something more like the catastrophic continuum that is Walter Benjamin’s description of the historical process: the single catastrophe, piling wreckage upon wreckage...

And “oppression [on] oppression, violence [on] violence,” *etc.* (121-2). So Dickens’s history ironically resumes the same “timeless” (*ahistoric*, *anaphoric*,¹⁴⁸ though again I’d rather say *chiastic*) patterning that’s always been the hallmark of his writing.

We ought to grasp the fact that Dickens’s *ahistoric* beat was always destined for the *deep* historic signaling that Rignall, among others, has apparently been hearing for the first time in his *Revolution*. “From the opening chapter in which the ‘creatures of this chronicle’ are set in motion ‘along the roads that lay before them,’ while the Woodman Fate and the Farmer Death go silently about their ominous work, those roads lead with sinister inevitability to the revolutionary scaffold” (Rignall 121). Nevertheless it is significant, I think, that critics heard the tacit meaning of the tumbrils; and more importantly (another first, in Rignall’s hearing) the deep centripetal persuasion I want to ascribe to Dickens’s writing right across this decade.

To an unusual extent, especially given the expansive and centrifugal nature of Dickens’s imagination, this is an end-determined narrative whose individual elements are ordered by an ending which both their goal and, in a sense, their

¹⁴⁸ A term which Stoehr explains at length, mainly by way of grammatical analogy to the photographic, freeze-frame optics Dickens had been trying out as early as *Bleak House* (1853), and perfecting in this “Hunger” passage we’re exploring in the *Tale* (83-5, 110).

source.... As oppression is shown to breed oppression, violence to beget violence, evil to provoke evil, a pattern emerges that is too deterministic to owe much to Carlyle and profoundly at odds with the conventional complacencies of Whig history. (121)

He's missed this patterning in Dickens's pre-*Tale* works—and in Carlyle as well. But just in case we need reminding, here's a paragraph from Carlyle's chapter on "The Tumbrils":

Two masses...an *over-electric* mass of Cordelier Rabids, and an *under-electric* of Dantonist Moderates and Clemency-men,—these two masses, shooting bolts at *one another*, so to speak, have *annihilated one another*. For the Erebus-cloud, as we often remark, is of suicidal nature; and, in jagged irregularity, darts its lightning withal into itself. But now these two discrepant masses being mutually annihilated, it is as if the Erebus-cloud had got to internal composure; and did only pour its hell-fire lightning on the World that lay under it. In plain words, *Terror* of the Guillotine was never *terrible* till now. Systole, diastole, *swift* and ever *swifter* goes the Axe of Samson...It is the highday of *Death: none but the Dead return not*. (II.390; my italics)

Destructive and self-destructive; terror springing Terror, "swift and ever swifter..." I forbear quoting further from an author whose determining chiasmus we have already measured out in Chapter 1. Suffice it to say—I will defer to David Marcus now—that "Dickens's conceptual debt to Carlyle is much greater than recent criticism has recognized." Not least, as Dickens navigates those postromantic rhythmic grounds that run somewhere among deep history, deep psychology and (Marcus insinuates another major theme in Carlyle) psychosocial neurosis.

[B]oth writers seek ways in which people can socialize their energies in an age whose institutions seem at odds with any humanly valuable purpose.; the humane man finds himself caught in the mechanism of historical processes that move according to their own laws and that destroy any possibility of useful action...

As Robert Alter has noted of the novel's French episodes, they are 'intended to dramatize the ways in which human beings become the slaves of impersonal forces, at last are made inhuman by them.' ...

Another Dickensian historical catch-22, as "violent oppression breeds violent rebellion which becomes a new kind of oppression" (Alter 16). And as history turns backward on itself, we might discern—another postromantic twist—the underwriting, inward turning Dickens absorbed from Wordsworth and company. Marcus nominates Dickens as

the heir to the Romantic era's tendency to internalize historical phenomena. Like Carlyle and the Romantic poets, Dickens is concerned with defining the possibilities for self-fulfillment in a society whose institutions seem inimical to all that is distinctively human. (25)

He doesn't say that Dickens found those humanist inflections where, of course, Romanticism did its major work—in the sublexemic crevices and narrative cross-currents we've been following since Wordsworth and tracing, back and forth, between the *Revolution* and the *Tale*. But I'll defer to Chris Vanden Bossche, another skillful reader of both texts, in particular, of the common mythopoeic coding I've been latching onto the Romantic tradition (though Vanden Bossche is reading forth to Barthes and Frye).

My emphasis on repetitive patternings as against syntagmatic and realist narrative may sound similar to Northrop Frye's notion that the meaning of narrative lies in its ability to reveal basic human archetypes...So Carlyle and Dickens want to create new myths for their culture but see that they can do so only by [sic] deviating from enslaving ones. (217)

History's meaning is eternal, not chronological, as Carlyle explained in his early essay on the subject. At this point we might recall Stoehr's counter-linear reading of the *Tale*, ("*there seems to lurk behind the façade of normal occurrences some secret meaning, every now and then intruding itself...as isolated bits of another story somehow underlying the one that takes up the actual time and space of the narrative*": 82; my italics). Vanden Bossche confirms: "The narrative moves [not] according to the events to which it refers, the French Revolution...but by a series of symbolic transfers that refer to a cultural code. In doing so, it discloses the code that remains hidden as the deep structure of events like the Revolution and that constantly emerges in the lives of the protagonists of *The French Revolution* and *A Tale of Two Cities*" (213).

Call it deep history, or deep psychology, or simply poetics. In any case, both writers have been tapping into something not entirely in line with history's traditional, chronological (Liberal, "Whig" as Rignall says) in any case *forward* unfolding. Of course you could say that's what fiction does, by rights, in Dickens's day. According to Catherine Gallagher, "it is practically a *donnée* of nineteenth-century realist fiction that the real is beneath the surface, a hidden network of connection that must remain at least partially hidden if the novel is to continue" (84). Others will say this was Dickens working out in novel time (on bourgeois grounds) the sweeping proletarian potentials Carlyle thrilled into their purview. "Throughout the book there runs this ambivalent attitude to the Revolution," as Jack Lindsay explains; and he

goes on to describe the psychic frictions and cognitive dissonances which motivate, and to some extent seek their final resolution in, the binary codes and structural rotations of this novel (“the subtle dialectics of conflict revealed by the story of Manette...the rhythms of give-and-take, the involved struggles with their many inversions and opposed refractions”: 56).

Ultimately, I come down with those critics who discern a common rhythm—and extrapolate from there. No doubt there is something to be said about the postromantic influence of those poets who, for several decades even before Carlyle took up this Revolution, had been experimenting with the pulses and stresses, the shocks and, of course, the flashbacks that this history had launched into the brains, and the prose, that rattled onward for a century before it caught Freud’s ear. Wordsworth’s 1793, or Carlyle’s 1774, or Dickens’s Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and (...fill in the blanks, as you will) gets its answer, as I have suggested, in Freud’s 1919: the end of the war that did not, of course, *end* so much as it continued in perpetual flashback rotation in the minds of soldiers just returning from the trenches. Poetry is, at last, the intrusion Freud discovered after roughly one long century of writers—novelists, historians, liturgists, scientists, and a few like Coleridge and Carlyle who seemed to write in every discipline at once—found that *something* refused to die out of knowing, and into language.

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