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Carrying Over: Poetry as Translation in Early Romantic Poetics

By

Adam Nagi Ahmed

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Committee in charge:

Professor Kevis Goodman, Chair

Professor Steven Goldsmith

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Abstract

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Carrying Over reconsiders the widely held Romantic-era belief in poetry as a universal form by arguing for the centrality of linguistic and cultural translation within early Romantic poetics. It traces Romantic encounters with Eastern genres alongside an emerging imperial sense of the world in eighteenth-century British systems of knowledge, including philology, pedagogy, and biblical criticism. Expanding recent postcolonial accounts of world literature's colonial origins, I show how Romantic works responded to a mounting scholarly effort to codify literature within England and its colonial peripheries. While Orientalist philologists like William Jones claimed to demonstrate "what *true* poetry ought to be" through their translations of Oriental works into familiar genres like the lyric and the romance, Romantic adaptations of non-Western forms (such as the *Arabian Nights* tale and the proverb) suggested what poetry could be once detached from these dominant modes. Indeed, I claim that these engagements with Oriental forms transfer, or "carry over," problems of translation into issues of interpretation—moments of unintelligibility in which the poem appears as an agent of translation rather than its object. In doing so, these poets revise the world-literary assumption that locates poetry in European modes of expression, suggesting instead that poetry's displaced origin precedes and lies outside of national forms.

After an introduction that explores the early Romantic revision of *translatio studii*, the first chapter considers Samuel Taylor Coleridge's fascination with the *Arabian Nights* against the backdrop of eighteenth-century empiricist pedagogical literature by John Locke, Anna Barbauld, and Maria Edgeworth. I show how the opaque and supernatural tales of the *Nights* precipitated a shift in early Romantic reading practice—from reading as a self-possessioned act to a recursive and involuntary process—and offered a model for the enigmatic form of *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*. In chapter two, I read William Blake's use of proverb form in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* alongside an empiricist insistence on knowledge's demonstrability, as articulated through eighteenth-century biblical criticism and colonial pedagogy. I argue that Blake's resuscitation of the proverb form in the "Proverbs of Hell" posits a mode of unfinished knowledge, in which incompleteness is converted from a mark of error into a sign of knowledge's deferred but eventual recognition. My third chapter looks at the dream of the Arab in William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, a vision of an itinerant Arab-knight saving poetry from destruction, to trace how this split figure embodies and unsettles the eighteenth-century belief in the primitive

origin of poetry. I claim that the Arab-knight shows how poetry's inheritance depends on its translation—its literal movement across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The dissertation concludes with a coda that explores the relationship between cultural translation and poetics in Walter Benjamin's and Édouard Glissant's different writings on translation.

For my parents, who gave me the gift of two tongues

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Introduction

Between Culture: Translation and Assimilation in Early Romantic Poetics

What does a literary work "say"? What does it communicate? It "tells" very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting of information. Yet any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but communication—hence, something inessential.

- Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"

Transparency, in Western History, predicts that a common truth of Mankind exists, and maintains that what approaches it most closely is action that projects, whereby the world is realized at the same time that it is caught in the act of its foundation.

Against this reductive transparency, a force of opacity is at work. No longer the opacity that enveloped and reactivated the mystery of filiation, but another, considerate of all the threatened and delicious things joining one another (without conjoining, that is, without merging) in the expanse of Relation.

- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Deriving from the Latin *translatio*—to transfer or carry over—the English word *translation* was originally associated with the transfer of knowledge (*translatio studii*) and of empire (*translatio imperii*) from Greece and Rome to the West. And indeed, for the neoclassical poets that preceded the Romantic period, the transfer of knowledge from the classical world formed the material for their art. As figures like John Dryden and Alexander Pope translated foundational works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into polished, Augustan couplets, they were also producing "imitation odes" and "mock epics" that sought to adapt classical genres for a new British social and economic world. In the transfer of ancient epics and the odes into modern English styles, these poets sought to measure the progress of the present against the achievements of the past.¹ In this way, David Duff notes, neoclassical *translatio* participated in a "fantasy of simultaneity with classical antiquity," which believed that "imitation of ancient models would put modern Europe on par with classical antiquity" (124). This fantasy permeated eighteenth-century literary culture, which used past genres to interpret the present. Thus, in his 1711 "Essay on Criticism," Alexander Pope urges poets and critics to "follow Nature," for "Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd, / Are Nature still, but Nature methodis'd; / Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd / By the same laws which first herself ordain'd" (88-92). Nature, here, is the set of generic rules and standards of taste, carried over from the ancients, that forms the condition for what is possible or "natural" in verse. In this sense, all originals could be said to be translations and imitations of "first ordain'd" principles.

With the mid- and late-eighteenth-century rise of ballad collections and compendiums of "antique" ephemera, British literary culture's *translatio* acquires a new dimension.² Driven by a desire to discover the native roots of English literary tradition, philologists, literary anthologists,

¹ For extended discussions of the Ancients and Moderns debate, and its role in the formation of an eighteenth-century British literary tradition, see Richard Terry's *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past 1660-1781* and David Spadafora's *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

² However, this classical sense of *translatio studii* would persist in the work of mid-eighteenth-century poets like William Collins and Thomas Gray, who imitated classical genres and composed progress poems that saw Britain as the culmination of Greek and Roman knowledge. As Gray describes in his famous "Ode" (which was later titled "Progress of Poesy") (1757), "when Latium had her lofty spirit lost," the Muses "sought, O Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast" (81-82). As a trained classicist who also maintained an avid interest in the translation of Nordic, Welsh, and Celtic works, Gray represents an important transitional figure between the neoclassical and Romantic eras.

and poets sought to trace the genealogy of poetry back to bards and troubadours. Even the word “ancient,” which had previously designated the great eras of Greece and Rome, came to be associated with a provincial medieval Europe (Duff 131). Indeed, David Simpson observes, the popularity of native forms like the ballad “made it less likely that a man of the times would argue, as Dryden had done, the need for sustained attention to classical or foreign models as a way of contributing to the refinement of English” (152). This turn towards origins was born, in part, out of emerging discourses of philology, anthropology, and political philosophy; a “discourse of the species,” as Maureen McLane dubs it, shifted the interest of poetry from the classical to the primitive.³ Thus, while the neoclassical poet endeavored to preserve knowledge of classical works, genres, and traditions, later eighteenth-century poets sought to catalogue and imitate archaic and folk relics.⁴ This primitivism would reach a its height in the early Romantic period, in which—as William Wordsworth writes—the poet was “a rock of defence of human nature . . . carrying every where with him relationship and love . . . in spite of soil and climate, of language and manners” (*Lyrical Ballads* 302).

As I hope to show in this dissertation, however, the shift towards primitive origins does not represent the death of *translatio*; rather, it marks a shift in *translatio* from the transfer of established traditions to the translation of culture more broadly. Central to the formation of a general theory of poetry in the Romantic period, I claim, were the developments of eighteenth-century Orientalist philology. At the same time that ballad editors endeavored to trace the primitive past of English literary tradition, eighteenth-century Orientalist philologists and critics like William Jones, Robert Lowth, and Isaac D’Israeli sought to uncover and catalogue the expressive origins of poetry in the East. In these years leading up to the Romantic period—a period marked by British economic, military, and political expansion—Orientalist revolutions in knowledge established “poetry” and “literature” as world categories with shared expressive norms. As Aamir Mufti has recently demonstrated in his reading of proto-Romantic philology in Britain and Germany, the origin of Orientalism is inseparable from the emergence of world literature out of “the philological revolution [that] sought to make the world *whole* for the first time” (35).⁵ Thus, according to Mufti, “what we call modern Orientalism is merely the cultural system that for the first time articulated a concept of of the world as an assemblage of ‘nations’ with distinct expressive traditions” (35).

³ In her recent work, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry*, Maureen McLane has shown how an eighteenth-century British ethnographic interest in the transcription of ballads turns poetry into “an object of medial and cultural theory” (6). Indeed, for McLane, the ballad collector’s effort to turn oral histories into vehicles for literary and ethnographic knowledge anticipates contemporary postcolonial and anthropological discussions around cultural translation. Her previous work, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species*, offers an expansive reading of the Romantic engagement with an emerging anthropological “discourse of the species.”

⁴ This is not to suggest that Romantic poets severed ties with classical knowledge entirely. Indeed, a whole host of contemporary scholarship, from Kevis Goodman’s *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (2004) to Jonathan Sachs’s *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789-1832* (2009), attests to the ways in which classical forms were used to negotiate Romantic poets’ vexed relationship with the shocks of modernity.

⁵ My understanding of the entanglement of Romantic poetics and colonial world-making is indebted to Mufti’s illuminating account of the Orientalist origins of world literature in *Forget English!: Orientalism and World Literatures*. Mufti’s text follows recent postcolonial critiques of world literature by Natalie Melas and Emily Apter, who revise world literature’s assumption of cultural equivalence in favor of a comparative literary study grounded on “incommensurability” (Melas) and “untranslatability” (Apter).

Many ideas that would become foundational for Romantic poetics can be traced back to the writings of William Jones—a colonial judge and prolific Orientalist philologist, whose linguistic and literary critical writings were instrumental for producing an early (although exceedingly fanciful) image of poetry’s archaic origins. Jones’s early critical effort “to defin[e] what poetry ought to be” by “describ[ing] what it really was among the Hebrews, the Greeks and Romans, the Arabs and Persians,” for example, gives some sense of the entwining of Orientalist philological knowledge and the idea of poetry that would be inherited by Romantic poetics (211). Jones’s writing on lyric establishes expression as the defining feature of poetry since its Oriental beginnings. As M.H. Abrams famously observes, it was not really until William Jones’s “Essay on the Arts Called Imitative” (1772) that “poetry” becomes synonymous with lyric expressivity. In that essay, Jones proposes “the lyric not only as the original poetic form, but as the prototype for poetry as a whole, and thereby expands what has occasionally been proposed a differentia of one poetic species into the defining attribute of the genus” (Abrams 87). Such a general theory—capacious enough to include primitive Oriental pastorals alongside Greek and Roman odes—was the result of Jones’s effort to translate and categorize works that were outside of European tradition.

Although Abrams does not mention it, Jones’s essay appears at the culmination of his collection of Orientalist translations and imitations titled *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages*. And it is through his engagement with Oriental works that Jones supports his claim that the effects of poetry derive from “the deep recesses of the human mind” rather than “the manners of men, and several objects in nature” (202). He proposes *expression* as the alternative to the idea of art as *imitation* that had dominated poetry in the neoclassical period and had limited poetic knowledge to a prescribed set of forms, topics, and tropes. Shifting the definition of poetry from “Nature methodis’d” to nature cognized, Jones claims that the poet or artist “will gain his end not by imitating the works of nature, but by assuming her power and causing the same effect upon the imagination which her charms produce to the senses” (216). Anticipating Wordsworth’s idea of poetry as “primary laws of our nature . . . in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement,” Jones shifts the *knowledge* of poetry from the imitation of outward form to the imitation of inner sense (*Lyrical Ballads* 290).⁶

Even as Jones seeks to raise expressive originality over mimetic mediation, his theory of expression remains grounded in the translation and imitation of Oriental works. If poetry, for Jones, “was originally no more than a strong, and animated expression of human passions,” knowledge of Oriental poetry was a way of rekindling the lost connection between poetry and feeling (202). Jones even cites Islamic aniconism as confirmation of expression’s supremacy over imitation, claiming that though “in some Mahometan nations . . . sculpture and painting are forbidden by law,” their art still reveals the importance of passionate speech and metrical regularity (202). In Oriental writings, Jones and other philologists and critics found expressions of the mind free from the burden of European mimetic tradition—cognitive and affective histories that they could study, translate, and imitate. In their engagement with old Oriental texts, the source of *translatio studii* was moved from Greece and Rome to Arabia, Persia, and India.

⁶ Indeed, Wordsworth, like Jones, regards the work of the poet as an effort to forge the connection between language and inner sense. For Wordsworth, the poet finds “language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests” (*Lyrical Ballads* 300). Tellingly, however, Wordsworth rejects the comparison of the poet to “a translator who deems himself justified when he substitutes excellences of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavors to surpass his original, in order to make amends for the general inferiority” of his translation (300). Unnecessarily ornamental translation, it would appear, is also a mark of inferior original compositions.

Where neoclassical *translatio* regarded poetry as the reproduction of recognizable forms, Orientalist *translatio* viewed poetry as an anthropological record of the passions. It is out of this desire to return to the expressive origin of poetry that Jones postulates Eastern texts as case studies for passionate speech. Consider, for example, Jones's vision of translation as a remedy for the stagnation of European poetry, presented at the conclusion of his "Essay On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations":

I cannot but think that our European poetry has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables: and it has been my endeavour for several years to inculcate this truth, that, if the principal writings of the Asiaticks, which are repositied in our public libraries, were printed with the usual advantage of notes and illustrations, and if the languages of the Eastern nations were studied in our great seminaries of learning, where every other branch of useful knowledge is taught to perfection, a new and ample field would be opened for speculation; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind; we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes; and a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate. (*Poems* 198-199)

At the heart of Jones's image is an archival fantasy—a hope that the future dissemination of scholarly knowledge about Oriental language and literature will provide material for European epistemic and poetic innovations. The passage pictures a massive philological effort to translate, annotate, and disseminate Oriental works as the beginning of deeper inquiries into "the history of the human mind," which will in turn inspire more authentic European compositions. As Oriental "images" and "similitudes" become available for European reader through translation, according to Jones, they will form a new expressive repertoire for European poets.

On the one hand, this archival fantasy is predicated on the faith in the supremacy of Western knowledge—its ability to "perfect" knowledge about Eastern cultural works. It is not difficult to see Jones's call for the mass translation and explanation of Oriental texts as an extension of the British colonizing project. Within the emergent imperial era of late-eighteenth century Britain, the explanation and imitation of Oriental cultural works helped perpetuate the fantasy of colonial knowledge's authority. As James Mulholland points out in his study on Anglo-Indian poetry in the Romantic period, poetic imitations of Oriental voices, much like British abolitionist poems of the same era, allowed British authors to "'speak back' about empire from a perspective subordinated within those very colonial structures that many of these authors helped to create" (123). These poems, which were circulated within India and Britain, staged fictional encounters with native subjects that allowed the English poet to speak for the subaltern.

At the same time that he insists on the study and codification of Oriental language and literature, however, Jones's conclusion presents a future in which European poetry *depends* on translations and imitations of non-European works to broaden the European expressive archive, as if the transmission of Eastern knowledge could produce an aesthetic revolution in the West. Herein lies the primary confusion of the "new and ample field" of knowledge that Jones describes: Oriental literature is situated simultaneously *within* and *outside* of European knowledge. It is old enough to give insight into the development of the mind, but new enough to open new fields of speculation. It is familiar enough to European poetry to be imitated and adapted, but different enough to transform it. Here Jones highlights the problem of all

eighteenth-century Orientalist translation—the way in which a cultural “inside” simultaneously forms and is formed by the entrance of an “outside.”

As we will see, this confusion of “inside” and “outside” was a persistent problem in Orientalist philology, and one that would be carried over into Romantic poetics. As Padma Rangarajan has observed in her account of translation in the Romantic period, Jones’s “constant poetic transfer [and] living translation suggests a nuanced negotiation of self and other, originality and imitation, that is an essential part of more normative Romantic aesthetics” (7). Using the Oriental tale as an example, Rangarajan argues that Romantic pseudotranslations of Oriental works superimpose fantasy onto archival “fact,” thus revealing the fictionality of Orientalist strategies for producing “truth,” such as long prefatory material and footnotes. More than exerting control, for Rangarajan, “translation (particularly as literary conceit) enables a textual nomadism that runs counter to the spirit of the state-controlled archive” (23). In Romantic pseudotranslations, such as William Beckford’s *Vathek* or Isaac D’Israeli’s *Mejnoun and Leila*, which claimed to be “authentic” translations of newly discovered Oriental manuscripts, translation offered a space in which knowledge could be fabricated and parodied. This extended beyond fiction’s fabrication of empirical facts. As I claim in my chapters on Coleridge and the amoral knowledge of the *Arabian Nights*, and Blake and the wisdom of Hebrew proverbs, the tension between recognizable categories and emergent forms in Oriental works provided a model for each poet’s of reevaluation of moral, pedagogical, and literary knowledge.

As we can begin to see in Jones’s pairing of poetic manifesto and ethnographic explanation, however, the influence of Oriental translation was not restricted to blatantly Orientalist texts. Jones’s writing is emblematic of late eighteenth-century efforts to negotiate the the inside and outside of “literature” and “poetry” by finding the seeds of poetic tradition in a more widely construed Eastern past. In his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753), Robert Lowth, Jones’s friend and mentor, derives an early system of poetry by treating the Old Testament as an Oriental literary text. Lowth’s reading of the sacred poetry of the Hebrews is driven by his claim that “religion is the original office and destination of poetry” because its hymns and odes are “animated by . . . inspiration” (18). In his widely read *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Hugh Blair extends the insights of Lowth and Jones to claim that “the hyperbolic manner [of expression], which we have long accustomed to call the Oriental manner of poetry (because some of the earliest poetical productions came to us from the East)” is “characteristical of an age rather than a country”—a sign that “mankind never resemble each other, so much as they do in the beginnings of society” (112). In an equally popular work, *Curiosities of Literature* (1791), Isaac D’Israeli traces the world historical movement of romance from the “mingling” of Crusaders with Eastern nation to claim that “in their improved state, poets of all nations have drawn their richest inventions” from fanciful tales (161). In each of these descriptions of poetry’s origin, the Orient is both a site of difference and resemblance. It occupies an interstitial space inside and outside of Western knowledge—a space that establishes norms of poetry in the very act of being discovered.

These efforts to locate the ancestral traces of European poetry in an Oriental origins coincided with eighteenth-century British attempts to define an Occidental identity, which was increasingly threatened by a “heterogeneous and uneven” modernity (*Making England Western* 45). As Saree Makdisi has recently observed, the imperial differentiation of center and periphery begins *within* the imperial culture—“an internal Occidentalism and an internal Orientalism were the necessary correlates of an Orientalism and Orientalization that would be exclusively directed to the outside, but only when the outside could be sufficiently distinguished from an Occidental

inside” (*Making England Western* 3). The consolidation of an Occidental interior could be witnessed in literature as well. Tracing the “civilizing” of the ballad in the early Romantic period, Makdisi argues that the “lyrical ballad can be thought of as an attempt to Occidentalize and settle the restless, itinerant, and nomadic” genre of the ballad, which had previously entailed a porous border between “self/other, other/them” (*Making England Western* 129). While Makdisi’s account of this internal Occidentalization offers a helpful insight into the effects of Occidentalization on genre, I think that his reading of this generic tension too easily comes down on the side of the poet as an enforcer of racial and class borders. Makdisi’s reading of poetry as cultural appropriation prevents him from seeing the ways in which Romantic poetic translations often destabilize cultural identities. For the generic translations I will look at in this dissertation, the distinction between Occidental interior and Oriental exterior is harder to tell. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s use of the *Arabian Nights* tale as a formal model for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, William Blake’s resuscitation of Hebrew proverbs in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Wordsworth’s encounter with romance’s translated figure of the Arab-knight in Book V of *The Prelude*—all of these texts engage with translated Oriental knowledge in order to question the border between a cultural “inside” and “outside.” More than the transfer of meaning from one language to another, these generic translations continue, in different form, the classical sense of *translatio* as the “carrying over” of culture.⁷ Rather than merely consolidating the Western identity of classical knowledge, however, these poets turn to non-Western genres to question the border between a cultural “inside” and “outside.”

Carrying Over traces Romantic encounters with Eastern expressive forms alongside an emerging imperial sense of the world in eighteenth-century British systems of knowledge, including philology, pedagogy, and biblical criticism. Expanding upon recent postcolonial accounts of world literature’s colonial origins, I show how Romantic works responded to the same generic standards used to translate and evaluate non-Western texts. While philologists and critics defined the borders of literature according to recognizable European genres (like the ode, the romance, and the novel), Romantic adaptations of non-Western forms suggested what poetry could be once detached from these dominant genres. Indeed, I claim, these engagements of Oriental forms transfer, or “carry over,” problems of cultural translation into issues of interpretation—moments of unintelligibility in which the poem appears as an agent of translation rather than its object. In doing so, these poets revise the world literary assumption that poetry originates in European modes of expression, suggesting, instead that it lies in a displaced origin that precedes and lies outside of national forms.

I understand “cultural translation” not only as the transfer of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Hebrew texts and genres into European literary tradition, but also as the transformation of genres through which literature is known and authorized. As Talal Asad describes in his landmark 1986 essay, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” the work of cultural translation involves “*learning to live another form of life* and to speak another kind of language” (149). For Asad, who is writing on the translation of native culture into anthropological knowledge, the anthropologist’s translation requires a sensitivity to the underlying power dynamics that structure the relationship between a particular culture and a

⁷ However, the connection between linguistic translation and cultural translation could be seen in the scattered (and mostly unpublished) translations of Romantic poets. Wordsworth’s translations of Virgil, Coleridge’s translations of Goethe and Schiller, and Shelley’s translations of Homer and Dante (to name a few examples) all bear witness to each poet’s interest in the simultaneous preservation and rewriting of European poetic tradition.

general discourse. Cultural translation should, instead, seek to undo the dominant culture's assimilative force. Following Walter Benjamin's suggestion that all languages are estranged from one another, Asad claims that it is the task of the cultural translator to "test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms" and "subject itself to [the] transforming power" of those forms (157). Although Asad is primarily interested in cultural translation as a methodological problem, I believe that a theory of poetry as cultural translation may offer an interesting view on how cultural authority is maintained and dispersed in poetry's engagements with "unaccustomed forms."

As Andrew Warren has recently shown in his study of second generation Romantic Orientalism, the reevaluation of cultural knowledge from a place at the borders of culture is deeply connected with critique's self-consciousness, which proposes the act of knowing oneself as a mode of being beside oneself (*ek-statis*), rather than a means of self-possession. Through the imagined space of the Orient, poets reveal "internal threats and limits within Western ideologies themselves" as their works participate in "an immanent critique that assumes the impossibility of a wholly external vantage point" (13). Whereas Warren reads this critique through familiar Western philosophical paradigms (idealism, empiricism, solipsism, etc.), however, I am interested in how Romantic Oriental translations point to what remains just outside the realm of Western epistemic categories. In this way, I hope to suggest, Romantic poets perform a kind of writing that is "outside of a mimetic social memory" of literature, "in-between culture, at the point of its articulation of identity or distinctiveness," to put it in the words of Homi Bhabha (178). Though Bhabha suggests that this contradictory "in-between" space appears in the transfer of cultural authority onto a colonial periphery, I am interested in how a similar space "in-between" culture appears in and as translation. How does poetry give an account of what remains "outside of a mimetic social memory" in which the literary tradition itself seems embedded? How can poetry, as an index of Western knowledge about the West, yet suggest the knowledge's undoing?

Within eighteenth-century scholarship, Srinivas Aravamudan has posed a similar question about fiction's Orientalist history: "what if a theory of realism were founded of the pursuit of dissimilarities rather than sameness?" (21). Against the monolithic idea of Orientalism found in Said's work—a model that Aravamudan associates with nineteenth-century Orientalism—Aravamudan argues that Enlightenment "imaginative fiction, just as much as scholarly disquisitions or mainstream philology, defined European understandings of cultures that were seemingly foreign but that shared the past" (4).⁸ Such Oriental fictions were "experimental, prospective, and antifoundationalist" (4). Indeed, Aravamudan claims, the presence of Oriental tale for early fictionality suggests an idea of fiction founded upon "transculturation" rather than the novel's self-enclosed, domestic form. If fiction studies have been deeply formed by the novel's ascendant "national parochialism," the Oriental tale suggests fiction's genres as products of translation.

Although Aravamudan deals with eighteenth-century fiction, his definition of genre applies to Romantic experimentations in verse as well. For both periods, genres were places

⁸ However, Aravamudan follows Said himself, who makes a distinction between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in *Orientalism*: "the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pretechnical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleonlike quality called 'Oriental.' But this free-floating Orient would be severely curtailed with the advent of academic Orientalism" (119). The precise date of this transition (and the Romantic era's relationship to a hegemonic Orientalism) has been a topic of much debate in both eighteenth-century and Romantic scholarship.

where the inside and outside of culture was defined— “apparatuses of mediation that traverse social distance, enable cultural transmission, and make absence productive of new forms and new media” (Aravamudan 4). “Absence,” in this sense, is the gap that appears as Oriental texts confront available literary genres and discourses. For Aravamudan, the absence of prescribed equivalences generates new forms. As Jacques Derrida observes, the function of genre in marking the difference between cultural inside and outside cannot be disassociated from genre’s root as *genos*—which suggests, at once, birth, filiation, gender, and race. The common English term for “genre” in the eighteenth century—*species*—only further highlights the entwinement of the genealogical and the generic. Genre is the internal principle through which works become members of a particular line. The “mark” of genre is the precondition for any text to become “poetic” or “literary.” Derrida’s deconstruction of genre is driven by his reading of the tension between any text, “or corpus of traces,” and “the identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should recognize, a membership in a class” (“The Law of Genre” 64, 63). As a vehicle for recognition, this trait is “always *a priori* remarkable” (64). The paradox of genre lies in the *remarkableness* of its mark, the way in which the discovery of genre’s mark in a text is a reinscription of the mark onto the text. Derrida’s account of the iterative process of genre allows us to see the way in which no text *belongs* to genre. That is to say, literary or poetic texts are not inherently defined by their genres; rather, they are constituted by the *translation* of their gestures into recognizably literary or poetic features. The *translation* of traces into common marks is necessary for any text that is not to remain a collection of indecipherable traces. Yet the designation of genre is never identical with a text. If a text is to be more than the sum of its traits, its gestures must exceed the law of genre, which “put[s] to death the very thing that it engenders” and “cuts a strange figure; a formless form, it remains nearly invisible, it neither sees the day nor brings itself to light. (65)

While Derrida’s essay is directed towards the process of genre in general, I believe that his notion of genre as the translation of traces into a recognizable form raises interesting questions for the hazy borders of genre in domesticated Orientalist translations and unhomely Romantic cultural translations. In both, translation entails a process by which the “formless form” of genre is consolidated and transformed. One finds a good example of this in Jones’s description of the poem “Solima; An Arabian Eclogue,” which he admits is “not a regular translation from the Arabick language; but all the figures, sentiments, and descriptions in it, were really taken from the poets of Arabia . . . I selected those passages, which seemed most likely to run into our measure” (ii).⁹ Here, the work of translation is conflated with imitation’s process of assimilation. “Selecting” only that which resembles “our measure” leads Jones to see signs of classical pastoral in Arabic *ghazal*. The resulting “Arabian Eclogue” is a set of flowery heroic couplets with occasional reference to Arabic figures like camels, ostriches, and tents (6).¹⁰ So Occidentalized is the Orient, here, that even Horace Walpole would dub the poem “a blunder of 'Oriental' for 'ornamental,' for it is very flowery, and not at all Eastern” (5:389).

Though Jones calls “Solima” an irregular translation, his drive to select only that which resembles European verse can be said to appear in all the translations in *Poems Consisting*

⁹ Jones’s eclogue likely draws its inspiration from William Collins’s *Persian Eclogues* (1742)—a work that similarly sought to Orientalize English pastoral in order to evoke a common bardic past “when Wisdom held her Reign / And Shepherds sought her on the silent Plain” (7). Collins, however, claims to have translated the eclogues from a manuscript given to him by a Persian carpet merchant—evidently unable to imagine an Orient that is any more unfamiliar than a popular European ornament.

¹⁰ Jones’s “selective” imitation parallels Samuel Johnson’s description of imitation as an improvement of nature; for Johnson, “it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation” (1:22).

Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages. Other poems in the work find Jones translating Eastern works into European approximations, such as “an Indian tale,” “an Eastern allegory,” “a Persian song,” and “a Turkish ode.” Each of these poems translate by assimilating Oriental images and tropes into lofty neoclassical verse and familiar European genres. Translation, in this sense, was not the systematic and scientific process that would define the Orientalist project of knowledge in the nineteenth century. Rather, it was a means of rendering familiar what was not fully known, but still desired.¹¹ As Zak Sitter observes, “poetic imitation” acts as a remedy for “the problematic ‘originality’ of literary forgery” (388). In these imitative translations, “Jones draws attention to oriental difference in order to dramatize its successful assimilation within the field of English letters” (395).

Such assimilation of difference was foundational for the construction of literature as a world space composed of recognizably European genres. As Aamir Mufti and Natalie Melas have each recently noted, world literature’s premise of cultural equivalence is tied to the colonial project of knowledge that “discursively consolidated” the West as the “standard and model of humankind” (Melas 36). Indeed, Melas notes, by “archly asserting culture as a discriminating civilizational value, the coercive comparison of the colonial cultural project conflated the ground of comparison with the basis of equivalence” (36). Through this coercive comparison, Oriental works are translated into European genres and measured against European literary standards. Jones’s postulation of Oriental versions of these genres resembles other philological attempts to classify Oriental texts, such as Richard Hole’s description of the story of Sinbad as an “Arabian Odyssey” in *Remarks on the Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* (1797) and Isaac D’Israeli’s description of “Arabian romance” and “Arabian Petrarch and Laura” in *Romances* (1799). In each of these definitions, the civilizational value of Western literary tradition is imposed through genre.

In translating and clarifying Oriental literature, Jones and other philologists also sought to define what poetry *should* be. It is not surprising, for example, that Jones’s *Poems* more often resembles an eighteenth-century collection of English poetry than a collection of non-European verse. Consider Jones’s message to his readers in the “Preface”:

I am persuaded that a writer, acquainted with the originals, might imitate them very happily in his native tongue, and that the publick would not be displeas’d to see the genuine compositions of *Arabia* and *Persia* in an *English* dress. The heroic poem of *Ferdusi* might be verifi’d as easily as *the Iliad*, and I see no reason why *the delivery of Persia by Cyrus* should not be a subject as interesting to us as *the anger of Achilles* or *the wandering of Ulysses*. The Odes of *Hafez*, and of *Mefihi*, would suit our lyric measures as those ascrib’d to Anacreon; and the seven Arabick elegies, that were hung up in the temple of *Mecca*, and of which there are several copies at *Oxford*, would no doubt, be highly acceptable to the lovers of antiquity, and the admirers of native genius. (vii)

Jones’s call for the European imitation of Oriental works is predicated on the belief that Oriental works already conform to familiar European genres. He suggests that traces of all dominant eighteenth-century European species of poetry—such as epics, lyrics, odes, and ballads—may be found in his Oriental collection of poems. Illuminated by the comparison to European poetic tradition, these Oriental works can be recognized and appreciated as literature. Indeed, Jones

¹¹ Jones’s appropriative imitation is aptly defined by Jean Baudrillard’s definition of simulation as “to feign to have what one doesn’t have” (2).

goes so far as to make the contradictory claim that English poets could produce “genuine” Eastern compositions in “English dress,” precisely because Eastern works are equivalent to English ones.

Here, as in other places in his work, Jones’s belief in the transfer of knowledge between Orient and Occident is predicated on the belief that Oriental poetry provides and proves the norms of European poetry. In his “Essay on the Arts Called Imitative,” Jones suggests that genre derives from human passions. In his catalogue of poetry’s expressive possibilities, joy is associated with “dramatick poetry,” love with the ode, grief with elegy, morality with epic, and hate with satire (203-205). Several years earlier, Jones’s mentor Robert Lowth, makes a similar claim in his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. Lowth’s interpretation of the Bible divides it into “the different species” of “Prophetic Poetry,” “Elegiac Poetry,” “Didactic Poetry,” “Lyric Poetry,” and “Dramatic Poetry” (xviii-xxi). Hugh Blair remarks that “in the first rude state of Poetical Effusions, we can easily discern the seeds and beginnings of all the kinds of regular Poetry,” which began to take hold through the “progress of Society and Arts” (108) The most primitive genre of poetry, “odes and hymns,” derived from “religious feelings,” then “plaintive or Elegiac Poetry” derived “from lamentations over the dead,” “Epic Poetry” was a record of achievements; and the public staging of heroes’ stories formed basis of “Tragedy, or Dramatic Writing” (108). These definitions of poetry offer ways of classifying archaic and contemporary compositions that would become hugely influential in the early Romantic period.

While the translations of Orientalists works were formed by and measured against regulative eighteenth-century literary norms, however, Romantic poets used Oriental works to question and expand the idea of what poetry could be. Because Romantic poets took more from translations than their assimilation into recognizable genres, their reading of Oriental works allowed them to find and engage with forms that lie outside of and between established literary genres. In reading and imitating these Oriental texts, they retranslate them *as* poetry rather than *into* poetry. But how does poetry register what remains outside of its genres? Alongside Aravamudan’s question about the Orientalist origin of fiction, we may ask: what if a theory of poetry were founded upon difference rather than equivalence, upon translation rather than originality?

In trying to answer this question, my dissertation reads the translated poetics of three Romantics as a response to the standardizing national culture of eighteenth-century Britain, where a codification of texts and traditions at home preceded a civilizing project abroad. My first two chapters show how Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake used Oriental forms to subvert eighteenth-century ideas of literature’s educational function. In chapter one, I trace the influence of the *Arabian Nights* on Coleridge’s poetics against eighteenth-century bowdlerizations of the *Nights* tales. While writers such as Anna Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, and Frances Sheridan sought to convert the *Nights* into an instrument for empiricist instruction, Coleridge saw the tales as a model for the imagination. Following Coleridge’s assertion that the *Rime* “ought to have had no more moral” than the *Nights* tale of the merchant and the genie, I argue that, much like the tale, the *Rime*’s concluding moral instruction about love asks the reader to translate the untranslatable. In revealing the disparity between the mariner’s narrative and the concluding moral, thus showing how the narrative is constrained by its didactic translation, the poem demands an interpretation of love that exceeds recognizable forms.

In chapter two, I examine Blake’s use of proverbs in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* within the context of eighteenth-century epistemology and biblical criticism. I claim that Blake’s resuscitation of the proverb form in “Proverbs of Hell” responds to an empiricist insistence on

knowledge's demonstrability—a view that was instrumental for the conversion of the Bible from a religious work into a vessel of colonial knowledge. In the midst of this conversion, the obscure, Oriental form of the proverb stood as the antithesis to demonstration's easily reproducible form. As Robert Lowth writes in his study of the poetic forms of the Bible, the proverbs represented “human wisdom . . . in a rude and unfinished state, [as] it was not digested,” and intended “not to persuade, but to compel” (*Lectures* 200). Against the reproducibility of demonstration, which Blake aligns with imperial pedagogy, the “Proverbs of Hell” propose an “infernal wisdom” predicated on the reader's belief in the eventual but as yet incomplete recognition of their hidden knowledge.

In chapter three, I turn from these poetic translations of Oriental forms to the question of poetry's own translatability in the Romantic era and after. This final chapter considers poetry's movement across places and times in the dream of an Arab-knight episode in Wordsworth's in *The Prelude* and in earlier, eighteenth-century representations of poetry's primitive Arab past. I claim that Wordsworth's vision of this familiar and unknowable figure saving poetry from world destruction suggests that poetry's inheritance depends on its translation—its literal movement across national and literary forms. I read the dream of Arab-knight alongside the work of his contemporary Isaac D'Israeli, who viewed poetry as the inheritance of chivalric European romance. D'Israeli's image of romance's Arab origin, I argue, reveals a tension between the trajectory of empire (*translatio imperii*) and the passage of knowledge (*translatio studii*), suggesting that poetry lies in the discontinuity between nations and historical moments.

Chapter One

Under the Influence: Empiricist Minds, *Arabian Nights*, and Romantic Education

Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimaeras—dire stories of Celaeno and the Harpies—may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition—but *they were there before*. They are transcripts, types—the archetypes are in us, and eternal. How else should the recital of that which we know in a waking sense to be false come to affect us at all? Is it that we naturally conceive terror from such objects, considered in their capacity of being able to inflict upon us bodily injury? O, least of all! *These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond body*—or without the body, they would have been the same. . . . That the kind of fear here treated is purely spiritual—that it is strong in proportion as it is objectless on earth, that it predominates in the period of our sinless infancy—are difficulties the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane condition, and a peep at least into the shadowland of pre-existence.

- Charles Lamb, “Witches, and Other Night-Fears”

When I think of books read in childhood they come to my mind’s eye in violent foreshortening and framed by a precarious darkness, but at the same time they glow somehow with an almost supernatural intensity of life that no adult book could ever effect.

– Anne Carson, “Decreation”

I may wish to reconstitute my “self” as if it were there all along, a tacit ego with acumen from the start; but to do so would be to deny the various forms of rapture and subjection that formed the condition of my emergence as an individuated being and that continue to haunt my adult sense of self with whatever anxiety and longing I may now feel.

- Judith Butler, *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*

One ought to ‘write the story on the corner of one’s eye,’ but no one will do it. Underlying the expression is the bitter observation that the receiver is negligent, distracted, ungrateful, and that the story will not give him cause for reflection. For he does not know how to reflect; he does not perceive his reflection in the mirror that is held before him; he does not grasp the injunction, the plea—articulated or mute—contained within the story, within every story: do not forget me, for I speak of you.

- Abdelfattah Kilito, “The Eye and the Needle”

1. Reading as Rereading

If, as Anne Carson suggests, books read in childhood radiate with a “supernatural intensity,” the source of that intensity is so bound with the memory of first encounter that it is difficult to conceive that such books were ever anything but supernatural. Embalmed in the half-light of consciousness, they seem to index the private momentousness of our entrance into the world. They are truly transitional objects; but rather than acclimating us to a world in which our wishes are forced to survive “the shock of loss of omnipotence,” these books preserve the indistinguishable space between world and wish (Winnicott 71). As Carson suggests, such books seem to exceed their objective form in the supernatural intensity with which they enter our “mind’s eye.” The *Arabian Nights* was one such book (or series of books) for Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who claims to have been so affected by reading it that it altered his mind irrevocably. In a letter in which he traces the origin of his penchant for the “streamy Thought” of reverie, Coleridge describes his reading of the *Nights* as a formative and transformative experience:

At six years old I remember to have read *Belisarius*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Philip Quarll*— and then I found the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*—one tale of which (the tale of a man who was compelled to seek for a pure virgin) made so deep an impression on me (I had read it in the evening while my mother was mending stockings) that I was haunted by spectres whenever I was in the dark— and I distinctly remember the anxious and fearful eagerness with which I used to watch the window in which the books lay— and whenever the sun lay upon them, I would seize it, carry it by the wall, & bask, & read—. My Father found out the effect, which these books had produced— and burnt them.— So I became a dreamer— and acquired an indisposition to all bodily activity— and I was fretful, and inordinately passionate. (*Collected Letters* 1.347-348)

The significance of this early reading scene, and the *Nights'* place within that scene, depends on how one reads the relationship between the father's punishment and the child's transformation into "a dreamer." The relation of "so I became a dreamer" to the previous statement initially makes it hard to tell whether the father's prohibition of the book *provokes* the child's penchant for dreaming, or if the penchant is shaped by the child's reading of the book. In our reading of Coleridge's account of this childhood scene, we are asked to reconcile the world in which these "spectres" could be allowed to exist with the father's implicit demand that that they should not.

If the child's reading creates this penchant for dreaming, then there is something threatening in the book itself, and the father's punitive destruction of the work that fills the child with terror seems to fit the crime. The father burns the book to guarantee that the object will no longer possess the child, to separate the *object* of the book from its mental impression. The father punishes the book to avoid acknowledging the child's desire, which sustains the book in ghostlier forms. In destroying the book, the father hopes to show the child that the child possesses the power to regulate these internal phantoms. Once the child realizes this, he can will himself to be free of their influence. But the father is too late (could he have ever been on time?); the book has already left its mark on the child's mind. Because the tale has already impressed the child to the point where the mere sight of the book in which it is contained evokes terror, the lesson of the father's act has already been lost. Indeed, the father's destruction of the book seems only to confirm the power of specters for the child. If the mere impressions caused by the book warrant its destruction, then the book truly must be possessed.

John Coleridge was certainly not the only Enlightenment-era father worrying about the precarious state of the child's mind under the spell of supernatural tales. For John Locke—the foundational empiricist thinker whose account of consciousness's development would remain instrumental for eighteenth-century British epistemology and education—the "white Paper" of the child's mind needed to be shaped early in order to protect itself from nefarious influences. For Locke, like other empiricist pedagogues after him, this "white Paper"—a common metaphor for the state of the mind before experience—was a text to be started by the "steady hand" of the parent. Through the constant instruction of the parent, the child could be taught to assimilate the parent's will into its own. Without this early instruction, the child's mind was open to the "madness of association," or the compulsory connection of "unnatural" thoughts. As the scene above demonstrates, an early exposure to specters was enough to cause a permanent change in the child's psychic life. Here, according to Coleridge's self-narration, because the child cannot

see how these specters derive from his own mind, he becomes “a dreamer,” thus embracing the world of reveries and imaginary beings.

But this scene of reading also challenges the Lockean empiricist ideal of the mind as a self-determining, self-possessed identity. If the mind is vulnerable to and dependent upon forces beyond its control, how could it be said to govern itself? As we will soon see, this question haunted eighteenth-century empiricist accounts of consciousness.¹² But the empiricist effort to negotiate the self’s relation to external influences also anticipated contemporary debates around subject formation. Gayatri Spivak, for example, suggests in a recent essay that any attempt to tell the story of one’s formation as an individuated and agentive self must struggle to give an account of those influences that remain continually opaque to consciousness. Citing Melanie Klein’s description of the ego’s development in infancy, Spivak suggests that a self is formed in the “shuttling back and forth” of “translation”: “the grabbing of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, fit to negotiate with an outside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped” (*Aesthetic Education* 241). In this psychoanalytic revision of empiricist instruction, the self becomes a self in and through its relation to an outside—an outside that only materializes through the sudden absence of satisfaction. By way of this “shuttling” of outside and inside, “‘nature’ passes and repasses into ‘culture’ . . . in the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility” (242). Violence, here, lies in the intrusive appearance of incommensurability (the not-I) within an economy of satisfaction that sustains the infant. The “I” is formed as a response to the withdrawal of the “not-I” that satisfies its needs. In this sense, the formation of self into a deliberative consciousness with a continuous identity may be thought of as a retroactive assimilation of an uncontrollable loss. Translation—which Spivak uses, here, as a “concept-metaphor” for the formation of self—is “not under the control of the subject who is translating,” because it is “something that will have happened without our knowledge, particularly without our control” (242, 243). For Spivak, moreover, such shuttling back and forth characterizes all linguistic and cultural translation, which must negotiate between an intimate knowledge of a particular system of cultural rules and the need to render generalizable. While Spivak is primarily concerned with translation as a task for the subaltern critic in this essay, her psychoanalytic-influenced description of subject formation as a process of translation raises an interesting connection between Coleridge’s account of the *Nights*’ impression on his psyche and the broader eighteenth-century assimilation of the *Nights* into a text fit for a European reading public.

Though years after his infancy, a similar shuttling back and forth characterizes Coleridge’s childhood scene of reading, as Coleridge struggles to trace the moment in which he became a dreamer. If father’s destruction of the *Nights* tries to demonstrate the power of mind to choose and restrict mental associations, the child’s attachment to the book suggests the persistence of involuntary associations, which survive the integration of a self as a locus of internally willed actions. This is not only true for Coleridge, but for many of the Romantics who perceived the *Nights* as an early lesson in the power of the imagination. In his 1822 essay “Witches, and Other Night-Fears,” published in the *London Magazine* (and later included in his

¹² While Locke’s work represents an early formulation of this problem, an uncertainty over identity would, importantly, reach its apotheosis in David Hume’s suggestion that even the most fundamental identities of “space” and “time,” upon which all knowledge of self and world is founded, are only the result of habitual associations. Though I do not discuss Hume’s *Enquiry* in this chapter, his thinking on association represents an important revision of earlier empiricist accounts of a self-possessed subject.

Essays of Elia), Charles Lamb writes that the affect of these tales present “difficulties” to our reason, because they seem to derive their power from a time before we were constituted as selves. As primitive texts, these tales “afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane condition, and a peep at least into the shadow-land of pre-existence” (387). For Lamb, works like the *Nights* are mental texts; they “are transcripts, types,” and “archetypes” that “are in us, and eternal” (386). Part of Lamb’s metaphor of text-as-type is, no doubt, predicated on a naïve Orientalist primitivism that regards the Orient as a static, eternal symbol of humanity’s infancy. Coleridge’s own conflation of the *Nights* with his childhood may owe something to the pervasive cultural figure of the Orient as “the child of man.” As Ann Rowland observes, eighteenth-century writers after Locke “embrace a theory of infancy and development that allows them to compare child and savage, the individual life and the course of history, and repeatedly to describe primitive man as, in short, a big baby” (81). But Lamb’s metaphor of the *Nights* as a primitive transcript of the mind also, importantly, presents the tales as a script that precedes and exceeds the establishment of an agentive self—an early iteration of the unconscious as a symbolic script to be translated and interpreted.

The liminal position of these tales in the mind mirrored their place within eighteenth-century letters. If early Romantic poets like Coleridge and Lamb returned to the *Nights*, it was because the tales offered entry into an imaginative world, and a diversion from an eighteenth-century humanist reading culture. The lack of a clear moral value, the presence of supernatural agents, and the wealth of mesmerizing narratives of the work all led to its classification as an “entertainment,” rather than a work of “literature”—a word reserved for works of deep feeling and educational value in the eighteenth-century canon. The strange and wondrous stories of the *Nights* appealed to Romantic readers because they offered an alternative to neoclassical knowledge, which had been hardened by habitual reading practice. Indeed, Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum argue, the *Nights* added an important “supernatural dimension to the Enlightenment; the tales offered an avenue into modernity through its magical opposite, an alternative to European identity, and an antidote to neoclassicism” (4). Along with the popular “Gothic” romances of the time, the *Nights* offered an expansion of *translatio studii* (from Greece and Rome to the Near East) at a time in which literature was beginning to be considered on a world scale.

As an entry into the state of the mind before the self’s consolidation, too, the *Nights* was at the center of a British literary dispute about the transmission of “knowledge” in texts for children and adults. The *Nights* presents a problem for eighteenth-century empiricist reading, which, as Deidre Lynch describes, “found in the activity of reading a model for self-consciousness’s operation in all manner of situations” (168). For Lynch, “literature” (or “literature,” as she cleverly puts it) is the name given to books “that both *bear iteration* and also *mandate* it” (150). Coleridge himself designates iteration as a criterion for great works, writing, in *Biographia Literaria*, that it is “not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return [that] possesses the genuine power” (1.23). Even as returns to a text facilitate one’s memorization of and appreciation for its content, however, such repetitions are not tantamount to mastery. Lynch, thus, importantly distinguishes between “rereading so as to have by heart—to make a book’s one’s constant companion” and “rereading so as to know better and deeply by knowing one’s own assumptions” (150). As Coleridge’s childhood scene of reading certainly shows, rereading may also work to un-master the reader by allowing him or her to yield to feelings, thoughts, or drives that remains outside of deliberative consciousness. Is this not at least partly why one labors so hard to translate one’s feelings for favorite texts into readings? There is

something in those works that we feel compelled to communicate, even as the transfer of our attachment into knowledge leaves the urge unsatisfied. As Coleridge notes, those great works we return to are also untranslatable, for “whatever lines can be translated into other words of the same language, without diminution of their significance” do not bear repeating (I. 23).

If the *Nights* became a metaphor for an opaque and untranslatable part of Coleridge’s mind, it was because its text occupied a similarly marginal relationship to eighteenth-century Enlightenment knowledge. An empiricist desire for the steady hand of an instructor would extend from the white paper of the mind to the printed volumes of the *Arabian Nights*. First translated from the Arabic *Alf layla wa layla* into French—as *Les Mille et une Nuits*—by Antoine Galland in 1704, and then into English—as the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*—in 1706, the work would become a source of endless “improved” translations in French and English. The father’s burning of the book may be read as one of many violent translations that sought to purge the immoral and supernatural content of the *Nights* for an Enlightened reading public, and for the impressionable minds of children. Eighteenth-century revisions, redactions, and adaptations of the tales (by the likes of Anna Barbauld, the Edgeworths, Frances Sheridan, and others) strove to introduce a clear moralizing frame into the tales where moral existed opaquely. These assimilative translations sought to demonstrate the discriminating power of an Enlightenment mind against the corrupting influence of Oriental specters. Indeed, Coleridge’s childhood scene of reading is one drastic example of a habitual and normalizing tendency in eighteenth-century pedagogy to produce deliberative agents out of receptive minds.

As I hope to show in the following pages, the early Romantic use of *Nights* as a metaphor for the mind responds to a broader attempt to cultivate self-possessed subjects through children’s literature. The *Nights* is at the center of a shift in reading, from reading as a self-possessed act to reading as a recursive and involuntary process. Coleridge’s later claim to Anna Barbauld, that *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* “ought to have had no more moral” than the *Arabian Nights* tale of the merchant and the genie is the result of the poet’s own reading and rereading of the *Nights’* enigmatic tales (*Table Talk* 273). In the first parts of the chapter, I will look at how the *Arabian Nights* is translated against the backdrop of the eighteenth-century empiricist writers like Locke, Barbauld, and Maria Edgeworth. In the final part of the chapter, I will ask how the *Nights* challenges the expectation that literature be morally instructive. Reading the “unnecessary” moral of the *Rime* alongside moralized translations of the *Nights*, I wish to show how the *Rime* demands a reading that suspends our desire for a recognizable meaning.

2. Educating the Will

Coleridge’s reading of the *Nights* takes place within an eighteenth-century empiricist culture of education that held the self-possessed subject—able to control its mind’s motions and maintain its identity across space and time—as the preferred model for the fully formed mind. By contrast, the Romantic interest in childhood and their childhood reading of works like the *Nights* contributed to their promotion of the power of the imagination in education. Still, as we will see, it was only through the empiricist idea of consciousness as a living archive of associations that Romantic poets were able to read the *Nights* as an extension of their own minds.¹³ Though Coleridge’s later promotion of the *Nights* as a text for children may be read as a

¹³ As Coleridge writes in a 1797 letter to Thomas Poole, “from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c -- my mind had been habituated to the Vast ---- & I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief” (*Letters*, October 1797).

direct response to empiricist writings on children's education that regarded supernatural works like the *Nights* as a threat to the self-regulative power of the mind, his narration of the work's influence on his psyche derives its language from these same writings.

Beginning with Locke's 1693 treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, and continuing through to early children's literature by Anna Barbauld and Maria Edgeworth, this empiricist school regarded the child's mind as "white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" (*Some Thoughts* 215). This view became central for children's education and children's literature within eighteenth-century Europe. Indeed, Locke's 1693 work was so popular that it went through twenty-five editions by 1800 and several other printings in France and America. *Some Thoughts* may be read as the prescriptive articulation of Locke's descriptive account of consciousness from his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he posits the "person" as an "intelligent being that . . . can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places." (2.27.9). Locke's suggestion that the identity of a person consists in the preservation of a stable self through changes of time and place refuted the Cartesian account of the soul as the bearer of identity. The identity of consciousness was, instead, confirmed through experience; as the mind reflects back upon its prior state, it should consolidate its identity. Without a stable sense of self, regulated through habit and experience, Locke claims, the mind remains a passive vehicle for compulsory and "unnatural" associations. Locke's description of the "madness of association"—which echoes his critique of religious enthusiasm—imagines compulsory associations as an unruly mob: "'tis very hard to separate [these associated ideas], they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the understanding, but its associate appears with it; and if they are more than two . . . the whole gang, always inseparable, show themselves together" (*Essay* 2.33.4).

Against the influence these pernicious gangs, Locke promotes a version of self in which consciousness regards itself as both an author of its actions and an object of the law. For Locke, self-legibility is necessary for social legibility—a person "is a forensic term . . . appropriating actions and their merit" and "belong[ing] only to intelligent agents capable of a law" (*Essay* 2.27.26). "Person," in this sense, signals the introduction of a self into a social order composed of other intelligent agents who are measured according to the same system of values: "in this personal identity, is founded all the right and justice of reward and punishment; happiness and misery being that for which everyone is concerned for himself" (*Essay* 2.27.18). As Talal Asad has observed, Locke's idea of the person gives rise to a form of agency "built on the idea of blame and pain"—an assimilative process in which "a world of apparent accidents is rendered into a world of essence by attributing to a person moral/legal responsibility on whose basis guilt and innocence . . . are determined" (*Formations of the Secular* 74). This assimilation of external accidents into an attribute of individual agents, according to Asad, "helped the human subject to become an object of social discipline" (74).

If the *Essay* held the person as an effect of self-possession, *Some Thoughts* laid out the groundwork for the self's development of that state. The primary goal of early childhood education, for Locke, was to make the mind receptive to the ways of reason through a habituated respect for good. Locke insists that "a virtuous and able man, must be made so within," for "what he is to receive from Education, what is to sway his and influence his Life, must be something put into him betimes; Habits woven into the very Principles of his Nature" (*Some Thoughts* 42). These habits were integrated into the child's mind through the mediation of the parent. As Alan Richardson notes, Locke's book was a crucial book for its "advocacy of freeing the child from physical restraint and punishment, and for setting out educational agendas which emphasize

reasoning and judgment over rote learning” (*Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 48). Locke’s theory of education, thus, marks a shift from a physically punitive mode of teaching to a more psychically corrective one. Instead of being educated by “the Discipline of the Rod,” the child would internalize a love of virtue through habitual obedience to parental guidance (*Some Thoughts* 70).

Of central importance for the construction of a regulative self, within Locke’s text, is the shaping of the child’s power of will. For Locke (and other empiricists who would follow him), “will” represents the faculty “which the mind has . . . to order the consideration of any idea, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest” (*Essay* 2.21.15). This will is the instrument of “volition,” which Locke describes as “an act of the mind knowingly exerting that dominion it takes itself to have over any part of the man” (*Essay* 2.21.15). If the goal of the will was to exercise and consolidate one’s agency over other parts of the mind and body, early education sought to train the will through assimilation of the parent’s dominion. This education began by treating the child’s ambivalent will as an object of discipline. As Sara Ahmed writes, in Locke’s writing “the will . . . is understood not as something a subject has, or experiences itself as having, but as what a subject develops, or must develop, to a greater or lesser extent over time” (79-80). For Locke, moreover, the will is both that which the child contains in excess (as a naturally willful being) and that which the child must be taught to master (through habitual training). Against the threat of excessive will (or willfulness), Locke encourages a regulative obedience:

a compliance and suppleness of [the child’s] will, being by a steady hand introduced by parents, before children have memories to retain the beginnings of it, will seem natural to them, and work afterwards in them, as if it were so; preventing all Occasions of Struggling, or Repining. The only Care is, That it be begun early, and inflexibly kept to, till Awe and Respect be grown familiar, and there appears not the least Reluctancy in the Submission and Obedience of their Minds. When this Reverence is once thus established . . . ‘tis by it . . . they are for the future to be governed, as they grow up to more Understanding. (*Some Thoughts* 44)

Here, Locke proposes that the shaping of the will should happen prior to the formation of the child’s memory so that the parent’s will appears natural to the child’s mental process. Awe and respect, “grown familiar” by the “inflexible” hand of the parent, form a model for the self’s later control over its own will. Before Freud’s association of the super-ego with the voice of parental authority, Locke suggests that a self is produced in the assimilation of the parent’s will into its self-consciousness. As Ahmed puts it, Locke’s description of this assimilation assumes that “the child’s identification with parental will would become so complete that identification is experienced as willingness”; in this way, the child is not only “doing what they are commanded to do, but also being this doing, as having always been this doing” (84-85).

For Locke, obedience is not only demanded for the authority of the parent, but also for the sovereignty of God, who concretizes the idea of the good and the true. In a section on moral pedagogy, Locke claims that “a foundation” of virtue may be “imprinted” through a “true notion God, as of the independent Supreme Being, Author and Maker of all things, from whom we receive our good, who loves us and gives us all things” (*Some Thoughts* 136). The imprint of this Supreme Giver of good initiates one into an economy of credit that mirrors the person’s relationship to a larger social order. Locke goes on to argue that a “love and reverence of this

Supreme Being” must come before the child’s theological “enquiries into [God’s] inscrutable essence and being” if it is to instill virtue effectively (*Some Thoughts* 136). This discussion of God precedes Locke’s discussion of the harmful effect of specters, especially those used by servants and maids to keep children obedient, for mental and moral development. Against the influence of these imaginary beings, Locke cautions the parent:

be sure to preserve [the child’s] tender Mind from all Impressions and Notions of *Spirits* and *Goblins*, or any fearful Apprehensions in the dark. . . . Such *Bug-bear* Thoughts once got into the tender Minds of Children, and being set on with a strong impression from the Dread that accompanies such apprehensions, sink deep, and fasten themselves so as not easily, if ever, to be got out again; and whilst they are there, frequently haunt them with strange Visions, making children Dastards when alone, and afraid of their Shadows and Darkness all their Lives after. (*Some Thoughts* 138)

Since children may lack the mental fortitude needed to regulate these phantoms, they should only be exposed to them when they are able to distinguish them as fictions. It is not the falseness of spirits that endangers the child, according to Locke; rather, it is the power of external forces to affect an impressionable child before the mind can ward off their threat. Indeed, Locke claims in his *Essay*, the children’s encounters with “goblins” and “sprites” are prime causes of the madness of association in adults. But the supernatural tale that subjects the child to its influence is also a fitting double for the internalized will of the parent and God, which inaugurates the child’s agency. The agency of God, in this case, acts as a placeholder for the good judgment that the child should internalize as an intelligent agent. A habituated belief in God would provide a defense against a compulsory belief in spirits. Yet it is, paradoxically, a compulsory, unreflective reverence for authority figures like God, parents, and teachers that forms the basis for Locke’s self-possessed subject.

3. From Empiricist Reading to Romantic Reverie

Though published in the late seventeenth-century, *Some Thoughts* would become the basis for much eighteenth-century writing on children and for children. One of the most popular adaptations of Locke’s text could be found in the work of Coleridge’s contemporary, Anna Barbauld, whose *Lessons for Children* volumes—first published in 1778—represent an early effort to promote childhood reading through books that could be comprehended by children. It is Barbauld who argues, in Coleridge’s account of the conversation from *Table Talk*, that *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* “was improbable and had no moral”—a comment that would lead Coleridge to respond that the poem “ought to have had no more moral” than a story from the *Nights* (273). The exchange between Barbauld and Coleridge is underwritten by an early Romantic period debate around the educational function of literature, which is an extension of a broader empiricist interest in the formation of self as an intelligent agent. This debate was central for eighteenth-century authors of children’s literature, whose works aimed to lay the cognitive groundwork for a larger reading of the world. On the one side, the empiricist school of Barbauld and the Edgeworths emphasized the reading of familiar scenes that could be easily internalized and assimilated by the child’s understanding. On the other side, Romantic poets who were raised on fairy tales and supernatural tales insisted upon reading that would expand the imagination beyond what can be sensed and known.

If the child's mind was a "white Paper to be fashioned as one pleases," early children's literature, like *Lessons for Children*, sought to impress the order of the world through repeated reading. Reading, in these texts, was an extension of empirical perception, as the child was habituated to common objects, signs, and rules. As Joanna Wharton has recently observed, Barbauld's texts often employ "sensible images" to articulate a "distinctly embodied" relation between the child's mind and the world (107). Read from beginning to end, Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* reads like an archive of the child's mind as it organizes perceptions into categories that can be reinforced through repetition. The repetitious lines provided a representative experience of habit formation. As Alan Richardson observes, in Barbauld's work, "the child inside the text was to be as manageable as the child outside the text," so that the "the reader, like the text, is stable, stereotyped, and linguistically naïve" (*Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 145). Indeed, for Richardson, "the 'new' children's book sought to reconstruct the child's subjectivity as an ordered, legible, normative, and moralized text in its own right" (141).

In the opening pages of *Lessons*, the reader, through the character of Charles, is enjoined to sit on his mother's lap and begin reading:

Come hither, Charles, come to mamma.
Make haste.
Sit in mamma's lap.
Now read your book.
Where is the pin to point with?
Here is a pin.
Do not tear the book.
Only bad boys tear books.
Charles shall have a pretty new lesson.
Spell that word. Good boy.
Now go and play.
Where is puss?
Puss has got under the table.
You cannot catch puss.
Do not pull her by the tail, you hurt her.
Stroke poor puss. You stroke her the wrong way. This is the right way. (*Lessons for Children* 3)

Much like Locke's description of the child's assimilation of the parent's will, this scene of instruction asks the child to perceive the characters and objects of the book as an extension of his or her own world. It is through identification with the mother, for example, that the child is persuaded to read the mother as a source of moral and empirical knowledge, and through identification with Charles that the child comes to imagine himself or herself as a distractible reader. The command "do not tear the book" is a prohibition that extends to *this* book and all other books by analogy. In this representational writing of objects, the mother's instruction is a model for the making of self and world that should happen through the child's own cognitive efforts. Indeed, this instruction even applies to the performance of reading the book. Read by a mother or nanny, the mother's lines resonate with the child as if they were truly directed at him or her. Read by the child, the repetition of injunctions would ask the child to see himself or

herself as the giver and the recipient of instruction. In both cases, the book asks children to see themselves in relation to a fictional world analogous to their own.

Barbauld's domestic scene of instruction finds an interesting parallel in her domesticated adaptation of an *Arabian Nights* tale, from the first volume of her later work *Evenings at Home; Or the Juvenile Budget Opened* (1796), written with her brother, John Aikin. A companion to the domestic scenes of instruction in *Lessons for Children*, *Evenings at Home* consisted of fables, stories, and dialogues accumulated by the fictional family Faireborne and "adapted to the age and understanding of young people" (1). "Travellers' Wonders" traces the conversation between Captain Compass and his son and daughter Jack and Betsy after Jack expresses his fondness for wonderful and adventurous tales like the *Nights*:

I have been vastly entertained whilst you were abroad, with *Gulliver's Travels*, and the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor; and I think, as you have gone round and round the world, you must have met with things as wonderful as they did. — No, my dear, said the Captain, I never met with Lilliputians or Brobdingnagians, I assure you, nor ever saw the black loadstone mountain, or the valley of diamonds; but, to be sure, I have seen a great variety of people, and their different manners and ways of living; and if it will be any entertainment to you, I will tell you some curious particulars of what I observed. (31-32)

After preparing his children for an ordinary narrative, the Captain recounts the customs of one particularly exotic place he once visited. Using general language, the Captain describes inhabitants whose "garments were made from the outer covering of a middle-sized quadruped" and whose houses fostered "an animal of the tiger kind, with formidable teeth and claws" (40). In the middle of his description, the observant Betsy realizes that the "strange" land the father describes is none other than England, while the naïve and fanciful Jack is left puzzling over the resemblance between this strange land and his own. The story concludes with father explaining his intentions to the inattentive child:

if you recollect what I have been describing, you will find, with Betsy's help, that all the other wonderful things I have told you of are matters familiar among ourselves. But I meant to show you, that a foreigner might easily represent every thing as equally strange and wonderful among us, as we could do with respect to his country; and also to make you sensible that we daily call a great many things by their names, without ever inquiring into their nature and properties; so that, in reality, it is only their names, and not the things themselves, with which we are acquainted. (42)

By showing how easily familiar objects may be turned into strange ones, the father demystifies those wonderful tales for the the fanciful child. In defamiliarizing everyday objects so as to temporally unfix them from their proper names, moreover, Barbauld reveals wonder to be no more than an effect of our ignorance of the world and the relation between things. From this lesson, the child can learn that strangeness and wonder are not attributes of things (which are sensible), but their mental *representation*; strangeness is no more than an effect produced by one's perception of the world, which one must regulate by measuring one's perception against prior experiences. The story ends by demonstrating the assimilative process by which the mind translates the world into legible signs and the estranging power of the imagination to dislocate those signs. As Wharton has pointed out, the story participates in a "re-mystification, as familiar

ideas and object are recast as sources of wonder” in the process of being categorized (121). In this way, the domestic “provides children with the means of imagining themselves as citizens of the world” (121).

Barbauld’s domestic recasting of the foreign in her adventure tale parallels the familiarized strangeness of translations and adaptations of the *Nights* in English and French. These assimilative translations sought to westernize the *Nights* tale by taming the language and giving the tales an explicit moral intent. It should come as no surprise that the Oriental tale, along with the fairy tale, would become an instrumental genre for empiricist children’s literature. Barbauld’s work would be taken up in the writings of Maria Edgeworth, who held similar views on the reading of supernatural tales. Edgeworth, with her father Richard Edgeworth, would publish their theory on education, *Practical Education*, in 1798. *Practical Education* explicitly prohibits the reading of adventure narratives for boys, except for those planning to live at sea or join the military, since “the taste for adventure is absolutely incompatible with the sober perseverance necessary to success in any other liberal occupation” (336).¹⁴ In the book, the Edgeworths promote a version of self as agentive, remarking that parents should only “associate cheerfulness, and praise, and looks of approbation with industry” (15)

Like Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth promotes these values in a domesticated adaptation of the *Nights* tale, “Murad the Unlucky” (from her *Popular Tales*, in 1804). As Alan Richardson observes, the story may be read as a study in the formation of a self-determined subject, “endorsing a bourgeois ethic of work, discipline, and delayed gratification” (*Three Oriental Tales* 247). This strange work of Orientalist realism follows the fated life of Murad, the Unlucky alongside the successes of his brother Saladin, the Lucky. By the end of the story, however, these epithets of chance are replaced by epithets of volition:

I acknowledge that the histories of Saladin, the Lucky, and Murad, the Unlucky, favour your opinion, that prudence has more influence than chance, in human affairs. The success and happiness of Saladin seems to me to have arisen from his prudence . . . let Murad, the Unlucky, be named Murad, the Imprudent: let Saladin preserve the surname he merits, and be henceforth called Saladin, the Prudent. (274)

Like “Travellers’ Wonders,” “Murad the Unlucky” ends with things finding the proper name for their nature: the character who believes in fortune is subject to external occurrences while the character who controls his will rises above his circumstances. Indeed, the value of action is only emphasized by Murad’s unhappy fate as an opium addict dying a nameless death in the streets of Constantinople. Equating industriousness with social mobility, the story seems to say “you, too, may turn into a Murad, if you remain too open to influence.”

In their assimilative translations of the *Nights*, both Barbauld and Edgeworth reinforce the eighteenth-century empiricist ideal of a volitional and self-reflective agent against a lazy, passive “Oriental” subject. The image of the Orient as a place of bodily and spiritual servitude was a common one within the eighteenth century. In his *The Spirit of the Law*, for example, Montesquieu describes the Oriental disposition as “a certain laziness of spirit, naturally bound with that of the body, which makes the spirit incapable of any action, any action, any effort, any

¹⁴ Interestingly, however, the text suggests that these tales do not present a significant threat to girls, who “very soon perceive the impossibility of their rambling about the world in quest of adventures,” because of “an obvious impossibility in gratifying” the wish to travel (336). Girls, for the Edgeworths, are restricted to realism, and better attuned to probability because of it.

application” (235). For Montesquieu, this only proves that “the soul can no longer alter impressions once it has received them. This is why laws, mores, and manners, even those that seem not to matter . . . remain in the East today as they were a thousand years ago” (235). A similar view of the Oriental mind would form the basis for British imperial pedagogy. A restriction on the nefarious influence of superstitious tales, for example, would be important for colonial education in India, where Oriental tales were, according to Gauri Viswanathan, “denounced for their deleterious effects,” since natives “lacked the prior mental and moral cultivation required for literature—especially their own—to have instructive value for them” (*Masks of Conquest* 5). The task of colonial education, like domestic empiricist education, was to reshape the impressionable mind of a subject through habitual instruction.¹⁵

With the early Romantic reading of *Nights*, however, we see a shift in thinking about the process of education. This shift in education was underwritten by a reconsideration of the activity of reading. Where empiricist pedagogues saw reading as an agentive engagement with the world, Romantics saw reading as an exercise in the power of the imagination. Coleridge’s antipathy towards explicitly moralizing literature, expressed in his comment to Barbauld, reflects his larger critique of empiricist education, which, he believed, overemphasized the child’s use of reason. For Coleridge, “the comparing power, the judgment . . . ought not to be forcibly excited” for “it can only lead to selfish views, debtor and creditor principles of virtue, and an inflated sense of merit” (317). Charles Lamb certainly reciprocated Coleridge’s sentiment when he wrote, in an 1802 letter to Coleridge, that the problem with Barbauld’s text is that knowledge “must come to a child in *the shape of knowledge*, and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a horse is an animal . . . instead of that beautiful interest in wild tales, which made the child a man” (*Letters* 81). If Coleridge and Lamb found empiricist literature’s emphasis on self-possession repetitive, it was because their own encounter with the *Nights* suggested that reading could do otherwise. As Deidre Lynch notes, “Romantic-period critics redeemed the workings of association from Locke’s charge that the automatic nature of associative thought estranged us from our reason and will” (170). This shift in educational emphasis was nowhere more evident than in the Romantic use of *reverie* to describe the processes of reading and composition. Coleridge’s own description of his childhood reading to trace the origin of his penchant for reverie, for example, suggests that reverie, and not self-possession, is the mental affect of the *Nights*.¹⁶ Against the assimilative reading of empiricist education, reverie offered a reading that accepted and perpetuated new associations.

The difference between self-possession and reverie can be seen quite clearly in the writings of Erasmus Darwin, who offers a diagnostic account of reverie in the “Diseases of Volition” portion of his *Zoonomia; or The Laws of Organic Life* (1794). In trying to map the psychology of reverie, Darwin shows the way in which the person in reverie is like one under a spell:

When we are employed with great sensation of pleasure, or with great efforts of volition, in the pursuit of some interesting train of ideas, we cease to be conscious of our existence, are inattentive to time and place, and do not distinguish this train of sensitive and voluntary ideas from the irritative ones excited by the presence of external objects,

¹⁵ As I will show in my next chapter, many ideas for the cultivation of the colonial mind come directly out of the empiricist eighteenth-century English efforts to develop a standardized education in Britain.

¹⁶ Coleridge’s use of “reverie” as a mode of reading and composition can be found throughout his notebooks and poetic works. It is also worth noting that he titled the 1800 version of the *Rime* “The Ancient Mariner: A Poet’s Reverie.”

though our organs of sense are surrounded with their accustomed stimuli. (220)

Darwin's description of reverie as "inattentive to time and place" here certainly reads like the antithesis of Locke's self-possessed subject. The inward motion of reverie, instead, precipitates a momentary suspension of habitualized stimuli—"irritative" impressions that make us conscious of our body's position in time and place.¹⁷ This suspension is maintained through the motion of volition, which Darwin uses slightly differently than Locke. Whereas Locke's "volition" is an agentive act that exercises dominion over mind and body, Darwin's "volition" is a motion that passes through the mind and body. As Darwin defines it, "volition" is an "exertion or change of the central parts of the sensorium, or of the whole of it, terminating in some of those extreme parts of it" (32). Notice how Darwin's description of volition's function is noticeably free of the language of agency and possession.

Elsewhere in his *Zoonomia*, Darwin distinguishes between the "twofold use of volition [which] has confounded the metaphysicians, who have disputed about free will and necessity" (417). According to Darwin, "volition in its common acceptance"—including Locke's usage of the term—entails the "power of choosing, whether we shall act or not" (417). By contrast, Darwin uses volition to mean "the active state of the sensorial faculty in producing motion in consequence of desire or aversion" (416). Such a definition of volition suggests that the motion generated by desire or aversion is not driven by choice or deliberation. As Kevis Goodman observes, Darwin's clarification of the metaphysicians' misunderstanding suggests that "they should all along have been talking about volition-with and volition-without the interposition of conscious deliberation" (214-215).¹⁸ Volition in the involuntary sense entails desire without a deliberating subject, motion without agency. For Darwin, the undeliberate motion of volition exists in excess in the state of reverie—a state of absorbed thought that he associates with the creation and contemplation of aesthetic works. The most extreme manifestation of reverie, according to Darwin, can be seen in sleepwalkers, who suffer from a total "inaptitude of the mind to attend to external stimuli" (221). In both aesthetic contemplation and sleep walking, reverie suggests the power of the mind to be absorbed in its own motion.

Reverie, in this sense, suggests a telling revision of Lockean consciousness, and an interesting way of framing Coleridge's and Lamb's reading of *Nights*. If a Lockean self is bound up with conscious volition—the assertion of the mind's power against automatic drives—reverie may be thought of as the internal and involuntary compulsion of the mind by desire. Still, if Darwin, in 1794, regarded reverie as a disease, it was because its mode of inattention and inaction signaled a weakened faculty of choice. Even Coleridge, in his notebooks, struggles to extricate his penchant for reverie from dominant empiricist educational norms. The notebooks offer a telling picture of the authority that empiricist education continued to exert on early Romantic poets' minds. In one entry, for example, Coleridge regards reverie as the origin of evil:

I will at least make the attempt to explain to myself the Origin of moral Evil from the streamy Nature of Association, which Thinking = Reason, curbs & rudders/how this comes to be so difficult/Do not the bad Passions in Dreams throw light & shew proof of

¹⁷ Anticipating Spivak's description of "the violent production of the precarious subject," Darwin suggests that the reverie continues until the "interesting train of ideas becomes exhausted, or the appulses of external objects are applied with unusual violence, and we return with surprise, or with regret, into the common track of life" (220).

¹⁸ I owe this reading of Darwin's "twofold use of volition" to Kevis Goodman's illuminating explication of the problem in her essay "'Uncertain Disease': Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading."

this Hypothesis? (*Notebooks* 1770)

Coleridge distinguishes “streamy Association” from the rudders of “Thinking,” citing the menacing associations of dream as proof of the former’s evil. His connection of reverie and evil is predicated on the association of reverie with inaction. Following Darwin, he labels this “streamy Thought” “diseased,” since it is “state producing from Pain” (*N* 1770). Indeed, Coleridge struggles to *disassociate* reverie from evil, because pain is so deeply *associated* with his experience of reverie. Because reverie supersedes reason’s regulative power, Coleridge cannot help but regard its influence as a sign of moral and mental deficiency.

But a couple of entries later, Coleridge rejects the association of streamy thought and “evil”— seeing how the pain is produced *by* reason’s “curbs & rudders”:

Now, all Duty is felt as a command, commands most often, & therefore by Laws of Association felt as if always, from without & consequently, calling up &c &c commands from without & consequently, calling up the Sensations &c of the pains endured from Parents’, Schoolmasters’ . . . But I saw the phaenomenon occurred far far too early . . . That interruption of itself is painful because & as far as it acts as Disruption . . . I saw great Reason to attribute the effect wholly to the streamy nature of the associating Faculty and especially as it is evident that they most labor under this defect who are more reverie-ish & streamy. (*Notebooks* 1833)

In radically empiricist fashion, Coleridge traces his association of pain and reverie back to the disruptions of parents and teachers. Tracing that association even further then allows him to see that reverie was a part of his natural disposition, which was only rendered “evil” by his assimilation of these commands into principles of reason. Coleridge’s rereading of these early pedagogical scenes—as “interruption[s]” to his psychic life rather than intellectual errors—meticulously divests his desire from the will of his former pedagogues in order to extricate reverie from evil. The result is a reevaluation of psychically-embedded cultural truths about the proper way to know.

Coleridge’s attraction to reverie over reason seems to also drive his promotion of the *Nights* as a foundational children’s literary text. In the eleventh lecture from his *Course of Lectures* (delivered from 1811 through 1812), for example, Coleridge claims that a reading of supernatural works like the *Nights* gives a child a necessary education in the powers of imagination.¹⁹ Coleridge’s account of the expansive imagination of “Asiatic and Greek Mythologies,” in the lecture, leads him to consider the mind’s coming-to-consciousness in “Robinson Crusoe,” which drives him to discuss the “Use of Works of Imagination in Education.”

In order to set up his discussion of imagination and education, Coleridge ponders the question of knowledge in Oriental works. Echoing previous Orientalist philologists, Coleridge

¹⁹ Though a complete version of the lecture does not exist, an advertisement for the lecture indicates Coleridge’s pedagogical intentions:

Having shewn the laws prescribed by the nature of the subject in the use of the supernatural, and the especial merit of the Arabian Tales, as works of imagination, Mr. C will attempt . . . to settle the question, whether ‘works of this kind, Tales of Enchanters, Genii, Fairies, etc.’ can be safely and advantageously read at all during the periods from childhood to early youth; and, if so, under what conditions and regulations. (*Lectures* 188)

theorizes that Oriental (or “Asiatic”) imaginative works like the *Nights* are the product of a world in which will is subordinated to external agents. This world is starkly different from the Greek world which sought deify “some legendary individual”:

In Asia, probably from the greater unity of the government and the still surviving influence of patriarchal tradition, the idea of the unity of God, in a distorted reflection of the Mosaic scheme, was much more generally preserved; and accordingly all other super or ultra-human beings could only be represented as ministers of, or rebels against, his will. The Asiatic genii and fairies are, therefore, always endowed with moral qualities, and distinguishable as malignant or benevolent to man. It is this uniform attribution of fixed moral qualities to the supernatural agents of eastern mythology that particularly separates them from the divinities of old Greece. . . .

The Asiatic supernatural beings are all produced by imagining an excessive magnitude, or an excessive smallness combined with great power; and the broken associations, which must have given rise to such conceptions, are the sources of the interest which they inspire, as exhibiting, through the working of the imagination, the idea of power in the will. This is delightfully exemplified in the *Arabian Nights' Tales Entertainments*, and indeed, more or less, in other works of the same kind. In all these there is the same activity of the mind as in dreaming, that is—an exertion of the fancy in the combination and re-combination of familiar objects. To this must be added that those tales cause no deep feeling of a moral kind—whether of religion or love; but an impulse of motion is communicated to the mind without excitement, and this is the reason of their being so generally read and admired. (*Lectures* 2.191)²⁰

Coleridge regards the *Nights'* associative and dream-like form as the sign of “the power in the will”—a will that is communicated to the mind without the interruption of a “deep moral feeling.” It is not hard to see, here, how Coleridge’s description of this “power” echoes Darwin’s account of reverie as a motion that impels without being assimilated by consciousness. Coleridge however, reframes the *Nights'* reverie as an example of “power *in* the will”—emphasizing the immanence of this power rather than its sublimation to the volitional force of the will. Coleridge attempts to explain this power in religious historical terms. The *Nights* represents a species of a “mythology” in which the will of the individual is passive to the will of supernatural agents, who are also the symbolic bearers of moral qualities. In this world, agency is displaced onto spectral beings—“a distorted reflection of the Mosaic schema” because it is these external beings who are agents of moral good or evil, not individuals. Interpreting the *Nights* as the work of a dreaming mind rather than an archaic document allows Coleridge to note the ways in which the text reflects aspects of contemporary readers’ minds.

In translating these supernatural beings into mental entities, moreover, Coleridge finds an aesthetic value in the *Nights* that is independent of moral value.²¹ We can compare this to

²⁰ As Kathleen Coburn notes in her comments on Coleridge’s lecture, the preserved passages of this lecture are cobbled together from notes, reports, and marginalia, “mak[ing] it difficult to determine what was the origin of many passages” (*Lectures* 2.191). As this chapter hopefully demonstrates, however, these lecture comments correspond with Coleridge’s other statements about the *Nights* and its influence on his young mind.

²¹ Coleridge’s formal observations on the *Nights* here are echoed in Richard Hole’s 1797 collection of lectures *Remarks on the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*:

Coleridge's later Schillerian formulation (within the same lecture) that "in the imagination of man exist the seeds of all moral and scientific improvement" (300). Here, the *Nights* is not a synthesis of moral and sensuous, but an invitation for the mind to imagine without the question of how a thought should be formed. Indeed, it appears that Coleridge's defense of the childhood reading of supernatural texts is predicated on his belief that the associative power of the imagination must be developed before the discriminating and assimilative power of understanding. And his reading of the *Nights* as a work of "power in the will" offers an important example of the shift in the way literature conveys knowledge—a shift that would also influence Coleridge's poetics, as we will see in the *Rime*.

4. Rereading the Moral of *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*

Driven by his reading of the *Nights*, Coleridge argues that the *Rime* "ought to have had no more moral than the story of the merchant sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and the Genii starting up and saying he must kill the merchant, because a date shell had put out the eye of the Genii's son" (*Table Talk* 273). In the previous section, I have shown how Coleridge's identification with the *Arabian Nights* as an example of the "streamy Thought" of reverie shows the limitations of empiricist habits in eighteenth-century children's literature. In this section, I will trace the connection between Coleridge's reading of the *Nights* and his writing of his own supernatural tale to ask what the moral of the *Rime* does teach its readers. I claim that more than a statement about literary influence, Coleridge's analogy of the *Rime* and the *Nights* suggests a relationship between both works' associative forms—the similar ways in which the works arrange their wandering tales.

In a sense, Coleridge's comment shows the connection between the *Nights* and the *Rime* as objects of cultural translation. Like Barbauld's domesticated adaptation of the *Nights* tale, eighteenth-century European translations of the *Nights* sought to heighten the didactic element of the text and to elevate readers in the process. One need not look any further than the first French and English translations of the *Nights* for an example of this. In the introduction to Antoine Galland's translation (which forms the text of the anonymous Grub Street, and first English, translation), the translator celebrates the "pleasant and diverting" events that "shew how much the Arabians surpass other Nations in Composures of this sort," while affirming the renovating virtue of his European tongue (*Three Oriental Tales* 230). Galland lauds his translation's capacity to better the text by "shew[ing] the Arabians to the French, with all the Circumspection that the Niceness of the French Tongue, and of the Time requires" (230). He claims that his translation of selected *Nights* tales contains models for good conduct: "if those who read these Stories have but any Inclination to profit by the Examples of Vertue and Vice, which they will here find exhibited, they may reap an advantage by it, that is not to be reap'd in other Stories, which are more proper to corrupt than to reform our Manners" (230). The moral improvement of the work extends to its language, as Galland likens the task of the translator to that of a colonial pedagogue "shewing the Arabians to the French" and an ethnographer giving an account "of the

we must be convinced that these tales possess merit of some kind or other, however it may have eluded our notice. The minds of European readers are commonly affected in a very different manner from those of the Arabian auditors. The sedate and philosophical turn from them with contempt: the gay and volatile laugh at their seeming absurdities: those of an elegant and correct taste are disgusted with their grotesque figures and fantastic imagery; and, however we may be occasionally amused by their wild and diversified incidents, they are seldom thoroughly relished but by children, or by men whose imagination is complimented at the expence of their judgement. (8)

Customs and Manners of the Eastern Nations” (230).²²

Subsequent versions of the *Nights* sought to edit and reorganize the tales to suit bourgeois reading habits. As Alan Richardson notes, the *Nights* was part of an influx of “early fairy tale collections designed for middle-class children [that] were cleaned up and often given didactic applications” (*Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 117). We have already seen evidence of this process in the empiricist children’s literature of Barbauld and Edgeworth. Richardson also cites the preface to *The Oriental Moralist*—a work which the author, “Rev’d Mr Cooper” (a pseudonym of Richard Johnson), “expunged everything which could give the least offence to the most delicate reader” and “added many moral reflections, wherever the story would admit of them” (1, 2). In sanitizing the text, Johnson sought “to promote the love of virtue” and “fortify the youthful heart against the impressions of vice” (ii). He tellingly likens his task to a florist who “traverse[s] this wild and unweeded spot with a cautious and discriminating eye . . . to cull a pleasing nosegay for my youthful friends” (i). Like Galland, Johnson claims that his translation cultivates the wild content of the original in its tasteful selection of the most appropriate passages, turning the amoral work into a work worthy of moral reflection. The reader of the *Oriental Moralist* would, thus, gain a specimen of the exotic original in the familiar and safe space of home.

These assimilative translations bespoke an ongoing trend of European poets and novelists using the *Nights* to both assert and question dominant cultural and literary norms. By the nineteenth century, so many translations and adaptations of the *Nights* had been produced, that the “original” became a purely symbolic function of translation. In the midst of all these translations and adaptations, the *Nights* existed as little more than a specter of a text—a phantom of some archaic Arab past to be channeled anew in each reworking. As Borges notes in his exhaustive account of the *Nights*’ European translation history, these many translations of the text vex our desire for a true and original version.²³ In the symbolic “text” of the *Nights*, “the threshold is confused with the mirror, the mask lies beneath the face, no one knows any longer which is the true man and which are his idols. And none of it matters; the disorder is as acceptable and trivial as the inventions of a daydream” (425). If Romantic poets like Coleridge and Lamb were able to read the work as a living transcript, it was partly because the history of the text’s translations and imitations mirrored the palimpsest writing on the mind. The text of the *Nights*, like the text of the empiricist mind, was subject of influence and assimilation—a permeable text that confused the distinction between a cultural inside and outside.

²² As Srinivas Aravamudan describes, Galland’s translation “imposes a regime of familiarity and aesthetic propriety, making his characters sound as if they might be in the court of Louis XIV” (54).

²³ This is not only the case for the European translations of the *Nights*, but also for later Arabic editions, which sought to reproduce the image of the Orient reflected in the *Nights*’ proverbial mirror. Indeed, an authoritative Arabic edition of *Alf layla wa layla* (or *One Thousand and One Nights*) did not exist until after Galland’s 1704 translation, which strayed much from the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript original. And yet it is Galland’s copy of the Syrian manuscript that is (according to the Iraqi scholar and translator Mushin Mahdi) the oldest extant written version of this origin-less oral work. The status of the *Arabian Nights* as an “Arab” text is product of an Arab effort to make itself equivalent to European world—in a process that Shaden M. Tageldin has described as a “seductive exchange” of culture. That is to say, the *Nights* could only become an “authentic” cultural artifact after the European treatment of the work as an exemplary Oriental text. It is only after Galland’s translation is published, for example, that a standard Arabic edition is published by the British East India Company in Calcutta. The first non-European Arabic edition, based on a lost Egyptian edition from the 1770s, is published in Egypt in 1835, using a press that Napoleon established after his 1798. The *Arabian Nights* is, thus, a text that operates within “an irreciprocal economy of colonial translation” that circulated world texts and traditions according to a Eurocentric standard of equivalence (113).

Coleridge's treatment of the *Nights* as the work of a dreaming mind certainly bears witness to a confusion between text and psyche. In the power of Oriental supernatural beings, Coleridge claims, we can see a trace of the Old Testament God as a mediating figure, even as what is communicated to the mind is an "impulse" free of the "deep feeling" of "love or religion" (*Lectures* 2.191). Coleridge's reading of the *Nights*' representation of the power in the will mirrors his description of the Book of Job as "an Arab poem antecedent to the Mosaic dispensation," in which "the desire and necessity for a Mediator [is] so intensely expressed" through "the mind of a good man not enlightened by an actual revelation, but seeking about for one" (*Table Talk* 146). In both cases, Coleridge associates Arabic works with a kind of itinerant power in will that has not yet been integrated into a more "enlightened" and self-possessed mind. Indeed, this seems to be part of the reason he enjoys reading the *Nights* so much; it gives him the permission to pursue trains of ideas that do not culminate in knowledge. This sense of permission seems to be carried over in his composition of the *Rime*, where Coleridge's stated goal, according to the *Biographia*, was "to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" in order to represent the mind of one "who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency (2.6-7). This "transfer" of human interest applies to both our identification with the mariner and our reading of the poem. In our reading of the poem's superstitious association and supernatural occurrences, we must, effectively, imagine that we know less than we do—a *de-empricizing* task that allow us to entertain the poem's many potentially irrational associations.

Coleridge's effort to "transfer . . . a human interest" onto the mariner's delusion, interestingly, corresponds with philological attempts to trace the origins of poetry and religion in primitive Oriental texts. As Jerome McGann observes, the *Rime* may be read as an extension of Coleridge's interest in the works of English and German Higher Critics (such as Robert Lowth, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Friedrich Schleiermacher) who saw the Bible as a historical, and predominantly secular, record of religious consciousness rather than a devotional object.²⁴ For these biblical critics, the Bible was "the world's central literary event" through which non-Western—and primarily Near Eastern—religious texts could be studied as expressions of consciousness (56). Reading Coleridge's earlier poem "The Destiny of Nations," McGann suggests that Coleridge shows how "the West's central pre-Christian documents . . . were important scriptural events not merely in themselves but in relation to the general development of mankind's religious cultures" (56).²⁵ In a similar fashion, McGann argues, the

²⁴ An extended discussion of the connection between biblical criticism and early Orientalism can be found in my next chapter.

²⁵ As McGann calls our attention to, traces of the *Rime* may be found in the beginning of Coleridge's earlier poem "The Destiny of Nations"—a poem that was written in 1796, and was originally intended to be a part of Southey's Joan of Arc epic. The poem starts with a speaker proclaiming:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
 For infant minds; and we in this low world
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality,
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken
 The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,
 Whose latence is the plentitude of All,
 Thou with retracted beams, and self-eclipse
 Veiling, revealest thine Eternal Sun. (18-26)

Rime's many revisions and glosses "imitate a redacted literary text" of Higher Critical tradition (57). The result is "a Western and Judeo-Christian" poem of development that traces the mind of a man from superstitious thinking to greater love and reverence for God and his creatures (57). In this way, McGann claims, the work's various figures—"mariner, albatross, sprectre-bark, water snakes, rain, sun, etc"—enter our reading as "objects bearing-meaning, as already significant (or preinterpreted) phenomena" (58).

However, McGann's reading misses the ways in which the poem frustrates our attempts to translate the mariner's tale into legible interpretations. Indeed, I claim, Coleridge's effort to draw us into the mariner's delusion encourages us to confront the limits of our knowledge of self and world, and to suspend our need to assimilate our associations into higher, more enlightened, forms. The poem moves associatively rather than progressively. From the very moment that the albatross appears out of the semiotic "fog" surrounding the ship, he is regarded as a sign of God's presence: "And an it were a Christian Soul, / We hail'd it in God's name" (2.61-64). After the arrival of bird, the ice surrounding the ship breaks and "a good south wind" carries the crew onward. The albatross remains perched "In mist or cloud on mast or shroud" for nine days. But in a sudden and unfathomable gesture, the mariner decides to shoot the albatross with his cross-bow.²⁶ Like minds subject to the "madness of association," the crew interprets this enigmatic act through their superstitious associations, first accusing the mariner of "kill[ing] the Bird / That made the breeze to blow (2.91-92)." But after seeing the fog part and the sun rise again, the crew justifies "kill[ing] the Bird / That brought the fog and mist" (2.95-96).

This act is shrouded in as much uncertainty as the ship is shrouded in fog. In our attempts to interpret the poem, we simply do not have enough information to read the motivation for the mariner's act. Nor does the poem lead us towards an interpretation, preferring, instead, to leave opaque the poem's determining act. By doing so, however, the poem makes it difficult for us to learn from the poem—to assimilate the poem into our own experience. In trying to interpret the mariner's act, Geoffrey Hartman notes that "even the simplest answer, that it was willfulness, implies a drive on the mariner's part for self-presence. The killing is a shadow of the Mariner's own casting. What follows his self-determining, self-inaugural act is, paradoxically, the presence of otherness" (*Fate of Reading* 76). The killing of the albatross may, in this sense, be read as the mariner's a failed attempt to assert his will over external and arbitrary forces—failed, because this assertion is itself compelled by the assumption that he must act. If the mariner kills the albatross in order to break the spell of external spirits, his compulsion to act only confirms the power of forces that are beyond his control.

The mariner's inaugural act is mirrored in the poem's forced moral, which retroactively seeks to impose order over the poem's bizarre series of supernatural events. Although Coleridge may have wished to evade the need for moral, he ends the poem with an explicit and reductive lesson:

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

Coleridge's idea of an alphabet connects the "infant minds" of unenlightened religious culture with the "infant minds" of children. As Susan Wolfson points out in her reading of the passage, "the lesson becomes increasingly entrapped in its contradictions," since "what meets the bodily sense . . . has to be mediated by something other than bodily sense; what is an alphabet may be opaque to the infant mind, which is unspeaking, pre-linguistic" (91).

²⁶ The later gloss on the poem describes the mariner's act as a transgression against "the laws of hospitality." In his reading of this gloss, David Simpson notes that the mariner "never entirely shake[s] off the fundamentally synthetic identity of host and guest, of the one who is at home and the stranger who appears at the door" (28).

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (7.643-650)

Read in conjunction with the poem's later redactions, the moral could be taken as a Coleridge's early attempt to make the sequence of events more comprehensible. Notice, for example, how the moral seems to come as a direct consequence of the mariner's act. If the message of this narrative is to love God and his creatures, then the punishment for the act can be considered as a means of instilling that injunction. As empirical readers, we should know that the *effect* of the punishment stems from the *cause* of the mariner's rejection of the injunction to love God's creatures.²⁷ Through knowledge of the disastrous consequences, we can reinforce our love for God and all His creatures. By prompting us to read backwards here, the poem suggests that this moral knows better than the mariner, and that it may lead us towards an improved and enlightened consciousness.

But the moral is too late (could it have ever been on time?); its placement at the end of the poem, reduces love to a lesson of punishment, turns the mariner's incomprehensible tale into a pithy lesson moral improvement. It forces us to reconcile the gap between the tale and the moral, and, in so doing, to learn from what remains largely indecipherable. As Frances Ferguson observes, "the possibility of learning from the Mariner's experience depends upon... a more linear and complete pattern than the poem ever agrees to do" (620). For Ferguson, instead, the lack of moral shows the unpremeditated "moral commitment" that lies at the heart of "every interpretation" (628). Ferguson's comment suggests that learning from a moral entails an assimilation of a story into a recognizably moral pattern. In this way, she argues, the *Rime* addresses the dialectic between knowledge and belief: between needing further knowledge to act and believing one has enough knowledge to act.

Coleridge's comment to Barbauld certainly acknowledges the tale's glaring absence of moralistic ground, but it only raises the question: if there "ought" to be no moral, how should we read the poem? What we can learn from an agentless and supernatural story of punishment that resembles a tale from the *Nights*? Barbauld's reaction to the *Rime* represents a larger reception of the *Rime* as a nonsensical supernatural work much like the *Nights*. As Tim Fulford notes, "the dreaminess, [the] absence of moral judgment, and the dislocation of cause and effect" of the work that would lead to its condemnation by many of Coleridge's close friends, with the exception of Lamb (221). Southey's denunciation of the *Rime* as "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity" is especially insightful here, if we view Coleridge's adaptation of Oriental literary form as a translation of a heterogeneous value into a culture where that value can only be registered as impure (201). Coleridge's use of the *Nights* as the reference point for his poem's bewildering structure demands a reading that would frustrate our desire to understand the poem's gestures through familiar generic and moral categories. Along these lines, Fulford claims the *Nights* afforded Coleridge "a model for poetry that is concerned with, and itself exploits, the power of its own fictional world to intervene in the real world of its audience" (223).

In a way, the problem of moral (or the lack of the moral) in the poem manifests the deeper cultural commitments of reading—the underlying expectations about what and how a literary text should mean. As we have already seen quite clearly in children's literature,

²⁷ The moral's call to love all of God's creatures echoes Locke's call for the child's compulsory reverence of God.

empiricists held reading as an exercise in self-possession—a process that reinforced associations through habit, and turned these associations into authoritative signs. Coleridge’s remark to Barbauld, on the other hand, emphasizes the processual character of the work, encouraging us to pursue involuntary associations to no clear end. The poem does not lack a moral; rather the poem *ought* to have had no more moral than a story in which revenge is extracted arbitrarily. Through a clever reversal of terms, the *ought* associated with moral duty or action is exchanged for a formal or poetic *ought*, as if form still retained a minimal moral content. A similarly processual form structures the *Nights*’ “Story of the Merchant and the Genie.” Like the mariner’s fate, the merchant’s cruel punishment is the consequence of a law that is executed without one’s will or knowledge. And like the mariner’s narrative, the story of the merchant resists a moral that can be assimilated easily into the language of agency. The merchant is punished for an act that he commits involuntarily, and one that is only made known to him after he commits it. Like the *Rime*, the action of the story is fueled by the genie’s insistence that this thoughtless wrong must be expiated, that loss must be met with loss.

What Coleridge excludes from his summary of the story, however, is that the merchant has his freedom granted *back* to him through the power of storytelling. After a one-year reprieve—which the genie grants him on the condition that he returns for his punishment—the merchant comes back to scene of this involuntary murder, where he meets three different old men who are drawn in by his story and insist on staying to see what happens. The old men are bound to the merchant by listening to his tale; as recipients of his narrative, moreover, they are incorporated into his story. The three old men offer their wondrous stories of supernatural punishment on the condition that the genie “remit[s] a third part of the punishment” if he finds each story “more wonderful and surprising than the adventure of this merchant” (16). By the end of the narrative, the genie, thoroughly astonished by what he has heard, gives the merchant the remaining portions of his freedom. The brilliance of the old men’s plan is that it guarantees the continued deferral of punishment at the same time that it gratifies the genie’s desire for equivalence. The exchange of life for tale *structurally satisfies* the economy of punishment, but the debt of the son’s death is repaid through others’ tales. By the end of the story, the old men have substituted the merchant’s life for accounts of their own lives.

In one sense, we may think of the moral in the *Rime* as the satisfaction of an eighteenth-century discourse of agency and improvement—a discourse that conceals the tale’s insistence on a world in which characters are undone by external agents. While the moral calls on us to learn from the mariner’s experience and love God’s creatures, the tale suggests that the call may be never be assimilated fully into experience. In this way, too, the *Rime* borrows from the *Nights*. In the Syrian copy of the *Nights* that Galland uses as his original, one old man responds to the merchant’s story by exclaiming:

By God, my brother, your duty is great! And your story is extraordinary! If one could write it with a needle [*ibra*] on the inner corner of the eye, it would spur reflection [‘*ibra*] in those who know to reflect” [‘*itabir*]. (501)²⁸

As a metaphor of reception, the inscription on the inner corner of an eye offers an interesting parallel to the invisible inscription of the parent on the “white Paper” of the mind. For a story to be written “on the corner of the eye” suggests that it would remain simultaneously impressed upon and inscrutable to the organ of sight. It would demand to be read always but could never be

²⁸ The sentence plays on the rhyme of needle [*ibra*] and warning [‘*ibra*].

read by the one it is written on. Indeed, as the Moroccan writer Abdelfattah Kilito observes, in tracing the phrase's function in the tales, this comment "praises in advance the story that it highlights," in order to show that such a story should not be received "distractedly but in an attitude of respect, meditation, even fear" (502). Such a statement is predicated on the failure of and expectation for the listener to receive fully the story, for "the receiver is negligent" and "does not know how to reflect; he does not perceive his reflection in the mirror that is held before him; he does not grasp the injunction, the plea—articulated or mute—contained within the story, within every story: do not forget me, for I speak of you" (504).²⁹

Kilito's reading of every story's doubly explicit and implicit demand offers a helpful way for thinking about the articulated and mute injunctions of the mariner's tale, and the deeper connections between the *Nights*' and the *Rime*'s modes of telling. This is not only witnessed in the poem's moral—which is an explicit articulation of the tale's implicit injunction—but also in the mariner's speech. Does not the mariner's enchantment of the guest (who "listens like a three year's child") and the mariner's forced repetition of his tale bear witness to the power of a story that exceeds both the teller's and the listener's conscious wills? As soon as the mariner begins his tale, an "alien spirit . . . comes to inhabit the Mariner's speech" (Eilenberg 34). As Susan Eilenberg observes, such speech, "endlessly iterated and claiming no source of the Mariner's will, must be regarded as enclosed in invisible quotation marks"—a tale impelled by another, stranger voice (34). Like the out-of-place moral at the end of the poem, the story the mariner tells seems to come from some place beyond him. Indeed, Eilenberg notes, even in his encounter with the albatross, the mariner is "unable to recognize his fears and desires as his own or distinguish himself from his surroundings," since he "apprehends the contents of his own psyche as alien and inexplicable" (Eilenberg 32). It is as if the mariner exists only as a medium for his experience's conversion into a tale that he can impart to others. In this way, too, his tale resembles the story-driven world of the *Nights*, in which life is repaid with narrative.

But the mariner's tale also suggests that telling a tale and receiving a tale are not commensurate to knowing it. Since the tale bears messages that remain opaque to our knowledge, we must return to it. This is not only a matter of textual coherence, but also a matter of self-legibility. The mariner's undeliberate repetition of the tale and the moral mirrors the paradoxical injunction of the unconscious: translate me, you will never be able to translate me. Though the unconscious demands to be made intelligible, it is never fully deciphered by a self, never fully translated into recognizable forms. As Jean Laplanche notes, "the drive to translate" unconscious material "springs up, not from the translator, but from this untranslated or this imperfectly translated, which endlessly demands a translation" (173-174). Such a drive, Laplanche speculates, is a continuation of the infant's failed translation of an adult world of enigmatic messages—an incomplete assimilation that "leave[s] behind . . . untranslated elements which constitute the first rudiments of the unconscious" (176). Each subsequent translation of these elements is a reworking of this originary relationship between world and self, an attempt at a "better" and "more comprehensive translation" (176). For Laplanche, psychic translation is necessary for self-representation, for the telling of who "I" am and how "I" came to be. This is certainly the case for Coleridge's attempt to translate his childhood scene of reading into an origin story for his dreaming disposition. It is also the case for the mariner's effort to turn his cruel punishment into a lesson of love. But as both the child and the mariner show us, the

²⁹ Tellingly, this violent image of inscription is neglected in Galland's version of the text, and every English translation of the text (including the recent translation by Hussain Haddawy).

demand to translate entails the promise of recursion, like an oft-repeated tale with ever-varying endings.

Chapter Two

Unfinished State: Proverbs and the Production of Knowledge in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

In the mission schools of Bengal, there developed a mode of instruction, which set up . . . contradictory and independent textualities of Christian piety and heathen idolatry in order to elicit, between them, in an uncanny doubling, undecidability. It was an uncertainty between truth and falsehood whose avowed aim was conversion, but whose discursive and political strategy was the production of doubt; not simply a doubt in the content of beliefs, but a doubt, or an uncertainty in the native place of enunciation; at the point of the colonizer's demand for narrative, at the moment of the master's interrogation.

- Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it's about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold the regulatory forces of subjecthood.

- Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*

This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend: we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense which the world shall have if they behave well
I have also: The Bible of Hell: which the world shall have whether they will or no.

One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression

- William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

1. Infernal Wisdom: Converting Knowledge from the Center to the Periphery

Early on in the Books of Proverbs, before we are even expected to receive knowledge, we are admonished by the voice of vagrant Wisdom:

She uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. (*King James Version*, Prov. 1:20-23)

Wisdom, here, calls out to us where we are most neglectful—in the places of concourse where her muteness is most public and our ignorance is most egregious. In reproving only the ones who refuse her call, she addresses all as if none have ever listened. As readers of this exchange, too, we are asked to inhabit both the exemplary voice of Wisdom who feels compelled to proclaim her knowledge and the guilty silence of “you” who refuse to hear. Wisdom promises to make her words known to us *because* we have ignored her call, but in order to hear her, we must know enough to know how little we listen. The Book of Proverbs even begins by teaching us, though we will have already forgotten by the time we encounter Wisdom, that “a wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel” (Prov. 1:5). Here too wisdom is vouchsafed to the few who have it, but those who need it most are the ones who claim to know it already. Wisdom initially appears to us as a model for self-

righteousness—the voice of someone assured of her ability to show the true nature of things. But the self-assuredness of Wisdom betrays the ignorance upon which it is founded. That Wisdom must “make [her] words known” to us through a “reproof” suggests that her message must be doubly heard; hearing Wisdom implies returning to Wisdom—a belief in truth’s presence that compels one to listen from beyond and within Wisdom’s reach. This, according to the Bible, is the voice of the proverb: the weathered voice of experience—indistinguishable from the chatter of the concourse—that must be heard partially before it is known fully.

Wandering through Hell’s infernal chambers, the speaker of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* starts to hear voices of his own. Rather than rising above the chatter of the commons to reach him, though, these voices materialize in the echoing clamor of Hell’s caverns:

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell, shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments. (Plate 5:35, Erdman 34)

What appeared as indispensable moral knowledge in the Bible is presented here as an ethnographic curiosity. Like an eighteenth-century ballad collector or an Orientalist philologist, the speaker presents Hell as a nation whose “character” and “nature” can be shown through its popular sayings. But the syntax breaks down when we try to trace the origin of these proverbs. As if parodying the evidentiary logic it avows, the “their” of “their proverbs” lacks a proper antecedent. Indeed, the errant syntax momentarily fools us into thinking that these proverbs belong to the “angels” who are baffled by them. “Their,” here, materializes out of fires and enjoyments—congregating the entities (fires, enjoyment, and genius) that surround it—rather than the nation or people we expect syntactically and logically. This scene appears right after we are taught that (what Blake regards as) the common Enlightenment prioritization to “soul” over “body,” or “reason” over “energy,” only measures the “bound or outward circumference” of the body (4, E 34). Energy, on the other hand, lingers in movement, resisting reason’s reduction of perception to what is already known; it is a power that is transmitted in the liminal space *between* bodies. The conductive ambiguity of “their Proverbs” similarly suggests knowledge that is gained in continual dispersion—energy as potential for reception and transmission. Blake will teach the reader of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that, as this atmospheric “their,” proverbs contain a knowledge that everyone could have but no one may claim to possess fully, a wisdom that may appear inseparable from folly.

Like other eighteenth-century archives of national character—such as dictionaries, grammar books, ballad collections, and anecdotes—these proverbs are taken out of oral circulation in order to be indexed in a representative collection. The context of their use is replaced by some generalized “nature” that can be demonstrated. At the same time that the speaker employs the language of evidence to frame these proverbs, though, it becomes unclear what this disparate collection of sayings *shows*, or how it shows it. Is the same infernal nature revealed in each of these proverbs? Is their nature some totality the proverbs ask us to reconstruct imaginatively? Proverbs such as “Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps” and “A dead body. revenges [sic] not injuries” do not offer a reproducible system of values; they tell their knowledge obliquely (8:26, E 36; 7:16, E 36). Certainly these statements bear *traces* of a character in their collection, but they lack a system that would complete them. They reach out for

context in their recipients, asking them to imagine a ground for their use. Other proverbs call for action aggressively: “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires,” for example, compels one to think about the egregiousness of inaction by placing it on the same scale as excessive violence (10:67, E 38). But the proverb produces bewilderment at the moment it calls for action, since the grounds for action are produced out of an analogy between murder and passivity.

On the surface, these diabolical invitations appear altogether opposed to the educational task of biblical Wisdom. Wisdom seeks to turn the ignorant listener into a knowing recipient of her message through awareness of one’s incomplete knowledge, or folly. Folly forms the ground for Wisdom’s conversion of the recipient from a lower nature to a higher, moral one. By comparison, “infernal wisdom” is wisdom that is accumulated in fragments; its “nature” is incomplete, or always on the verge of becoming known, since a proverb may be interpreted to fit different contexts and natures. However, the *Marriage* teaches us that these two wisdoms should be read *beside* one another, in an *appositional* rather than *oppositional* relationship. Just as the speaker of the *Marriage* reads the Bible “in the infernal or diabolical sense,” subverting Heaven’s authoritative interpretation of the text, so does infernal wisdom exist in oppositional friendship with biblical wisdom.³⁰ Infernal wisdom reverses biblical Wisdom’s progress from folly to knowledge to propose, “if the fool would persist in his folly he [sic] would become wise” (7:28, E 36). Blake’s insistence on the wisdom in folly, I contend, is implied in biblical Wisdom’s call for all to receive knowledge as fools.

Indeed, as the poem suggests, an infernal reading of the Bible may even restore the knowledge of faith against the eighteenth-century conversion of the Bible into an object of Enlightenment literary and pedagogical knowledge. It may also offer a critique of the early use of the Bible as a civilizing instrument—an imperialistic iteration of Wisdom’s message of conversion. If eighteenth-century philology regarded the proverb as an “unfinished” method of knowledge—a vestige of a primitive Oriental poetic and pedagogical tradition—it is because it represented a practice of knowing that Enlightenment thought believed itself to have surpassed. Much eighteenth-century skepticism towards the proverb stems from the form’s resistance to recognizable literary and philosophical genres like the lyric and the essay, which were both beginning to be codified in European letters. Eighteenth-century critics such as Robert Lowth, for example, regarded the obscurity of the proverb as proof of its limited thinking. At the heart of proverbs, Lowth claimed, was a compulsory belief in the higher authority of tradition, which disdained the empiricist emphasis on knowledge’s reproducible order.

Though he does not address the medium of the proverb directly, John Locke begins his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by critiquing the similarly pithy form of the maxim for its presumption of innate knowledge. For Locke, the maxim only encourages an unreflective agreement with received ideas. In maxims, “what idea soever is affirmed of itself . . . the mind cannot but assent to such a proposition, as infallibility true, as soon as it understands the terms, without hesitation or need of proof” (4.7.10). What Locke finds so threatening about the maxim is its groundless claim of validity. Since maxims do not rely on a formal method to be proven, they risk becoming mere vehicles for custom. Locke regards such faith in the authority of unverifiable knowledge as an overextension of our power of *assent*, “which we give to any proposition as true, of whose truth yet we have no certain knowledge” (1.1.3).

Locke’s view of the maxim is central to his belief—and the early empiricist belief—that our assent should be regulated by experience. He begins his *Essay* by stating his intention to

³⁰ As *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* suggests, “Opposition is true Friendship” (20, E 42).

“examine by what measures, in things, whereof we have no certain knowledge, we ought to regulate our assent, and moderate our persuasion” (1.1.3). Such a call for regulation appears to be a manifestation of Locke’s disdain for the contagious and radical belief of religious enthusiasm. As Jon Mee and Steven Goldsmith have recently shown in their different works on Blake’s revival of enthusiasm, the need for regulation belied a fear of the uncontrollable power of the masses, for which the terrifying revolutionary fervor of the English Civil War served as a continual example. Indeed, Mee writes, “the ubiquitous and troubling presence of enthusiasm represented a standing denial of the idea of continuous and unified identity that was the bedrock of emergent liberal-bourgeois ethics” of the postwar period (38). As a species of timeless wisdom validated through common use, proverbs represent a similar threat for eighteenth-century knowledge. Knowledge, within an Enlightenment empiricist tradition, is expected to provide the grounds for its understanding through a demonstration of its process; it depends upon what can be known, and thus reproduced, through the ordering power of reason. The goal of this knowledge, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is an intelligent agent capable of reflecting upon its past experience and regulating its power of choice. On the other side, the proverb demands that its recipient bears with obscurity. It asks one to know what may only be seen in flashes. As I will argue in this chapter, demonstrative knowledge and proverbial wisdom present two different ways of *possessing* knowledge. The former suggests knowledge as a known possession, or ownership, proven by one’s ability to recall and reproduce a system. The latter suggests knowledge as an unknown or partially known possession (for both the teacher and the student) which can only be accessed through figures and similes. Indeed, as the meaning of “proverb” in Arabic and Hebrew (*mithāl* /*mashal*) suggests, the proverb offers one “instance” (or “likeness”) of the obscure knowledge it reflects.

By looking at the infernal proverbs within against the backdrop of eighteenth-century knowledge production, I hope to show how Blake uses the proverb’s unfinished form as an alternative to the compulsory demonstration of eighteenth-century empiricism and the restrictive version of empiricist knowledge promulgated in English pedagogy. I claim that the “Proverbs of Hell” offer a form of knowledge predicated on belief in their eventual recognition, rather than the display of a complete system. Indeed, the force of Blake’s proverbs lies in their differentiation between performative and discursive utterances— simultaneously conveying the urgency of belief, while asking that the recipient *do* nothing in particular with that knowledge in order to prove his or her reception of it. My intention here is not to claim that proverbial knowledge is diametrically opposed to Enlightenment knowledge, or that faith is antagonistic to reason. On the contrary, I would like to show how Blake’s proverbs suggest a critique of the Enlightenment *discourse* of self-knowledge as it is used to authorize the erasure of one tradition of knowledge in the name of another. In doing so, I hope to show how the Enlightenment’s oracular call “dare to know” may be interpreted as a demand for one’s knowledge to remain unfinished.

The decoupling of religious belief and reason should be read against the conflation of the two in eighteenth-century empiricist tradition. For Blake, the greatest fault of thinkers like Locke and William Paley was their regulation of belief through empirical reason. Locke, for example, considered faith a “firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason” (4.17.24). As Blake well knew and frequently expressed in his poems, the reduction of belief to reason bound belief to the “ratio of all we have already known” in “the same dull round” (E 2). A rationalized faith would, a few decades later, become a legitimizing mechanism for colonial Evangelicals, who insisted that Christian values could provide the groundwork for the intellectual development of “unenlightened” native

peoples. Far from opposing a Lockean idea of reason, Evangelical pedagogues like Alexander Duff sought to prove the empiricist belief in “man’s innate” power to know by cultivating a new nature in colonized minds (Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* 53). Duff is certainly hopeful about faith’s capacity to cultivate knowledge when he writes, in 1852, that the “pursuit of Christian evidence and doctrine [will] supply the noblest substitute in place of that which has been demolished, in the form of sound general knowledge and pure evangelical truth” (*Masks of Conquest* 45).³¹ Such a program of education offers a pedagogical scene quite similar to the image of Wisdom in the concourses—one where “truth was self-evident only to those equipped both mentally and morally to receive it,” as Gauri Viswanathan observes in her reading of nineteenth-century colonial education (*Masks of Conquests* 62).³²

In a parallel account of the colonial pedagogy, Homi Bhabha has shown how the rationalization of belief appeared as a central strategy for cultural colonization of native subjects. Tracing the “nonsense” at the heart of the Evangelical education of Muslim and Hindi subjects, Bhabha shows how the authority of colonial truth relies on a defensive splitting of belief:

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same place, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself productive of differentiations. (188)

For Bhabha, this splitting reveals the ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse’s “authority to differentiate”—an undecidability that both enables and unsettles British imperial efforts to export English culture to colonial territories (186). It is through this splitting that a native is converted into a subject of colonial knowledge, turning an incipient doubt about the “truth” of his culture into the grounds for his conversion. This logic works both ways, however, since colonial discourse must continually legitimate itself against the contradiction at the center of its truth claims. Indeed, Bhabha suggests, colonial discourse “must be authorized at the point of its dismemberment” (197). That is to say, in the very process of legitimizing and unifying the truths of its discourse, a slippage is produced. Bhabha offers the failed Evangelical missionary scene as an example of the defense and differentiation of colonial discourse. Drawing on William Paley’s foundational Evangelical missionary text *Evidences of Christianity*, written in 1791, he observes that “the miraculous authority of colonial Christianity . . . lies precisely in its being both English and universal, empirical and uncanny, for ‘ought we not rather to expect that such a Being, on occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed?’” (168).³³ As

³¹ This substitution was, interestingly enough, accomplished through an appeal to the imagination. As Gauri Viswanathan notes, for Evangelical pedagogues like Duff, “the truth of Christianity was presented in vain unless it was *seen*, unless it was *felt*. To read the Bible well, to be moved by its imagery . . . the imagination first had to be fully trained and equipped” (*Masks of Conquest* 55).

³² However, Viswanathan finds an agentive form of religious assent in the process of conversion, which resisted the assimilatory force of secular education in Britain and India. Reading John Henry Newman’s Catholic writings, for example, she claims that “assent is often indistinguishable from dissent. That is to say, what appears to emanate from a religious discourse is as concerned with negotiating secular parameters as it is with establishing the claims of religious subjectivity” (*Outside the Fold* 44).

³³ The quote Bhabha cites is taken from Paley’s opening argument for the empirical grounds of Christianity. In the argument, Paley reverses David Hume’s critique of miracles as “a violation of the laws of nature,” to suggest that

Duff's later imperial pedagogy only demonstrated, the rationalization of Christianity—the conversion of faith into a matter of natural evidence—would form the basis for its universalization in the colonial context. The “miracle” of knowledge in these pedagogical scenes lies in the divine authority of colonial discourse to contradict its truth claims and still maintain its discursive power. Here one can imagine the difference between Wisdom's universalistic self-legitimizing tone in the Evangelical pedagogue's voice and the native's reading of Wisdom as a disorderly presence in the metropolitan public sphere.³⁴

Within eighteenth-century scholarship, Janet Sorensen and Saree Makdisi have traced the ways in which colonial knowledge is reproduced in the formation of a British linguistic and political subject. Sorensen has shown, for example, how “the standard language constructed throughout the eighteenth century figured centrally in the national subject's ability to imagine him or herself as a member of a national community” (13). Resisting the idea that “national character” develops organically out of culture, Sorensen argues that the character of “English” language and literature emerges out of the desire for an ideal subject. Her reading of eighteenth-century English grammars suggests that splitting was also a strategy for the expansion of a standard English within Britain. In his recent work on eighteenth-century imperial culture, Makdisi further points out that the domestic-born discourse of the other is cultivated and then disseminated in the unfolding of “the struggle to locate and secure the space in which [a dominant] identity might be consolidated” (*Making England Western* xvi).

As Makdisi demonstrates in his studies of Romanticism, *Romantic Imperialism* and *William Blake and the Impossible History of 1790s*, Blake's poetry traces the tension between a given system of representation and one's own power to imagine otherwise. The mythic structure of Blake's longer poems emphasizes the representational function of knowledge—how even the most empirically grounded “truths” naturalize their system of representation. “In Blake's geography,” Makdisi observes, “London is the spatial representation of the experience of the Universal Empire of modernizing capitalism; a process that was, in Blake's vision, gradually reterritorializing and transforming the globe” (*Romantic Imperialism* 157). In Blake's mythological reconstruction of the imperial world, moreover, “London . . . is spreading outwards over ‘the nations’” at the same time that “the spatial relays of the colonial networks . . . can be seen and mapped in the space of London” (*Romantic Imperialism* 165). One's relationship to the world in Blake's poem is mediated by these complex networks of power, where one is exhorted to “Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's” (*Romantic Imperialism* 171).³⁵

Blake's awareness of empire's self-authorizing knowledge is expressed throughout much of his work. As early as 1795, in the “Africa” section of *Song of Los*, Blake perceives the connection between empiricist knowledge and colonial pedagogy:

the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave
Laws & Religion to the sons of Har binding them more

the improbability of miracles—the fact that they remain confined to the experience of a few—only serves as proof of their miraculosity. In the course of his text, Paley develops his argument by demonstrating the “evidence” of miracles in the New Testament and colonial accounts of natives' conversion in India. The result is a faith legitimated through rationalization.

³⁴ For Blake, infernal reading produces a similar dis-identification with Heavenly representation.

³⁵ We need look no further than the end of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in “A Song of Liberty,” for proof of Blake's engagement with imperial culture. The declaration that “Empire is no more! And now the lion & wolf shall cease” is only followed by the anti-imperial claim of life's universal singularity—that “every thing that lives is Holy” (27, E 45).

And more to Earth: closing and restraining:
Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete
Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton and Locke (5:13-17, E 68)

According to S. Foster Damon, Har (in Blake's mythology) suggests the primal "father of all mankind," himself fathered by Satan—another infernal connection (174). Occupying both the geographically "primitive" place of Africa and the historically primitive position of pre-Enlightenment religion, Har here appears to replicate the typical Enlightenment binary of knowledge and ignorance. At the same time, however, that the appearance of Enlightenment modernity confines Har to a perpetual, ignorant past, empiricist knowledge is not "complete" until it is reproduced. This reversed chain of succession suggests that empiricist knowledge needs an image of ignorance in order to prove its superior knowledge. Reason must "bind" the sons of Har in its system in order to bind itself together.

Hell's inverted dialectic of folly and wisdom also reflects knowledge's constitutive need for spatial and temporal completion; as the proverb goes, "the hours of folly are measur'd by the clock, but of wisdom no clock can measure" (7:11, E 36). Where folly is the differentiated time of empiricist knowledge as it is experienced and accumulated against error, wisdom is that which refuses to be measured in discrete quantities. Time's march forward is an "empty and homogenous" accrual of what it counts, while wisdom dwells in uncounted time. Elsewhere in the *Marriage*, the relationship between Heaven and Hell is inverted and recontextualized: "in the Book of Job Miltons [sic] Messiah is call'd Satan. / For this history has been adopted by both parties / It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out. but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss" (5-6, E 34-35). The coexistence of these rivaling "histories" in the poem suggests that Hell's heaven should be read *beside*—not merely against—Heaven's canonical account of the past. Indeed, as a work that strives to teach us "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression," the *Marriage* continually asks us to perceive the contradiction underlying any authoritative record or system.

What is left out of Heaven's history is the indeterminacy of leaving out; Heaven's authoritative knowledge is founded upon Heaven's insistence that everything is represented in its system. Indeed, much of Blake's hatred of Emanuel Swedenborg's writings in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* stems from Blake's sensitivity to the rationalizing systems of Enlightenment theology. Swedenborg's utopian vision of Heaven is a regulated order of the whole and its parts. In Heaven, "there is nothing . . . that does not some thing for the common weal, or that does not perform a use. The whole performs use to its parts, and the parts perform use to the whole" (635). However, those dissenting members, "who do not perform a use to the whole [,] are cast out of heaven, because they are heterogeneous" (635). Blake's Hell is a home for the cast off heterogeneity that reason perceives as a void. Unlike Milton's vision in *Paradise Lost*, though, this Hell is not driven by opposition to Heaven's law. Indeed, the inhabitants of Hell know that the law endeavors to regulate what lies outside its sphere—as one proverb tells us, "Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion" (8:21, E 36). The placement of the possessive "of" here suggests that the sites of crime and sin are constituted by the juridical law and religious morality; the law needs the prison for its order to be proven, just as an authoritarian religion needs the deviance of brothels for its moral right to be consolidated. It should come as no surprise that Hell, as "heaven . . . in the abyss," sees the paradox at the heart of legal and religious authority; the force of "infernal wisdom" is its capacity to reverse or evade whatever

knowledge is commanded from above. Here, as in other places in Blake's work, each building is the beginning of an "unbuilding"—to quote the title of Steven Goldsmith's monograph.

In one particularly telling moment of unmaking in the poem, an angel attempts to convert the speaker by revealing the true nature of Hell. The angel takes the speaker through a dark and cavernous Gothic interior—"thro' a stable & thro' a church & down into the church vault at the end of which was a mill: thro' the mill [they] went, and came to a cave" (16, E 41). In this winding list of directions, Blake leads us through a superstructural map of Enlightenment faith, where the church is aligned horizontally with the stable and vertically above the mill and the caves of Hell. The stable, like the space of colonial pedagogy, is where formerly "wild" bodies are held captive to their knowledge, or, to use the language of the proverbs, where "the horses of instruction" are maintained. The church is positioned above the sites of the labor and punishment. Both at the edge and at the very foundation of the good-producing mill is the void of Hell.

The angel and speaker hang onto the roots of trees over the blank space of Hell, when the speaker insists, "we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also" (17, E 41). The angel refuses to enter the void, claiming that the speaker's lot will become evident as soon as "the darkness passes away" (18, E 41). The speaker's place in Hell, the angel demonstrates, is "between the black and white spiders," amidst a Dantean scene of raging fires and ravenous leviathans (18, E 41). Immediately after witnessing the speaker's punishment, however, we find the speaker "sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light hearing a harper who sung to the harp. & his theme was, The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind" (19, E 42). The speaker's escape from the angel's fantasy effectively reorients him in space and time—converting Hell from an infernal punishment into an idyllic scene. Even as the angel tries to confirm the abject lot of the speaker, the void of Hell refuses to be externally delineated. The speaker's reorientation of Hell breaks the spell of the system that associates Heaven with truth and Hell with error. Indeed, in this scene of failed conversion, we see that Hell is not a place where knowledge is regulated and authorized—not a place that *completes* Enlightenment knowledge—but a void in which another world may be imagined. Hell, here, makes a heaven out of what it "stole from the abyss," but what, we might ask, can be stolen from nothing?

2. Between Knowledge and Error: Eighteenth-Century Bibles and Grammars

If, as Viswanathan and Bhabha suggest, the Bible could function as a metonym for Western knowledge in the Evangelical conversion of native subjects, it was only because it was preceded by the Bible's conversion into an anthropological and literary archive. Beginning with the philological work of Robert Lowth, the mid-eighteenth century saw the rise of a historically oriented biblical criticism—or Higher Criticism—in Britain and Germany, which studied the Old Testament as a work of Oriental (Arabic and Hebrew) literature. As Jonathan Sheehan argues in *The Enlightenment Bible*, the conversion of the Bible into a text of Oriental literature was a product of an increasing distance between the New Testament and the Old Testament in the eighteenth century. As a number of eighteenth-century Christian scholars began viewing the New Testament as a living embodiment of Enlightenment ideals, a new class of religious scholars "were forced to address the question of archaism, to consider whether this collection of ancient Hebrew writings had any bearing on modern Christian life" (151). Against the backdrop of an eighteenth-century literary antiquarianism, biblical scholars sought to ramify the Old

Testament “into new forms, forms independent of old Christian unities . . . with the aid of new generic, scholarly, and disciplinary practices” (151). In this new secular school of biblical criticism, the conversion of the Old Testament into a poetic text “became essential to its modern relevance” (155). Lowth’s famous *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (originally composed and delivered in Latin in 1754) represents an early attempt to categorize Oriental poetic genres and “offer persuasive proof of the system of Hebrew poetry” (Balfour 61). This system lays the groundwork for the later Higher Critical and Orientalist study and codification of literature into world genres. Indeed, Lowth’s critical treatment of the Bible’s Oriental literature importantly anticipates the Orientalist philological works of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried Herder, and William Jones (a friend and student of Lowth), who traced the origin of poetry and language back to the Near East. As Edward Said notes, “one of the important impulses toward the study of the Orient in the eighteenth century was the revolution in Biblical studies” (17).

Lowth’s postulation of a literary Bible would also come to define the Romantic reading of the Bible as a poetic text. Blake’s later claim that “The Old and New Testaments are the great code of Art,” for example, may be read as the continuation of a philological tradition that drew a connection between the Bible and poetic creation (*The Laocoön*, E 274). We can also see the rhetoric of Orientalist philologists like Lowth and Jones in the *Marriage*’s description of the shared origin of poetry and religion. As the *Marriage* tell us, “ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses” and “studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under the mental deity” (P 11, E 38). It is only through the mediation of the Priesthood that mental deities were codified into a “system,” which distinguished “forms of worship from poetic tales,” and “enslav’d the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract mental dieties [sic] from their objects” (P 11, E 38). Within Blake scholarship, too, many critics have been quick to point out the connection between Blake’s prophetic poetry and Lowth’s literary analysis of Hebrew prophecies.³⁶ Much less attention, however, has been paid to Blake’s use of the proverb—an Oriental genre that is criticized in Lowth’s reading of the Bible’s literary genres. Read beside Lowth’s criticism, Blake’s resuscitation of the archaic form offers us a more nuanced picture of the poet’s relationship to emerging philological knowledge. Indeed, as I hope to show in this section, the “unenlightened” status of the proverb in Lowth’s work helps us better see the connection between Hell’s proverbs and the *Marriage*’s larger antipathy towards the discourse of empiricist demonstration.

Lowth’s denunciation of the proverb reveals a cultural split within biblical criticism, between an Enlightenment (Western-oriented) Orient and a primitive (Eastern-oriented) Orient. This split laid the foundation for the later linguistic and racial difference between Semitic and Indo-European traditions. As Ivan Kalmar argues, the orientalization of the Bible reveals an early anthropological distinction between the “primitive, Semitic or ‘Arabian’ spirit infus[ing] the Old Testament” and the “Christianity . . . of a more modern race” (*Orientalism Revisited* 177). Indeed, what we see in biblical criticism is the beginning of a textual notion race that anticipates the inscription of race in the biology of the nineteenth century, where race was literally that which could be read in physiognomy.

In Lowth’s text, this split occurs at the level of genre; the work finds Lowth separating the enlightened traditions of the Old Testament from its more primitive predecessors. In the

³⁶ For thorough accounts of the relationship between Blake’s prophetic poems and Higher Criticism, see Ian Balfour’s *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (2002), Molly Anne Rothenberg’s *Rethinking Blake’s Textuality* (1993), and Leslie Tannenbaum’s *Biblical Tradition in Blake’s Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art* (1982).

introduction to his lectures, Lowth muses that “nothing . . . can be more worthy of a liberal and accomplished mind, than to perceive what is perfect, and what is defective in an art” (10). His critical task in these lectures to Oxford students was to measure the perfections and defects of the various genres of the Bible in order to convert the text into an object of philological knowledge. In his foundational work on grammar, as well, Lowth’s prescriptive account of English speech is predicated on a split between an ignorant user of the language and a speaker with full knowledge of its rules. Lowth’s account of the proverb as an unfinished form interestingly parallels his appeal for a standardized grammar to convert an unenlightened English-speaking public. Both works emerge out of the eighteenth-century urge to codify national literary and linguistic forms. As Saree Makdisi observes, works like Lowth’s participate in the effort to “purge the last traces of Oriental contamination from a putatively Occidental space; and overseas, in order to begin the much more challenging process of converting Oriental difference into the universal culture of Occidental modernity” (*Making England Western* 16). Lowth’s praise of the ode as an ideal form of lyric expressivity and his criticism of the incomplete proverb should be read in conjunction with his promotion of a proper form of speech in English. In both instances, a standard is founded upon the completion of an unfinished other. In his generic hierarchy, Lowth places the obscure “Didactic Poetry” of the proverb below the eloquent “Lyric Poetry” of the ode. For Lowth, like Jones after him, the ode represented the apotheosis of poetic expression. More than a vestige of song, the ode stood as the “offspring of the most vivid and most agreeable passions of the human mind—of love, joy, and admiration” (278). Lowth’s speculation of the ode’s origin imagines an enlightened past in which man was “in perfect possession of reason and speech; neither ignorant of his own nor of the divine nature, but fully conscious of the goodness, majesty, and power of God” (278). With “contemplation of these objects,” Lowth claims, man’s heart would naturally “glow with gratitude and love” (278). In Lowth’s fantasy of the ode’s origins here, the genre is the product of a man who knows the proper way to order and regulate his thoughts (“reason”) and language (“speech”). Such praise of lyric’s inherent order connects with Lowth’s later claim that “the principal beauty of the ode consists in the order and arrangement of the subject” (281). This postulation of the lyric poet’s “perfect possession of reason and speech” also echoes John Dennis’s idea (from 1704) that the order of poetry (or “the Arts,” more broadly) is related to the organizing drive of logic. For Dennis, “the great design of Arts is to restore the decays that happen’d to Humane Nature by the Fall, by restoring Order” just as “the design of Logick is to bring back Order, and Rule, and Method to our Conceptions, the want of which causes most of our Ignorance, and all our Errors” (*Grounds of Criticism* 2.16). For both Dennis and Lowth, good poetry consisted in the proper demonstration of one’s knowledge of metrical and rhetorical rules.

Against the order of the ode, Lowth contrasts the unenlightened genre of the proverb:

In those periods of remote antiquity, which may with the utmost propriety be styled the infancy of societies and nations, the usual, if not the only, mode of instruction was by detached aphorisms or proverbs. Human wisdom was then indeed in a rude and unfinished state; it was not digested, methodized, or reduced to order and connexion. Those, who by genius and reflection, exercised in the school of experience, had accumulated a stock of knowledge, were desirous of reducing it into the most compendious form, and comprised in a few maxims those observations which they apprehended most essential to human happiness. This mode of instruction was, in truth, more likely than any other to prove efficacious with men in a rude stage of society; for it

professed not to dispute, but to command; not to persuade, but to compel: it conducted them not by a circuit of argument, but led immediately to the approbation and practice of integrity and virtue. (200)

Lowth's criticism of the proverb, here, stems from his treatment of it as a pedagogical rather than poetic genre. Lowth associates proverbs with a time when knowledge lacked method. Compared to a "circuit of argument," which aims to convince one of knowledge through demonstration, the proverb offers wisdom that should be apprehended without question, since it already derives from experience. Lowth's biggest objection to the proverb, here, is the way it convinces the recipient to accept the validity of the knowledge it imparts without proving it. The proverb depends too much on the immediate endorsement of experience, rather than arriving at endorsement through method. These defects lead Lowth to conclude that proverbs are only "efficacious" to "men in a rude stage of society."

Lowth's criticism of the proverb certainly shares the traditional Enlightenment belief in a proper form for knowledge's transmission. Though his text comes out several years before Immanuel Kant's famous "What Is Enlightenment?" statement in 1784, Lowth's dismissal of the proverb participates in the notion that the "public use of one's reason" should protect against the threat of "self-incurred minority" (2). The rudeness of the proverb lies in its belief in the wisdom of another. The proverb assumes a recipient that will heed its wisdom without questioning its validity. Like Kant, Lowth suggests that the "circuit of argument" is the proper home for such public use of reason. Lowth faults the proverbs for lacking a method that would give its recipient a means for reproducing its knowledge; this absence of means gives rise to a knowledge that is "unfinished," because it has not been organized into a method. Elsewhere, Lowth even goes so far as to claim that "the laws of methodical composition and arrangement were neither known by the Hebrews, nor regarded in their didactic writings" (205).

Within eighteenth-century empirical and philological knowledge, demonstration entails the evidentiary method of receiving and transmitting knowledge. Underlying this belief in knowledge's demonstrability is the assumption that truth is built upon a set of premises that can be reproduced *in* and *by* anyone. Locke, in his *Essay*, for example, describes reason as "the perception of the connexion there is between the ideas . . . whereby the mind comes to see, either the certain agreement or disagreement of any two ideas as in demonstration" (27.1.2). For Locke, like Lowth, demonstration is considered the proper form for transmitting and proving knowledge; it is knowledge that must continually mark its movement in order to prove its worth as thought.

The image of demonstration as the proper vehicle for knowledge appears against the backdrop of eighteenth-century English linguistic pedagogy, which sought to cultivate a subject who could speak properly. Janet Sorensen, for example, has observed how the discourse of grammar in the eighteenth century "assumed a learned distributor and ignorant receiver of knowledge; as institutionalized bodies assembled pedagogical subjects for instruction, they also instituted relations of power" (13). Lowth's belief in method as the only way to instruct an uninformed English public motivates his *Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Published anonymously in 1762, Lowth's prescriptive grammar book set the standard for English grammar texts in eighteenth-century England and after. One finds signs of these universalizing aspirations in the introduction to the book, which reads like a brochure for the public use of one's reason: "It is with reason expected of every person of a liberal education, and it is indispensably required of every one who undertakes to inform or entertain the public, that he should be able to express

himself with propriety and accuracy” (vii). Even the knowledge of grammar requires demonstration as the measure of one’s civility.

Elsewhere in the introduction, we see a similar differentiation between demonstrated knowledge and traditional wisdom:

The truth is, grammar is very much neglected among us We take it for granted that we have a competent knowledge and skill, and are able to acquit ourselves properly, in our own native tongue; a faculty, solely acquired by use, conducted by habit, and tried by the ear, carries us on without reflection; we meet with no rubs or difficulties in our way, or we do not perceive them; we find ourselves able to go on without rules, and we do not so much as suspect, that we stand in need of them. (iv)

Lowth’s insistence that consciousness of grammatical rules will improve one’s knowledge of the language mirrors his critique of the proverb as a form of instruction that relies on an unthinking reception of tradition. If knowledge of one’s language is typically confined to habitual use, Lowth suggests, most English speakers cannot claim to know their tongue. He uses juridical rhetoric to emphasize the extent of our ignorance of the law: we believe we can “acquit ourselves properly, in our own native tongue” solely from use. The verb acquit suggests both the presentation of good conduct, “to prove oneself worthy,” and the fulfillment of an obligation—“to pay the debt of” (*OED*, “acquit”). Grammar is the knowledge that would “prove oneself worthy” of speaking and acknowledge one’s debt to a system of laws one has inherited. Since our knowledge of grammar is restricted to our use, we cannot even “suspect” the offenses we commit in our speech. For Lowth, the ability to speak English is insufficient proof of the speaker’s mastery, because English is so often mangled in its common use. The right to use English must be earned through knowledge of its rules and demonstration of the proper form of speech.

Through proper speech, the English speaker may prove his or her right to speak English. In her reading of Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary*, Sorensen reveals the desire for “proper speech” inherent to standardized collections of language in the eighteenth century: “reading the *Dictionary* is an educational process that asks its readers, in the words of Garcia Canclini, to ‘convert yourself into what you are’” (97). Johnson’s *Dictionary* is, moreover, a manifestation of Enlightenment ideology in which “learning is recast as an inherently moralizing and disciplining force capable of fending off all possibilities of resistance” (Sorensen, 99). Sorensen shows how these texts emerge out of the eighteenth-century philological belief in a “universal language”—“a view of language as transparent, based upon universal principles of reason and language’s ability to ‘mirror’ the world around it” (12). More than acting as an organizing principle for imperial knowledge, the discourse of universal language delimited the kinds of language one could possess. These instantiations of a universal grammar address the “nobodies” of the English public, which becomes a “basis for imagining national fellows” and “transferable sympathies” between “anonymous citizens” (Sorensen 96). Looking back at the proverbs, we can see how this construction of a universal standard of speaking in England could also drive the philological codification of Oriental traditions. As Michel Foucault has suggested, “languages, though imperfect knowledge themselves, are the faithful memory of the progress of knowledge towards perfection” (87). Lowth’s criticism of the proverb for participating in an “unfinished” form of knowledge may be read along these lines.

Blake's Hell, alternatively, celebrates the liminal relationship of its wisdom to the perfected knowledge of Heaven. We witness a clever reversal of this self-authorizing identity in one of the proverbs of Hell: "if others had not been foolish. we should be so" (9:52, E 37). The proverb plays on the Enlightenment assumption that equates knowledge with the eradication of folly to suggest, instead, that any claim of knowledge depends on another being turned into a fool. Hell also tells us that "Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius" (10:66, E 38). In a rational Heaven, this proverb would be read as a statement of complacency: "do not improve yourself because you are already genius." The wisdom of Hell, however, reads "without" as both given and additional. In perceiving the roads without improvement as roads of Genius, the proverb asks us to differentiate between needing and going without. To improvement, the crooked road must be measured against straightness; crookedness is space that is squandered. Indeed, the very phrase—"the crooked roads without improvement"—sounds redundant; if they are crooked, do they not lack improvement? The proverb works to desynonymize knowledge and improvement. Because the crooked roads do not need improvement, we must be reminded that they are without it. The fact that the crooked roads are "roads of Genius" rather than roads *to* Genius indicates that the genius is immanent to the road. Every part "without improvement" is full of genius. As we will soon see, such crooked roads of Genius also characterize the indirect manner in which proverbs contain and transmit their knowledge.

3. Obscurity and the Discovery of Truth in the Proverb Form

If proverbs do not contain knowledge that can be accumulated towards improvement, in what sense can they said be said to contain knowledge? Lowth suggests that the recipient of a proverb appropriates its knowledge without being given the method to prove the knowledge himself.³⁷ Here, of course, Lowth measures knowledge according to one's ability to demonstrate or reproduce a system. But as "The Proverbs of Hell" shows, this lack of means is a prerequisite for "infernal wisdom." Proverbial wisdom is the potential possession of knowledge: it is not replicated through demonstration; rather, it transferred through a belief in truth's eventual discovery. Like the voice of Wisdom, the temporality of each proverb is now—not the present as the culmination of knowledge, but the present as the perpetual beginning of learning.

Though Lowth warns against the unfinished knowledge of the proverb, he suggests it is not an entirely purposeless form. Praising the capacity of proverbs to keep the mind attentive, he notes how the detachment of the proverb from method affords it a certain affective and rhetorical force:

This obscurity is not indeed altogether without its uses: it whets the understanding, excites an appetite for knowledge, keeps alive the attention, and exercises the genius by the labour of the investigation. The human mind, moreover, is ambitious of having a share in the discovery of truth; excessive indolence or dullness only requires a very open

³⁷ As T.A. Perry notes in his structural analysis of proverbs, "despite their appearance of consensus, [proverbs] are tyrannically single-voiced, typically used to win conviction rather than to gain insight, to clinch and end an argument, not continue or provoke another" (56). According to this definition, proverbs contain value as a product of their distribution. Perry further reminds us that, despite their appearance of consensus, proverb collections often require an individuation of the wisdom as validation of their content, either through "authorial superscription" or contextualization through a "qualified sayer" (90-91).

and minute display, or prefers a passive inertness to the exercise and the praise of perspicacity and discernment; and that knowledge is ever most delightful, which we have compassed by our own efforts. (202-203)

Like Burke's physiological account of the sublime, Lowth argues that the proverb form contains some cognitive value in the way that it exercises the perceptive faculties. Though we cannot argue with proverbs, Lowth claims, their obscurity rouses the mind to a state in which it is ready to receive truth. The difficulty attending the proverb—the fact that we must labor to know it fully—provides a taste of knowledge, while not satisfying our hunger. In this sense, proverbs provoke our mind's desire to "share in the discovery of truth." Although Lowth's evaluation of the proverb sees it as merely a means towards more enlightened and self-reflective knowledge, his connection of proverbial obscurity and truth, here, offers a helpful entry into the proverb's way of transmitting knowledge.

Lowth's defense of obscurity's rousing function finds an interesting parallel in Blake's 1799 letter to John Trusler—a letter in which Blake defends great artistic works (what he calls "Visions of Eternity") from the charge of obscurity. In a section that reads like a proverb of Hell, Blake tells Trusler:

you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act. I name Moses Solomon Esop Homer Plato. (E 702)

For Blake, obscurity is only perceived as a defect by "the Idiot" who would desire that everything be made explicit to his understanding. Flipping the relationship between demonstration and education, Blake claims that obscurity is the quality of works that are most instructive. This claim is driven by his belief that "What Is Grand" should not be, as it so often is, "made explicit" in order to be comprehended. Here Blake's resistance to the explication of a difficult work may be considered as an extension of his (and Hell's) larger rejection of the conflation of difference ("One Law for the Ox & the Lion is Oppression"). For Blake, unlike Enlightenment pedagogues of his era, instruction—the passage of knowledge from one to another—should confront a limit in understanding. This limit does not mark the end of knowledge, but the appearance of knowledge that is received in and through an experience of obscurity—a kind of *nonknowledge*.

Within rabbinical exegetical tradition, we find a similar defense of the proverb's obscurity. One notable, and particularly relevant, treatment of the proverb as a pedagogical form appears in Moses Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*. Written in Arabic sometime in the twelfth century—the exact date remains unknown—Maimonides's text offers an interpretation of the esoteric content of the prophetic books of the Torah. Maimonides addresses the *Guide* to "a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify" (5). Struggling to reconcile his attraction to philosophical inquiry with "the externals of the Law," this student is lost "in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect" (5). Like Blake's "Proverbs," Maimonides's text suggests the possibility of a belief in truth for a student who has learned to decouple religion from philosophy. As Shlomo Pines observes in the introduction to his translation of the *Guide*,

Maimonides's work sought to respond to "an unresolved conflict between religious tradition and nonreligious [philosophic] knowledge" (lviii). In doing so, the *Guide* suggests a religious and philosophical pedagogy that maintains belief in a text's inner meaning as a necessary part of the recognition of truth. As the product of Arabic and Hebrew philosophical and religious traditions, too, the *Guide* offers a helpful entry into the Near Eastern origin of proverbial knowledge.

Maimonides's *Guide* begins with a discussion of the *mithāl* (Arabic)/*mashal* (Hebrew)—or proverbial knowledge—of the Torah. Deriving from the Aramaic root verb *matal* ("to be like"), *mithāl/mashal* designates a figurative "instance" or "example" (including proverbs and parables) used to impart knowledge. But the very word "instance," and its connection to "likeness" suggests a different relationship of knowledge than what we typically associate with the word "proverb." As Gil Anidjar observes, *mithāl/mashal* "is a figuration by way of, and that rests on . . . the instance's own relation to what it exemplifies" (23). But *mithāl/mashal* confuses the distinction between example and exemplified, thus "staging . . . an encounter between caller and called, between reader and text, between law and subject, and between the language of the text and its taking place" (Anidjar 23-24). Indeed, for Maimonides, proverbs refer to knowledge contained *within* a religious text as well as the sage's interpretation of that knowledge. This double position within the text and its interpretation is particular to the way proverbs contain and transmit "experience." For Maimonides, when the sage tries to teach the "secrets" of a religious text to a student, he is "unable to explain with complete clarity and coherence even the portion that he has apprehended, as he could do with other sciences whose teaching is generally recognized" (8). Unable to rely on a system to convey his knowledge, the sage is forced to go back to his own experience to trace "that which he had undergone when learning himself" (8). But this moment of recognition "will appear, flash, and then be hidden again, as though this were the nature of [its] subject" (8). Such flashes of knowledge, shrouded in obscurity, are properly "contained" in proverbs, even as they require interpretation in order to be contained. In his reading of the proverb form, Maimonides suggests that the proverb contains no use without the recipient's belief in its hidden meaning:

What [the Torah] has in view [in proverbs] is, without any doubt, the understanding of obscure matters. About this it has been said: *Our Rabbis say: A man who loses a sela or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an issar. In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing, but by means of it [bi-wāṣīthī] you can understand the words of the Torah.* This too is literally what they say. Now consider the explicit affirmation of [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, that the internal meaning [*batin*] of the *words of the Torah* is a pearl whereas the external meaning [*zahir*] of all parables [*mithāl*] is worth nothing, and their comparison of the concealment of a subject by its parable's external meaning to a man who let drop a pearl in his house, which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there, but he does not see it and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession, as it is impossible for him to derive any benefit from it until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp—an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds. (11)

Maimonides's distinction between the literal (*zahir*) and the hidden (*batin*) is directed towards a reader who would demand that the proverb contain some practical value or immediate applicability. Here Maimonides borrows terms from Islamic theological tradition to articulate this hermeneutical difference. The *zahir* is the external, or literal, meaning that can be gleaned on

the surface, while the *batin*, or inner meaning, only exists in flashes of recognition. As Maimonides implies, these terms are not oppositional. The inner meaning of the proverb is included in its outward form; it is “by means of” [*bi-wāṣithi*] the proverb that the words of the Torah can be grasped, just as it by means of the cheap taper that the value of the pearl can be derived. The pearl is only shown through the momentary flash of this taper.

Maimonides’s figure of the pearl in a dark room is a telling description of the value of knowledge in the proverbs, not only because it stages the process by which one comes to *comprehend* the meaning of proverbs, but also because it posits *obscurity* as a necessary part of proverbial knowledge. On its surface, the proverb exchanges the once precious value of the pearl with the relative disposability of the taper to show the inequality between the literal meaning of the proverb and the hidden meaning it conceals. “Do not mistake the surface for the depth,” the proverb suggests. But even as the proverb insists on the difference in value between the two levels of reading, the worth of the pearl is nothing without the disposable taper. Likewise, Maimonides suggests, the “external meaning” of proverbs “contains wisdom that is useful,” while their “internal meaning . . . contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs [*ā ‘tqdāt*] concerned with the truth as it [really] is” [*al-khq ‘lā ḥqīqth*] (12, translation modified). That the discovery of the pearl, in Maimonides’s proverb, follows its initial loss by the one who owns it is also telling; the “finding” of the pearl suggests that the flash of wisdom is a recursive rather than foundational act. The “taper” finds again what one possesses but cannot see. And this return is founded upon belief in the truth contained therein. Understanding the outward form of the proverb is not tantamount to its complete possession, and yet the proverb intimates a sense of its knowledge’s eventual discovery, even for the teacher, who must use proverbs in order to convey his unmethodized knowledge.

If, as Maimonides suggests, proverbial *instances* demand a differentiation between the *zahir* and the *batin*, we may ask, how do the “Proverbs of Hell” reflect or alter this archaic biblical exegetical tradition? A pair of proverbs from “Proverbs of Hell” demonstrates, which is to say obscurely suggests, the way we should read proverbs. The first proverb, which comes at the beginning of the series, draws an analogy between the recursive temporality of proverbial knowledge and agricultural time: “In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy” (Plate 7). Like the image of Wisdom crying in the public square, this proverb deploys images everyone recognizes, as vehicles for knowledge. Here, the seasons of cultivation offer a figure for the time of knowledge. One should learn when it is time to plant, one should teach when it is time to reap, one should enjoy when the work is done. Translated into a list of imperatives, though, the proverb loses the matter-of-factness of its form that makes its wisdom appear inconsequential. Here, while the proverb is directed towards a “you” that would internalize this knowledge, it also suggests knowledge waits for a time that would make it known. The growing season is such an apt parallel here, because it suggests the intersection of passivity and activity—both making grow and letting grow. The difference between the time of enjoyment and the time of harvest (or teaching) suggests that enjoyment is not gained in proportion to the work one puts in to cultivate it, even as enjoyment remains barren without cultivation. This series includes the time for nothing (non-reproduction and non-knowledge) within the seasons that count for sustenance.

The final proverb in the “Proverbs of Hell” addresses the relation of belief to the perception of truth. The proverb reads, “Truth can never be told so as to be understood. and not be believed.” The proverb’s puzzling syntax asks us to think about the relationship of truth to belief through their mutual negation, creating friction between the experience of truth (*batin*) and the proverb’s way of telling it (*zahir*). In one sense, the proverb seems like a lesson against self-

incurred minority—a statement that warns one against believing without understanding. As Steven Goldsmith notes in *Unbuilding Jerusalem*, the proverb’s “compact message would need no expression at all were it not for the implication that truth is often told, misunderstood, and disbelieved” (161). Accordingly, “Blake’s subjection of truth to the contingencies of representation [in the negation of telling and the period dividing the clauses] signals a direct contradiction of the proverb’s overall and sanguine meaning” (162). The proverb calls attention to its function as a medium that cannot tell its truth, since telling does not guarantee understanding. But the proverb is also marked by an embodiment of the belief in truth it expresses, as if its truth was contained in the capacity to be told.

Here, as in an earlier proverb of Hell “Everything possible to be believ’d is an image of truth,” Blake wants us to think of a belief as a container of truth. Truth’s inability to be told is bound with the desire for it to be believed without being reduced to understanding. Here we can think of the Enlightenment’s self-perpetuating discourse—the image of truth that is assented to and understood through a demonstration of one’s method. As mentioned earlier, assent, in Locke’s skeptical terms, exists as a capacity for belief that is regulated and moderated by method. Belief, on the other hand, entails a conviction in the eventual recognition of knowledge. Indeed, here we find that belief is tied to unfinished understanding—a feeling for a truth that has yet to be verified by experience.

Hell also reverses Enlightenment logic to suggest that belief cannot exist *without* its telling—asserting the need for relational form of truth. The double negative in this proverb mimes the consternation with which we would respond to an unexpected truth. One hears echoes of those rhetorical questions directed at “The Tyger”—“what the hammer? what the chain?” The proverb says, “how can you not believe me?” at the same time that it lacks the capacity to be anything more than an image of something believed. At least the voice of the proverb believes itself when it compels the recipient to heed its wisdom. But the proverb’s telling is bound up with its reception. Its truth can only be told in the form of “a thing possible.” Rational presuppositions constrict as much as they instruct, in their assumption of perceptions that are shared by all. Proverbial truth, on the other hand, depends on a sustained experience of not knowing, and therein lies the wisdom of proverbs, for “if the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise” (7:28, E 36).

4. Foolish Wisdom

If Enlightenment pedagogy cultivates good students, there is something to learn from the students who refuse to understand. Such an education would, in the words of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, teach the lesson of “not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it’s about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others” (28). An unfinished knowledge would appear on the edge of folly, which dwells beside wisdom. Folly needs more time to understand; it is the impossible demand of knowledge that has yet to be recognized. Folly also demands knowledge that is not measured by improvement. As anyone who has ever learned anything knows, understanding is an exhortation to begin again. Like the proverbial pearl that must be found again in a dark room, there are forms of return that can inspire improvement as a different relation to the knowledge one already has. Hell teaches, “if the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise”; it is in this turn from “unfinished” as a mark of error to “unfinished” as a promise of endlessness that Hell reveals its foolish wisdom. These questions of knowledge are not confined to the eighteenth-century epistemology and philology. Academic

knowledge reproduces the Enlightenment attachment to systematically demonstrable forms of evidence—an attachment this chapter has not entirely escaped. What I hoped to point to is merely the beginning of an interpretation that remains ongoing.

Eve Sedgwick has written on the difference between the Buddhist and the Western forms of pedagogical demonstration, where a “theorized scholarly skepticism” of Buddhist practices instantiates a “Western phenomenology of ‘knowing.’” Compare, for example, the “democratic optimism” of American education, which divides lessons into “assimilable bits” of understanding to the “holographic structure” of Buddhist teaching where student is assumed to recognize the lesson (171,172). Sedgwick’s example for this holographic structure is the master pointing to the moon: “the recourse of pointing—the double movement of an appreciative attraction to phenomena in all their immeasurable, inarticulable specificity and . . . an evacuation of the apparent ontological grounds of their specificity” (171). Through the student’s expectation of a lesson, the master’s gesture initiates a litany of possibilities in the speaker, which could translate into lessons. It is at the juncture of attraction and evacuation that education should begin—between the expectation of reception and the reception of nothing expected.

More than pedagogy, this is a question of one’s ability to talk and be spoken to. As grammar teaches us, if you want to prove your knowledge you need to speak it. But the grammar of Hell requires no lesson. “Infernal wisdom” has nothing to show but what it has already said. Perhaps we can learn something from Hell, and talk about the possession of knowledge as one talks about the possession of a voice—voice as something that one “has” partially. When we censure ourselves for speaking falsely or not speaking at all, don’t we direct that animosity towards the voice we speak with? There is the voice of wisdom crying out in the public square—a voice that demands to be heard, but sounds like everyone else with something to say. There is the voice of the English grammar student, speaking properly to prove his right to use English. Then there is the voice of hell, contained in its atmosphere, which is also its wisdom. If the proverbs voice wisdom, do they speak to us in a voice that we know? Is it the voice that we use to talk to ourselves, or a voice we feel undone by? I say “us” as if I know what that means for you, but I can only address that aspect of you I perceive in myself. Is this the voice that would compel you to understand? All this time I have hoped to speak with the voice of wisdom, but I have ended up saying what everyone already knows.

Chapter Three

The Passing of an Arab-Knight: Romance and Poetry as Translation in Wordsworth and Isaac D'Israeli

No assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm, and, given the array of contesting norms that constitute the international field, no assertion can be made without at once requiring a cultural translation. Without translation, the very concept of universality cannot cross the linguistic borders it claims, in principle, to be able to cross. Or we might put it another way: without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic.

- Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal," *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*

In the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.

- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, "that he looks before and after." He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are every where; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man.

- William Wordsworth, "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*

. . . I am
a being who never was. And I am an idea for the poem
without land or body
without father or son

I am Qyss Laila, I am
and I am...no one!

- Mahmoud Darwish, "A Mask . . . for Majnoon Layla"

1. "Without land or body"

I would like to approach William Wordsworth's image of the poet "as a rock of defence of human nature" through a poem published nearly two centuries later by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. At the end of Darwish's poem "A Mask . . . for Majnoon Laila," the poet Qyys ibn al-Mulawwah, the speaker of the poem and the central character of the Majnoon and Laila legend, declares himself to be "an idea for the poem / without land or body" (99). The declaration comes just after Qyys has shared his own account of a love story that has become endlessly memorialized. He relates how he became infatuated with Leila, was consumed by his passion, and grew "distanc[ed] . . . from life / on earth" (97). The legend is considered a vestige of pre-Islamic oral poetic tradition. Like much pre-Islamic poetry, the story has no authoritative textual source, but it has been a point of reference for Arabic and Persian literary tradition since

the middle ages. Of course, the details of the legend vary in each retelling, but the general story goes: the poet falls madly in love with Layla, he obsesses over her, and scandalously pronounces his love for her in verse, earning the name “Majnun” (or “one who is possessed”) in the process. Qyys requests Layla’s hand in marriage, but Layla’s parents are frightened by the fervor of this poet’s longing for their daughter, and reject his proposal. Qyys, or “Majnun,” as he is afterwards called, spends the rest of his days wandering the wilderness and pining over his lost love, until he dies, nameless and friendless, in the desert. All that is left of him is the story of his longing for Layla.

Within Arabic and Persian literary traditions, the story has become a symbolic tale of love’s transcendence over the confines of place and time—one in which the negation of earthly love forms the conditions for a more capacious spiritual love. Indeed, in subsequent eras, Majnun would become a model of the Sufi love for God—both for his expression of divine yearning (*talab*) and his loss of self (or *fana*) in love. The twelfth-century Andalusian Sufi scholar and poet Ibn ‘Arabi, for example, would famously profess his faith to be “a religion of love” like “love-mad Qays and his lost Layla” in his philosophical poetic work *Interpreter of Desires*. Qyys’s description of himself as an “idea for a poem without land or body” cannot help but carry these mystical valences.

And like Qyys’s transcendence of the corporeal world, the tale has come to represent a kind of transnational legend of poetry’s nomadic origin. Darwish’s version of Qyys’s narrative appears as one in a long line of Eastern and Western adaptations of a story that travels “without land or body.” As As’ad E. Khairallah notes in his study of the legend, the verses and anecdotes on Qyys and Layla that are passed down through the ages bear no trace of an organic whole: “the reciters, who had to memorize great numbers of poems, tended to keep in mind the more striking [and similar] verses” allowing most verses to “become anonymous or at least ascribable to more than one poet . . . they become what one may call ‘floating verses’” (52). This lack of a “true” textual origin has allowed the legend to be continually rewritten and adapted in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Hindi, English, German French, Spanish, and countless other languages. One of the story’s first English adapters, Isaac D’Israeli, would, in 1799, subtitle it “the Arabian Petrarch and Laura,” and boast in his introduction that “instead of a poet, so elegant and delicate, that his passion some suspect to have been only a fine chimera,” his work presented “a Lover whose sincerity every one acknowledges, since he is distracted with his passion” (1). Even the father of *Weltliteratur*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, would, in his *West-Eastern Divan* two decades later, regard the story as a quintessential example of a love in which there can be “no other one” (Mommsen 259). If we read Darwish’s poem as a continuation of this world legend, Qyys’s words may appear as sign of poetry’s power to transcend national and linguistic boundaries—a sign of passion that is transferred “in spite of difference of soil and climate.”

But the Qyys we hear in Darwish’s poem appears altogether sadder and wiser than the figure we have come to expect. This weary Qyys speaks to us in the aftermath of his world fame, a washed-up figure of unwanted public recognition. Instead of repeating the parts of the legend everyone has come to know and love, he relates the fractured narrative of his loss of identity, his attempted suicide in a river (an allusion to the suicide of Paul Celan), and his encounter with Laila’s husband, who saves Qyys so that he may “know [him]self better” (97). Self-knowledge leads this formerly love-mad poet to realize that he is a “a stranger to [his] name and to [his] time” (97). Here, Darwish’s Qyys demonstrates a level of self-awareness we would have assumed to be completely lost in his madness. His consciousness of his legendary status is a permanent source of estrangement.

In the poem's concluding lines, the source of my epigraph, Qyys has lost the ability to articulate his experience without it being generalized into the legend. Even in our reading of the poem, we cannot help but see this self-reflective Qyys as an extension of the *majnun* (or possessed) Qyys; the temptation to turn Qyys into a poetic figure is too strong. To quote Najat Rahman, who writes about the simultaneous representation and effacement of Darwish's poetic speakers, Qyys's "movement of disappearance becomes paradoxically the survival of [his] song" (53). He can only name the generalized loss of himself in a story that is familiar to us, but is indistinguishable from his effacement. And, in this sense, he is no more than "an *idea* for the poem / without land or body" (*fkra llqšīdai*). As an idea, Qyys challenges us to consider how we can read Qyys's loss of identity within the span of a poem that encourages us to regard that loss as a metaphor. This challenge seems especially difficult for readers of an English translation of the poem, who must rely on a belief in poetry's translatability in their acceptance of the English translation as an adequate substitute for the Arabic. Add to this the fact that this poem is written by a pre-eminent Palestinian poet who has, in the West and the Arab World, become the voice of Palestinian dispossession of land and body. Are we to read Qyys's words as a metaphor for the loss endured by the exile or a sign of poetry's inability to give voice to an experience of loss that is so singular? How does poetry express the loss of land and body that the *idea* for a poem without land or body can only gesture towards? How may we think of the poet "in spite of difference of soil and climate" alongside a poem "without land or body"?

In England two centuries earlier, Wordsworth would confront a similar problem in Book V of his *Prelude*. But while Darwish's poem begins with the weariness of a world literary figure who transcends place and time, Wordsworth's book starts with the fear of a poet who worries that the great literary works are vulnerable to time's passing. It is out of this fear, however, that the poet imagines poetry's safe passage across national and historical limits. In the book, the poet relates the dream of his friend (a man of "kindred hauntings") in which a Bedouin vested like a knight defends poetry from the material destruction of the world. Tasked with preserving the vast stores of geometry (represented by a stone) and poetry (represented by a shell) from an impending deluge, this Arab-knight fulfills the hope that the great works will remain "consecrated" and "exempt from all internal injury" (1805 5.67). Like Qyys, the Arab-knight is a figure of passion for poetry that persists across cultural boundaries—the passion upon which all poetic expression is founded and by which it must be defended. But as the Arab-knight rides away from the dreamer and the approaching deluge with all the world's knowledge in his possession, a panic arises in the dreamer—is the Arab-knight a reliable defender of poetry's inheritance? Will he be able to carry the "great works" of poetry into another time and place? Or will they be lost "without land or body"?

On one level, the dream of the Arab-knight appears as an expression of the Romantic fantasy of poetry as a universal and universalizable knowledge. As a primitive and civilized figure, the Arab-knight reflects the mid- and late-eighteenth century status of romance as an anthropological genre—a genre that was thought to bear the genetic traces of the passage from primitive, enchanted consciousness to enlightened thinking. As Ian Duncan observes, the "romance revival" is, in part, the product of a "historiography of the late-eighteenth-century romance revival: looking back to narrate its own culmination, in the rational consciousness of the present (post-1689) establishment, out of the hard contest between the *ancien régime* and revolutionary ideologies of the last age" (8). As an all-encompassing genre for the "fiction of pre-modern cultures," romance was thought to trace the progress of literary expression towards

the more universal and autonomous forms of poetry and the novel. Central to this fantasy of romance's pre-modern history is the myth of the Arab as a noble savage, and Arabic poetic tradition as a less formally intricate, but more expressive iteration of European literary form. Romance, like the lyric or the novel, was a catch-all genre through which Near Eastern literary traditions were assimilated and measured. In this way, romance was an artifact of the world-making project of Orientalist philology, "which produced for the first time a conception of the world as an assemblage of civilizational entities, each in possession of its own textual and/or expressive traditions," as Aamir Mufti writes (20).

Wordsworth's image of the Arab-knight as an expression of poetry's universality, for instance, finds an origin in the Orientalist works of the eighteenth-century man of letters Isaac D'Israeli. D'Israeli's allegorical history of romance from Bedouin tents to Albion's shores and his translation of the Arabic and Persian legend of "Kais and Leila, Or The Arabian Petrarch and Laura"—the same legend represented in Darwish's poem—propose that European romance may trace its roots back to Arab nomads. Suggesting another concatenation of Arab and knight, D'Israeli's texts imagine romance as the traversal of a universal nature towards enlightenment (or *translatio studii*)—one that is carried back from the Crusades and reaches its proper home in the great poetic works of Spenser and Milton. For D'Israeli, the father of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, whose career would be marked by a sustained preoccupation with the Eastern Question, the "Arabian romance" forms the ground of an identification with the Orient that would see its end in the assimilation of Oriental culture into Occidental knowledge and the imperialistic exportation of Occidental identity onto colonial peripheries. D'Israeli's texts also, importantly, anticipate later British and German Romantic accounts of world literature that regard Arabic poetry as an expressive precursor to the more refined sensibilities of courtly love poetry.³⁸ Here, the orientalization of romance appears central for the Romantic period's idea of poetry as a universal knowledge.

My first two chapters have tried to complicate the binary of Occident and Orient by exploring early Romantic poets' adaptations of two works that were crucial for the formation of a textual Orient in Oriental scholarship—the Bible and the *Arabian Nights*. The study of Semitic traditions in biblical criticism marks an initial stage in Orientalist philology's archival of Eastern expressive traditions—one that is contemporaneous with the conversion of the Bible into a literary text. Within eighteenth-century biblical criticism, the proverb is associated with an unenlightened Oriental pedagogy of wisdom. A similar history may be traced in the *Arabian Nights*, which offered a model for thinking about the involuntary effects of reading at a time when the value of literature was judged according to its capacity to mold readers into intelligent agents. What I have shown in these preceding chapters is that the cultural translation of Oriental genres like the proverb and tale reveals a cultural split within British literary tradition, in which emergent Oriental forms contest, adjust, and rival dominant genres. In this final chapter, I would like to look at how these literary encounters with the Orient affect the much broader discourse of

³⁸ In his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (translated into English in 1803), for example, Johann Gottfried Herder suggests that "the national character and country of the arabs rendered a kind of knight-errantry, mixed with the tenderness of love, somewhat like hereditary property to them, from the earliest times" (572). Herder imagines that "while roaming with their tents, they fought love-adventures, and then breathed out complaints of the absence of the object of their passion in their much valued poetical language" (573). Surmising the history of poetic tradition in Europe, in particular, he claims "what the arabs began from the south, the normans cultivated still more strenuously from the north, in France, England, and Italy. When their romantic character, their love of adventures, heroic tales, and marital exercises, and their native respect to the women, united with the refined chivalry of the arabs, it gained a wider spread, and deeper root in Europe" (576).

poetry as world literary genre within the Romantic period. If my first two chapters focused on the translation of Oriental forms into Romantic poetry, this last chapter will consider the translatability of poetry itself—the conveyance of poetry across place and time as that transfer is both embodied in and unsettled by the dream of the Arab-knight.

If my account of Wordsworth's and D'Israeli's Arab-knight figures is ambivalent in this chapter, it is because their representations are as well. In reading these works, I remain vexed by each figure's antiquated, Orientalist caricature and its image of a future in which translation is necessary for poetry. This split appears central to the problem of poetry's cultural translatability. Wordsworth's and D'Israeli's Arab-knights articulate the persistence of, and their own fear of, an unintelligible "outside," which exceeds poetry's form. This outside appears not as a radical alterity, but as an uncanny specter (or multiple specters) *within* familiar figures of romance, threatening the future or poetry's inheritance. Indeed, towards the end of the dream, the poet refers to this half-knight as an "Arab phantom." These specters lead both poets to fear that the great works of poetry could be lost to a world that lacks a proper material or cultural medium for poetry's power. For both Wordsworth and D'Israeli, the Arab-knight becomes a figure of the unassimilated past of romance, which is itself a figure of passion representing both the attachment to extant forms—the heart, reason, truth—as well as to an unintelligible future. Their worry over poetry's future gives rise to the possibility that a different tradition could be inherited by another world, like the world in which I am currently reading their poetry.

In the dream of the Arab scene, the poet expresses his fear of poetry's future destruction to his friend, who relates the dream as a sign of "kindred hauntings" between them. Although the phrase explicitly refers to the sympathetic relationship between the poet and his friend, and their shared fear of tradition's loss, within the context of the Arab's inheritance of poetry, the image of a familiar specter gives voice to a multiplicity of voices entailed in and obscured by the past.³⁹ "Kindred hauntings" suggests both the relation between different specters *and* the specter of difference within relation. Indeed, for both Wordsworth's and D'Israeli's texts, "kindred hauntings" animate the temporal and historical problem of interpretation, which must translate the injunctions of the past into the present. Here, I am thinking of Jacques Derrida's formulations of a "messianic without messianism"—against what he perceives as the force of equivalence within secular progressive time—in his late political writings *Specters of Marx* and *Politics of Friendship* (*Specters* 71). If the vision of history as progress is involved in the standardization of space and time, Derrida's notion of an unfinished messianic suggests a relation between past and present that is constituted by an ongoing difference. In *Specters of Marx*, for instance, Derrida claims inheritance is "never one with itself," because "if the readability of a legacy were given . . . we would never have anything to inherit from it," and no occasion to inherit (18). Tracing the "kindred hauntings" entailed by all passing down, and contesting a certain historicist notion of inheritance as a single communion between past and present, Derrida suggests that "one always inherits from a secret—which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so?'" (18). The secret, here, suggests both the contingent status of all reading, through which any inheritance must pass in order to be received, and the reception of lineage inherent to reading.

Elsewhere, in *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida describes this double making and passing in terms of the *teleiopoetic* event of friendship—the incommensurability upon which any

³⁹ Andrew Warren has recently offered an account of the "kindred hauntings" of the dream sequence figuration of a "porous border between self and other," which in turn suggests a post-French Revolution community "defined negatively, by threat of catastrophe" and "failure" (22).

expression of relation is predicated. Like Wordsworth's fantasy of poetry's passage in the dream of the Arab-knight, Derrida's notion of *teleiopoios* "qualifies . . . that which *renders* absolute, perfect, completed, accomplished, finished, that which *brings* to an end" at the same time that it plays with "the other *tele* [that] speaks to distance and the far-removed . . . and of an absolute acceleration in the spanning of space. *Rendering, making, transforming, producing, creating*—this is what counts" (32). Following this second sense of term, in *Death of the Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak has used *teleiopoios* to imagine a translational form of world-making distinct from the expansionist universality of "world literature." Against the "convenience of mapmaking," Spivak proposes an "imaginative making—without guarantees," effectively moving "literature" outside of its "European intellectual enclaves" and towards those "readers of the future" who have not yet arrived (31). Both Derrida and Spivak encourage us to ask: what does the past demand of the present and the future? What can one preserve from the past without rendering it equivalent to the present? In tracing the figure of the Arab-knight across the works of Wordsworth and D'Israeli, I hope to sketch a history of poetry that is founded on the in-between space of cultural translation. In the first part of this chapter, I will read the missed encounter between the dreamer and the Arab-knight as a site of possible inheritance. In the second part of this chapter, I will look at the Arab history of romance in D'Israeli's work to explore how poetry imagines the passage of its inheritance from a past to a future.

2. The Arab-Knight

If, as Aamir Mufti suggests, world literature was involved in the eighteenth-century division of the world into distinct expressive traditions and national geniuses, the dream of the Arab begins with the fear of their loss—a loss that the dream analogizes to the loss of the world itself. The dream of the Arab envisions poetry defenseless before an approaching "deluge"—a vision that is simultaneously liberating and terrifying for the poet-speaker, who worries about whether the great works of the mind will survive. The dream is preceded by the interruption of "the steadiest mood of reason" by passion, as the poet contemplates the fleetingness of man's great works—"the honor of [those] high endowments" (*1805* 5.1, 5.9). The "abject[ion]" that arises from the poet "'weep[ing] to have' what he may lose" conjures a dream (of an unnamed friend) in which poetry would live a "lasting life / Exempt from all internal injury" after destruction of the society that produced it (*1805* 5.25, 5.67-66).

Though the beginning of Book V is framed around the fleetingness of book's materiality—the inability of books to preserve the powers of the mind—the question of textual materiality quickly opens into the larger problem of knowledge's containment and transmission. The dream emerges out of the gap between the mind of the poet and the minds of readers, and the fear that there is no adequate medium to convey the greatness of the former. Indeed, the dream is at least partly directed towards a culture that does not do enough to preserve the life of the great works of literature. In an analogous moment in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, Wordsworth speaks of the "deluges" of "idle and extravagant stories in verse" driving the great works "into neglect," and perpetuating a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" in the reading public (294).⁴⁰ Here, it may be said, poetry confronts a threat more imminent than catastrophe—the threat of nameless death under the "outrageous stimulation" promoted by works of fiction. At the same time that Wordsworth raises the possibility of poetry's death to an

⁴⁰ The contradictoriness of a deluge that creates thirst should be read in conjunction with the dream's juxtaposition of desert and deluge.

uncultivated public, he holds on to the faith in poetry's everlasting life—the “impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it” (294). Portentously, Wordsworth declares, “the time is approaching when “the magnitude of the general evil,” that is, “the multitude of causes” driving the public's thirst for outrageous stimulation, “will be systematically opposed by men of greater powers and with far more distinguished success” (295). The need for a “systematic opposition” to defend against the popular “literature and theatrical exhibition of the country” is a response to the pervasive uniformity that this thirst for stimulation represents. Wordsworth's tone here is prophetic, as if the indestructible qualities of the mind were divinely ordained and protected. But as Wordsworth oscillates between a fear that poetry will be destroyed and a faith in the immortal power of the mind, he remains uncertain of the culture that would preserve the mind and its works.

Wordsworth's statement echoes Isaac D'Israeli's fear, several years prior, in his *Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* (1795)—a work that sought to exemplify, so as to reproduce, the nature of “Men of Genius.” Endeavoring to defend the nature from degrading influences, D'Israeli begins his text by claiming that “a superior mind, long cultivated, and long exercised, adorned with polite, and enriched with solid letters, must still retain its pre-eminence among the inferior ranks of men; and therefore may still exact the same respect from his fellow-citizens” (xvi). For D'Israeli, the most egregious neglect of genius is suffered by men of letters, whose plight is epitomized in the proto-Romantic figure of the nomad.⁴¹ While “professional” men of genius (such “useful mechanics” or “great artists”) may find consolation in devotion to their profession, men of letters are assured no recognition for their still “national purposes.” Their labor is solitary and alienated:

Men of letters, in our country resemble ‘Houseless wanderers,’ scattered and solitary, disunited and languid; whose talents are frequently unknown to their companions, and by the inertness of an unhappy situation, often unperceived by themselves. It is remarkable that those men in the nation who are most familiar with each other's conceptions, and most capable of reciprocal esteem, are those who are often most estranged. (2)

D'Israeli uses the image of the wanderer to show the contradictory status of the literary genius as both public and anonymous, domestic and vagrant—a doubleness that the Arab-knight, following Wordsworth's idea of the poet's relationship to human nature, will also embody. Fortunately, for D'Israeli, “Nature . . . has provided some concealed remedy for [the] future universal deluge” in the form of genius (xix). Both Wordsworth and D'Israeli seem to possess a faith that genius will save those great literary works from destruction. However, while D'Israeli has faith in the lasting creation of superior mind—a faith that also colors his understanding of romance, as I will show later—Wordsworth worries that the “nature” of the mind is not adequately preserved by “frail” materiality of books. In his opening meditation on books in Book V of *The Prelude*, he laments:

Oh, why hath not the mind

⁴¹ Though D'Israeli rallied for the survival of the literary character, his own work—which was published in 1795—flourished in British letters for decades afterwards, the last revision being printed in 1846. As Lucy Newlyn notes: “the revisions to this book spanned the period associated with the Romantic movement, and demonstrate the steadily strengthening ideology [of literary survival] which gave it power to survive” (267).

Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail? (1805 5.44-48)

Wordsworth grieves the great works' vulnerability to contingencies of time and place even as he holds onto the wish for a form that could more adequately contain the mind's power. But the fantasy of a nature "nearer to [the mind's] own" raises confusion. Indeed, the image of the mind "stamp[ing] her image in nature" asks us to confront the limit of the mind as image. What gets imagined as the mind's printed reproduction in the first question ("stamp") returns as an image of temporary residence ("lodge") in the second. This shift in figure betrays an uncertainty about how the mind contains and convey its "spirit." Though the mind has the power to send its spirit abroad, its medium is too frail.

In a moment that seems to demonstrate the mind's power to send abroad its spirit, the next verse paragraph relates a moment when Wordsworth voiced these thoughts to the friend with "kindred hauntings" (1805 5.55). As the friend shares, and Wordsworth relates, his dream of "poetry and geometric truth / . . . And their high privilege of lasting life / Exempt from all internal injury," it becomes difficult to tell whose mind the dream belongs to. Indeed, by the time the 1850 edition of the poem is published, all traces of the friend will be incorporated by Wordsworth, who claims the dream as his own. In the 1805 version, however, this uncertainty over the border between minds forms the basis for the dream's driving intersubjective and intercultural question: how can poetry be translated or carried across minds in different places and times? As a shared dream, the scene offers a vision of the mind's translation. The dream of the Arab reminds us that dreams are psychic texts that contain the unbounded power of the mind in abbreviated forms. In their very effort to concentrate—or "condense," in the language of Freud—irreconcilable elements, the dream's central figures of the stone, the shell, and the Arab-knight reveal an un-incorporable excess. Freud's vocabulary is especially helpful here for considering the form of *The Prelude's* dream, which combines psychic and poetic modes of representation. As Freud describes in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, "condensation" is a sign "that the manifest dream has a smaller content than the latent one, and is thus an abbreviated translation of it" (171). Even though the *representation* of the latent contents suggests a form that is unified, condensation emerges in the gap between the parts of the wish that are easily rendered into form and the elements of the wish that remain on the verge of appearing.

Elsewhere, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud reminds us that condensation is an attempt to "evade the censorship" of the super-ego, by allowing potentially harmful latent content to emerge through "a second person [or form] also connected with the objectionable material" (322). In condensation, something is omitted for the good of the ego's state, but the trace remains, having "satisfied the claims of the dream-censorship" (322). In evading the force of repression, then, condensation *fulfills* the dream's rule of representation. However, because the latent content is contained in the "manifested" image, it must rely on the manifested content to show through. In the dream of the Arab, as well, the outward figures of knowledge (the stone, the shell, and the Arab-knight himself) appear in place of their unavailable contents. In the dream's abbreviated form, these condensed figures articulate a future-past relationship to the time of interpretation where not-yet-conscious material infuses familiar and legible forms.⁴²

⁴² Freud himself regarded the dream figure as a "hieroglyphic" which gets "translated" in interpretation.

While much criticism of the dream has regarded the Arab-knight as a vehicle for carriage of the condensed figures of the stone and the shell, I am interested in how the Arab-knight complicates the dream's central fantasy of poetry's preservation—how the split figure both carries poetry's past and carries it across time and place.

Alone in an indeterminate space between the end (“an Arabian waste”) and beginning of civilization (“a wide wilderness”), the dreamer begins to worry, until a man appears by his side:

To his great joy a man was at his side,
Upon a dromedary mounted high.
He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes;
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell
Of a surpassing brightness. (1805 5.76-81)

The guide that materializes before the dreamer seems to be equipped for survival in this primitive and post-apocalyptic wilderness—he is an Arab wanderer who is dressed as a knight. More specifically, this “stranger,” as the dreamer later calls him, is an Arab of the *Bedouin* tribes.⁴³ This Arab-knight tells the dreamer that the stone he carries is Euclid's *Elements*—a book that “wedded man to man by purest bond / Of nature, undisturbed by space or time” (1805 5.105-106). More than representing geometric proportion, here, the stone represents all that could be repeatable in nature across time and space—a law uniting men by the “bond of nature.” In anthropological terms, the stone is the “nature” which one holds close to oneself and that which holds men close to each other—it is the very foundation of relationship between men, the presence of which makes the “Arab” legible as a man to the dreamer. This book irrevocably “wed[s],” or pledges, man to man—fulfilling the promise of a “universal” humanity.⁴⁴

In an instance of intersubjective bonding, the dreamer “question[s] himself” about the content of these books, only to have his thoughts answered by the Arab-knight. He extends the shell to the ear of the dreamer, with command that the dreamer “should hold it to [his] ear.” Then, as if acquiescing to the Arab-knight's command, the dreamer hears:

in that instant an unknown tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
An ode in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge now at hand. (1805 5.94-99)

If the stone represents form that can be rendered intelligible and common through nature, the shell represents that which dissolves, or that which communicates through difference (a blast of “articulate sounds” and “an unknown tongue, / Which yet I understood”). On one level, the shell

⁴³ The Arabic word “bedouin” derives from the word “bedowee” which means “desert” and “wilderness”—a Bedouin is literally one who is “of the desert.”

⁴⁴ Within psychoanalytic terms, we could say that the stone is a metaphor for metonymy in language—the iterative conditions that structure the relation between things. In Jacques Lacan's reading of condensation (which he associates with metaphor) and displacement (which he associates with metonymy), he argues that the “transference” of metaphor is “possible only by virtue of the structure of language,” which metonymy indexes as an iterative process of substitution (226).

seems like a perfect symbol for poetry's power to be felt without being comprehended, and a necessary complement to the stone's bonding power. Indeed, Geoffrey Hartman differentiates between the stone's "dispassionate eternal relations"—or that which persists in nature as form, and the shell's "passionate human relations"—that which is communicated through feeling (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 228). I would argue, however, that the human relation of the shell is only made legible through the stone's establishment of equivalence. That is to say, the dreamer's understanding of the shell's speech is an extension of the stone's power to bond man to man. For the dreamer to understand the tongue, there must be something in it that speaks to him; there must be an assumed equivalence between the message and the recipient. That the shell's message comes in the form of an ode—a lyric genre thought by many eighteenth-century philologists to be the origin of all poetry—further suggests that the stone's underlying drive for equivalence is the condition for, or at least inseparable from, the shell.

This principle of equivalence extends to the Arab, who bears the features of a knight and is immediately regarded by the dreamer as his guide. The representation of this knight-like Bedouin here is particularly interesting, because within eighteenth-century history, the Bedouin is turned into a figure of incipient civil society. He is a noble warrior who traverses the borders of the Islamic empire, sovereign and self-sufficient. This familiar stranger also represents the universal, nomadic condition of man before civilization—a figure, like the poet, of the eternal and noble "nature" that exists before and after civilization. Eighteenth-century conjectural history is rife with accounts of Bedouins as solitary warriors, divided from civil society because of their refusal to relinquish their natural freedom. For example, in his massive twenty-part work (published between 1788 and 1797) *The Habitable World Described: Or the Present State of the People in All Parts of the Globe*, John Trusler notes how "excessive love of liberty occasions them to prefer the dreary wilderness, where they lived independent" (336). It is this love of liberty uncorrupted by society that gives them a naturally noble character, even though they fail to form their own empires. In his 1787 lecture "On the Arabs," delivered to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, William Jones similarly notes the noble character of the Arab in the wilderness and cities:

If courtesy and urbanity, a love of poetry and eloquence, and the practice of exalted virtues be a juster measure of perfect society, we have certain proof, that the people of Arabia, both on plains and in cities, in republican and monarchical states, were eminently civilized for many ages before their conquest of Persia. (*Works* 50)

In Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1768)—a work which traces the social history of man from a state of nature to a modern liberal state—the Bedouin is similarly situated at the beginning and end of civilizations:

The tents of the wild Arab are even now pitched among the ruins of magnificent cities; and the waste fields which border on Palestine and Syria, are perhaps become again the nursery of infant nations. The chieftain of an Arab tribe, like the founder of Rome, may have already fixed the roots of a plant that is to flourish in some future period, or laid the foundations of a fabric, that will attain to its grandeur in some distant age. (168)

In all these essentialized representations, the Bedouin is a figure whose noble character *could* become the basis for a prosperous empire, but whose absence of a sustainable, regulated state

assures his perpetual nomadic existence. Driven by freedom from lasting attachments, he is permanently on the verge of a future modernity. Symbolically, too, the Bedouin preserves the image of nature that precedes and exceeds historical condition—the “natural inheritance” that cleaves to man even as it eludes him. If the dreamer entrusts the Bedouin with the task of preserving poetry’s (and the mind’s) power, it is because his figure is naturally driven to carry out his task independent of society, and to defend poetry against the deluge of cultural works. As Simon Jarvis notes, the Bedouin “concretizes” the monastic drive of the poet, because he “is solitary to the extent which is possibly insane” and free of contractual obligations (186). Under the spell of the stone, which finds likeness through difference, the dream seduces the dreamer into reading the Bedouin’s errand as an analogue for his own task. But the limit of this analogy is soon revealed:

A wish was now engendered in my fear
 To cleave unto this man, and I begged leave
 To share his errand with him. On he passed
 Not heeding me; I followed, and took note
 That he looked often backward with wild look,
 Grasping his twofold treasure to his side,
 Upon a dromedary, lance in rest,
 He rode, I keeping pace with him; and now
 I fancied that he was the very knight
 Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight,
 But was an arab of the desert too,
 Of these was neither, and was both at once. (1805 5.115-126)

The appearance of the Bedouin creates the expectation that the dreamer’s way will be shown, an expectation that is only strengthened by the Bedouin’s hospitality towards the dreamer in showing him his books, and the fact that the dreamer is given access to the unknown tongue. All this “engenders” the “wish . . . to cleave unto this man,” whose task he claims to know. Yet, at the moment the dreamer expects to be treated as an equal by the Arab, he is ignored. The dreamer’s desire to “cleave unto” the Arab-knight, in fact, disturbs the bonds of their relationship. This double attachment and separation is mirrored in the twofold sense of “cleave,” which means at once to adhere to and to divide. At a moment when the terms of “universal” and “natural” love could be reinscribed through the Arab’s satisfaction of the dreamer’s request, the Arab moves on.

Mocking the very primacy of human relations that the books “preserve,” Arab shuns the dreamer in favor of his task: “on he passed / Not heeding me.” The word “pass,” like “cleaves,” highlights the way in which the Arab-knight simultaneously meets and eludes the dreamer. To “pass on” suggests a continuation of an original trajectory *and* a parting or deviation from a way.⁴⁵ Though the time of these actions is obfuscated by the fact that this dream is recounted, the passage of time is felt in prosody. The caesura that marks a pause—the period dividing the

⁴⁵ My reading of “passing” here is indebted to Anne-Lise François’s reading of Wordsworth’s line “Stop here, or gently pass,” which “scandalously grants permission to pass, implying an indistinct continuity between the act of stopping to listen and acknowledge and that of letting lapse or fall behind” (10). A similar conjunction of stopping and passing is expressed by *mawqif* within Sufi tradition. The *mawqif*, as a “halting place” on the way to God, both demands stopping and passing over.

fourth foot of the line—also disturbs the movement of the line: “To share his errand with him. *On he passed.*” A shift in time is materialized in the speech that carries the line forward, producing the effect of stopping and continuing. The double position of “passing” is further highlighted by its relation to the dreamer’s wish—“beg[ging] leave / To share his errand.” The Arab “passes on” in response to the request to be followed, leaving the answer open. In doing so, the Arab denies the possibility of an “exchange” between him and the dreamer; for the Arab to “pass” the dreamer, not heeding him, he would have had to always be moving past him, in pursuit of his task.⁴⁶

Surprised by receiving nothing, the dreamer believes the Arab does not “heed” him, as if his attention *suddenly* became absorbed by his task; but the Arab has only continued to do what he set out to do. For the dreamer, who immediately takes the stranger for *his* guide, the Arab-knight’s character appears crazed; the guide the dreamer claims to “have” in this wilderness is lost to his errand. Yet the dreamer follows, as if the Arab-knight still had something to show him. Indeed, for the spurned dreamer, the Arab suddenly becomes “wild” as he looks backward. Fixated on the Arab-knight, the dreamer simultaneously realizes that this figure is both Don Quixote and “an arab of the desert too”; being “both at once” and “neither.” Here the Arab occupies a lapse in the dreamer’s consciousness—or a lapse in what the dreamer can hold in common with the Arab: the condensed Arab-Quixote is perceptible at the very point in which his identity is cleaved.

Soon after this moment of passing, the Arab-knight grows more visibly “disturbed” as the threat of a deluge becomes discernible (*1805* 5.127). The Arab-knight responds to the dreamer one last time, telling him of “the waters of the deep gathering upon us,” but he soon loses himself in his task (*1805* 5.130-131). This second evasion marks the end of their relation. By the time the “fleet waters of the drowning world” approach, the dreamer is dislodged from the scene. Much like the initial passing of the Arab-knight, the arrival of the deluge—the moment of apocalypse prophesied by the shell—is elided. In this sense, the dreamer cannot even be said to “possess”—or retain the complete experience of—the deluge at the end, waking up at the moment just before the world is engulfed. At a time when action should be taken to protect these works—a moment where loss should be marked—it is carried out too late. The vision of apocalypse produces no experience that the friend may claim as his. Rather, in its deferral of an imminent end—under the elusive guidance of the even more elusive figure of the Arab-knight—it is left haunting the dream. Indeed, the form of a dream even bears witness to a moment whose reception is uncertain and prolonged because it cannot be said to “count” as an event. The end and future of poetry is left to the Arab who passes by. And in his absence, the poet tries to assimilate the scene into his own fantasies.

The friend’s wish to share the Arab-knight’s task is mirrored by the poet, who “has given / A substance” to the Arab, and “fancied him a living man” (*1805* 5.142-143). Renewing his earlier discussion of the mind, the poet peers into the Arab’s brain to testify that “in the blind in awful lair / Of such a madness reason did lie couched” (*1805* 5.151-152). If the poet wishes to give this “arab phantom” and “semi-Quixote” substance, here, it comes as compensation for his

⁴⁶ As Geoffrey Hartman has observed, this tension between stasis and continuity is manifested throughout Wordsworth’s poetry in the trope of “the halted traveler,” wherein “the traveler man, the secular pilgrim—is halted by an affecting image. And something peculiar in the image, or the suspension itself of habitual motion, or an ensuing meditative consciousness, brings him into the shadow of death” (12). Hartman has noted how the Arab offers an ambivalent middle position between the wandering figures of pilgrim and the revolutionary he encounters throughout *The Prelude*. The poet unifies “the fugitive and pilgrim, pursuer and pursued” (57).

inability to reconcile this split. The poet gives his “reverence” for such a mad, but necessary, errand, even as he registers his own distance from this “maniac’s anxiousness.” In revering the task, the poet saves himself from revering the man. It is only through the Arab-knight’s task that the poet finds sympathy, surmising that such a man is “crazed / By love, and, feeling, and internal thought” (1805 5.144-145). If the poet, according to Wordsworth, is the “upholder and preserved of human nature . . . carrying with him everywhere relationship and love,” the Arab seems to preserve poetry’s passion to the point of self-destruction. The Arab-knight passes on, and his passing on replaces the final scene of catastrophe. In this way, he seems like the perfect messenger for the uncontainable power of poetry and the mind. But the Arab’s mania is also endlessly suspicious; in carrying out his task, does the Arab-knight defend poetry or hasten its destruction?

3. Orientalizing Romance

Converted from wilderness to civilization, the Arab is manifested to the dreamer and Wordsworth through the errant-knight of chivalric romance. But in his spectral form, in his status as “neither” and “both at once,” he also offers a metaphor for poetry’s cultural translation. This split figure is a telling representation of poetry’s dislocating movement across time and place—a figure whose irreconcilable parts reflect a tension between poetry’s available forms and not-yet-perceptible knowledge. In this sense, he also stands as a challenge to a continuous historical time. That the figure is neither and both at once, for example, suggests that he is both the analogy between the two figures *and* a difference within history that cannot be elided or reduced to an intelligible form. But the passing of the Arab-knight only raises the question: how does poetry change as it is carried across national and historical boundaries? How can we give form to the unformed and the unintelligible power of poetry?

Within the “romance revival” of the late eighteenth-century, the history of romance was thought to bear an image of poetry’s translation. The Arab-knight’s association with the chivalric romances of yore is a manifestation of a theme that runs throughout *The Prelude*, and begins with a scene in which the poet is pressured to “settle on some British theme, some old / Romantic tale by Milton left unsung” (1805 1.179-180). Here the Romantic tale appears as a nationalistic injunction to continue in the legacy of one’s predecessor. But the poet inherits the theme by choosing to abandon the task, lingering where the call for chivalric action has become outdated, “in some gentle place / Within the groves of chivalry,” amongst the “reposing knights” (1805 1.181-183). *The Prelude* is full of these specters of romance—disenchanted enchantments that are absorbed by poetry. Writing on poetry’s “unceasing spiritual combat” with romance in Wordsworth’s poetry, Geoffrey Hartman has suggested that Wordsworth averts “apocalyptic or revolutionary change” by “accept[ing] chivalry as a false yet imaginative and redeemable way of life” wherein “the new and milder morality grows organically from the old” (*Unremarkable Wordsworth* 57). “Accept” is the operative term here, since Wordsworth receives Romance as a vestige of an archaic form from which his song emerges, being a species of the human imagination. Later in Book V, for example, he acknowledges the power of those “works of love”—a genitive phrase that is both *partitive* (works *composed of* love) and *possessive* (works *belonging to* love):

The tales that charm away the wakeful night
In Araby—romances, legends penned

For solace by the light of monkish lamps;
Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised
By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun
By the dismantled warrior in old age. (1805 5.520-525)

Wordsworth groups romance, legends, and Oriental tales within the same “shape [that] will live till man shall be no more,” since these forms arise naturally from the “dumb yearnings” and “hidden appetites” of man (1805 5.529-530). The shape stands as a vestige of (the poet’s and humanity’s) childhood, which “sits upon a throne / that hath more power than all the elements” (1805 5.532-533).⁴⁷ Echoing Charles Lamb’s reading of the *Arabian Nights* as an eternal archetype of the mind, Wordsworth suggests that the history of romance is the history of passion. Here, as in much eighteenth-century writing on literary and poetic expression, romance is a symbol for the natural progression of the mind from pure expressivity to rational consciousness—a shape that congregates the affective life of the individual and the historical trajectory of human nature in the passage towards a universal form. As Srinivas Aravamudan observes, eighteenth-century histories of romance regard the fictive realism of the novel as a progress from the fanciful fictions of romance—a trajectory that shows “the classical mode *translatio* [or transfer], [which] documents the way cultural transmission followed political and military lines” (40). Clara Reeve’s work *The Progress of Romance* (1785), for example, suggests that realistic narrative is the necessary result of an empiricist awareness of credibility; thus, “as a country became civilized, their narratives were methodized, and moderated to probability” (71). Aravamudan shows how this movement marks a separation between fantastic and realistic fiction at the same time that it complicates this distinction, since the very features synonymous with the novel—like incompleteness and speculation—were features of Oriental tales and romances.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Indeed, within eighteenth-century conjectural history, romance is associated with a continuous movement from antiquity to modernity—a form that traces the coming-to-consciousness of modern statehood through chivalric values. More particularly, romance traces the movement from the heroic individual of action to the enlightened sensibility of reflection. In Adam Ferguson’s *History of Civil Society*, for example, romance marks the conversion of heroic morality into a model for everyday conduct:

What was originally singular in these apprehensions, was, by the writer of romance, turned to extravagance; and under the title of chivalry was offered as a model of conduct, even in common affairs: The fortunes of nations were directed by gallantry; and human life, on its greatest occasions, became a scene of affectation and folly . . . Chivalry, uniting with the genius of our policy, has probably suggested those peculiarities in the law of nations, by which modern states are distinguished from the ancient. And if our rule in measuring degrees of politeness and civilization is to be taken from hence, or from the advancement of commercial arts, we shall be found to have greatly excelled any of the celebrated nations of antiquity. (303)

In Ferguson’s speculation on the history of Western modernity, antiquity—in the figure of chivalry—unites with the genius of the policy. He associates romance with the model of conduct, which stands as the precursor to “policy.” A model of conduct governing ordinary affairs organically grows into an ability to govern the relations between individuals and states. Here, again, it is a question of natural progression of civility.

⁴⁸ Ian Duncan has also shown how romance shaped the eighteenth-century British national imaginary as “antiquarian scholars and poets redefined romance as the scattered relics of an ancestral culture that was disintegrating under the pressures of modernization. Its strangeness—its difference from modern experience—was the effect of this loss: and thus the aura of its authenticity. Romance was the genius loci of the last age, to be preserved in the print-medium of the modern nation-state as its native essence” (4).

A similar complication of generic distinctions may be seen in poetry's incorporation of romance. In the continued life of its form, romance embodies the living power of an imagination that exists prior to an enlightened state of progress. As Geoffrey Hartman notes, the "romance revival" of the late eighteenth century occurs at a moment in which the temptation of superstition is no longer a threat to reason; a shift in knowledge that appears in the birth of "ingenium . . . from genius, psyche from persona, and the spirit of poetry from the grave clothes of Romance" (*Unremarkable Wordsworth* 52). The wresting of poetry's spirit from figure, for Hartman, marks a representational shift from the "derivation [of] personification from the persona" to the "freely inferred . . . projection of living thoughts" (*Unremarkable Wordsworth* 52). Yet, the negation of the spirit's attachment to dead figures occurs through the resurrection of figures that the spirit feels compelled to embody. Thus, Hartman observes, "if Romance is an eternal rather than archaic portion of the human mind, and poetry its purification, then every poem will be an act of resistance, of negative creation—a flight from one enchantment into another" (*UW* 52). In purifying romance, poetry wishes to prove itself as the more timeless genre—a living analogy of the mind that can channel forms after their death. Yet poetry's love of romance suggests that poetry must be *reenchanted* by something eluding its life, that its very existence is constituted by the insubstantiality of the illusion that romance exemplifies. Does not romance, in this sense, pose a deathly and spectral image of poetry, as a form that has encountered death in literary history? In purifying romance, does poetry carry its own passing? Here we are confronted with the question of inheritance, of passing on and passing away.

As I have suggested earlier, the dream's invocation of "kindred hauntings" suggests that inheritance is bound up with a plurality of specters. In this sense, the spectral figure of the Arab-knight marks the way in which—as Derrida puts it—"one always inherits from a secret" (*Specters* 18). In Edmund Burke's *Reflections On the Revolution in France* (1790)—a text from which Wordsworth's dream may have inherited its fear of catastrophe—inheritance is involved in the continuation of past through figures that reconcile difference. In Burke's famous exhortation to a revolutionary public, he argues that inheritance is the "philosophic analogy . . . [giving] to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood, binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties" (29-30). Burke's recourse to filial and bodily imagery to clothe the abstraction of "philosophical analogy" suggests that inheritance is bound up with a continual attachment to figures of the past. Burke frames this correspondence between past and present in terms of the "permanent body composed of transitory parts . . . molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race" (29). It is the power of such body to incorporate the movement of time so as to resist the "wholly new" change of revolution and the "wholly obsolete" condition of primitive states (29).⁴⁹ Burke offers the spatio-temporally binding metonyms of "blood," "bosom," "hearths," sepulchres, and "altars" as parts of this national body (30). And his idea of the body works for these timeless figures because they have already been

⁴⁹ Though Burke aligns this mode of time with nature, the very fact that he urges readers to choose inheritance suggests that the hypothetical "body" of inheritance is not naturally given or received. Rather, "the image of a relation" is aesthetically *made* and preserved by those who choose to uphold it. Burke's linking of analogy and generation, for example, emerges out eighteenth-century vitalist association of analogy with the changeable forms of life. As Denise Gigante has shown, the eighteenth-century "found a productive difference in the analogy, which provided a way to keep two entities in play without collapsing them into each other" (45). Thus Coleridge will famously remark in his *Theory of Life*, "analogy implies a difference of sort, and not merely in degree . . . and it is the sameness of the end, with the difference of the means, which constitutes analogy" (530-531). However, the difference inherent to analogy opens a domain of substitutability within relation that Burke seeks to disavow by collapsing the national and the natural—imagining a permanent social body instead of atomistic individuals.

memorialized and cathected in national consciousness. The analogical body becomes more difficult, however, when one imagines the corpus of poetry, whose translation—as Wordsworth’s dream and Darwish’s poem suggest—may work to detach and disembody.

Less than a decade later, Burke’s idea of a national body would take on a world historical dimension in the work of Isaac D’Israeli. Perhaps no one wrote about the universal promise of romance more fervently than Isaac D’Israeli. Like many literary critics and Orientalist philologists in the eighteenth century, D’Israeli believed that romance was the imaginative source from which “all nations have drawn their richest inventions” even as the liberty of the imagination “hovers on the borders of indecency” (*Curiosities of Literature* 214). D’Israeli, the writer who lamented the condition of literary men as “houseless wanderers” in England, found in romance both a history of literature’s exiled condition and the story of its reconciliation with the nation. The son of an Italian-Jewish immigrant and the father of Benjamin Disraeli, D’Israeli’s own genealogy seems like a fitting emblem for romance’s movement from East to West. Indeed, as Stuart Peterfreund has observed, D’Israeli’s status as an English man of letters was first established through his Orientalist work, which “insert[ed] him into a cultural context” and “establish[ed] his cultural authority in a manner indispensable to his major cultural works as a compiler, annotator, and curator of English literature and literary history” (140). In tracing the movement of romance, D’Israeli offers a history of its universality within the Romantic period.

D’Israeli’s collection *Romances*—a work which collects his own adaptations of Eastern and Western romances—certainly testifies to the eighteenth-century debt to the form. In D’Israeli’s “Poetical Essay on Romance and Romancers,” for example, romance is imagined as love’s allegorical offspring passing through and animating the world, from the Arabs to the Moors to the European minstrels.⁵⁰ A work that blends allegory, romance, literary history, and heroic couplets, D’Israeli may be said to trace romance’s corporeal and racial history as it passes through different generic bodies. The essay mimics many eighteenth-century conjectural histories measuring the progress of history from a state of nature to European modernity, while the purifying character of poetry allows him to narrate the symbolic passage from fancy to probability at the heart of these conjectural histories. In its metahistorical and multigeneric form, the work stages the tension between the specter of romance and its national British incorporation.

This poem begins with the allegorical image of Love, “the fairest child of fairest mother” disturbed by ““Ennui, Hell’s negro” as he reposes. (3-6). Lacking a beloved to direct its passion, fair Love is plagued by a black Ennui. Before Love even acquires a particular national form, his natural “fairness” is threatened by this racialized figure of lack. In characteristically eighteenth-century Manichean terms, D’Israeli locates the origin of romance in a bizarre racial allegory of Love’s movement out of an abject state of self-loving. Aware of the Ennui’s threat to Love, the Graces try to rouse Love, then present him with the nymph Fiction, who charms Love by taking him in her arms and flying away: “her flying hand with warm illusion turns / New earths, new heavens, a world where fancy burns”; she also “sails, without ships,” “builds, without hands,” and fights “bloodless” wars. Fiction gives Love the gift of analogy to traverse time and space undisturbed by difference (in what seems to reproduce the classic conflation of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*). Fiction charms Love into love, assuring the eternal marriage of fiction and love, and producing Romance, which is a product of love’s fiction. Henceforth, Love will always need Fiction to love, and Fiction will always act to rouse Love from the threat of self-love:

⁵⁰ Within *Romances*, this poem precedes D’Israeli’s “translation” of the classic “Arabian romance,” “Mejnoun and Leila.”

'Twas in that ecstasy, that amorous trance,
 That LOVE on FICTION got the child, ROMANCE.
 From that blest hour on EARTH, the Beauty glow'd
 And sought with social Man, her dear abode;
 With all her MOTHER'S SORCERY paints each dream,
 With all her FATHER'S SOUL makes LOVE the eternal theme!
 With her the ARAB at the evening's close,
 Oft soothes the way worn traveller's repose.
 By storied Love the social circle caught,
 All lean, abstracted in the charm of thought;

...
 All, all forgot! E'en Toil neglects to rest
 When human passions touch the lonely breast;
 Their heavy hearts the sprightly rapture hail,
 Charming the desert-wildness with—A TALE! (vi)

Romance, here, is the offspring of Love and Fiction—the union that happens in “ecstasy.” Ecstasy, from the Greek *ek-stasis*, means “to stand outside oneself.” Love’s ecstatic union with Fiction means Love is dependent on Fiction to lure him out of himself. Love is the “eternal theme,” and Fiction is the means by which the dream of love is kept alive. And yet Love is “charmed” by being lured out of the self-imposed Ennui. Out of the ecstatic union of Love and Fiction, Romance seeks an “abode” with social Man. It seems fitting then, that the Romance begins outside of Europe and Albion, in the Arab’s “lonely breast,” where the “human passions” are capacious but desolate. As a racialized vessel for fair Love’s offspring, the Arab appears as a figure half-incorporated by love.

From the Arab’s lonely tale, Romance travels through the Persian bowers and the Turkish harems to the border between the West and East in Spain. In Granada, it is transferred to the Saracens (holding “factions lances”) through the Moorish dame, who “flies, with fainting pulse and bloodless face, / Her lover knight, the murderer of her race!” (vii). Possessed by passion, the Moorish dame runs to the arms of her enemy—a Muslim knight, no less—and lover, despite the thing dividing them; in doing so, she foreshadows that classic romance image of impossible love. Romance—the product of love bound by what remains outside of itself—enters Europe through the figure of a Moorish woman who loves the enemy despite herself. Here, as in its journey with Fiction that fights bloodless wars, Romance marks the movement of a passion that can exceed race and nation. Interestingly, before Romance finds a proper home in the Christian, it finds a Christian analogue in the Muslim knight, who carries all the noble distinction of a king’s soldier and a lady’s servant, while remaining irrevocably separated from the Christian tradition that would confer value upon his title; he is “neither” and “both at once.”

From the wild passion of its Eastern origins and the “wild artists” of the early minstrels, Romance arrives upon “Albion’s shores” as a “family” of minstrels meeting and loving “every brother genius” (xiii). Romance’s arrival in England renews love that already exists in blood—a family bond that makes brothers rather than forging enmity. In the footnote to this line in the poem, D’Israeli notes that “the poetical student is well acquainted with [the] intercourse” of romance and genius in Spenser and Milton. “Met,” “loved,” and “acquainted,” the English inheritors of Romance refine its passion into a worthy marriage (xiii). Romance—as the

offspring of “fair” Love and the “soft hand” of Fiction—is received by its rightful inheritors in Albion. In the end, it is up to the genius to possess that fancy for the purposes of instruction. D’Israeli ends his poetical essay by appealing to “the few” to save him from the “the populace who read,” lest he “offend” their “Taste”—a sign of Romance’s progress from the enchanted Bedouin tribe to its discriminating English reading public (xviii-xix).

Read from beginning to end, D’Israeli’s history of Romance appears to claim the same universality that Wordsworth invokes in his defense of poetry’s inalienable inheritance. By tracing the movement of romance beyond European borders, D’Israeli traces the history of passion coming to consciousness in European (particularly British) man. In this way, D’Israeli’s history would only legitimate “historical time as a measure of the cultural distance . . . assumed to exist between the West and non-West,” which Dipesh Chakrabarty diagnoses in his critique of historicism (7). D’Israeli’s history does so by imagining the English reading public properly incorporating and inheriting what is only partially housed in the East. Indeed, Romance’s eventual embodiment in the fair bodies of Europe only reiterates the opening personification of Love the fair. The offspring, it seems, is a proper analogy of her father.

But the poem suggests that there is something transient in the body, that the movement of culture in *translatio* does not reinforce one’s history, but marks what will come to pass on. Because romance must wander, its abode in Albion may be a temporary one. D’Israeli’s anxiety about the “houseless” condition of the British literary character attests to the fact that the forms and bodies that sustain literature may not be permanent. The same security afforded to the body of the nation-state does not exist for passion. Indeed, D’Israeli’s other work on romance suggests that that its “inheritance” is animated by its ecstatic origin. In a section on “Romances” from the *Curiosities of Literature*, D’Israeli speculates that “the agreeable wildness of that fancy which characterized the Eastern nations *was often caught by the crusaders,*” substituting the language of migration with the language of illness (161). In this romantic fantasy of the European encounter with the East, the wild fancy of romance possesses the crusaders before genius can possess it and regulate it. Here we can read the illness of romance as a presence, like passion, whose traces cannot be effaced, only regulated—a form of life, born out of the contingency of time and place, that seizes its host with a vision of elsewhere.⁵¹ Is this not the case for Wordsworth, as we have already seen for Coleridge as well? Those Oriental “works of love” can charm one into delusion because they influence one in ways that are not reducible to reason’s assimilative force. Romance, here, exists as a ghost of unenlightened passion that poetry needs to survive.

It is this attraction to the overly expressive passion at the heart of Romance that leads D’Israeli to translate the tale of *Mejnoun and Leila*, *The Arabian Petrarch and Laura*—a work that narrates the dissolution of a young Bedouin poet (whose name D’Israeli transliterates as “Kais”) as he becomes possessed by the image of his beloved (“Leila”). In the same book containing his poetical essay, D’Israeli offers this “Arabian romance” as proof of romance’s timeless, universal life. Like many Oriental “translations” of the time, D’Israeli’s text is the

⁵¹ A parallel account of the borders of chivalric romance may be found in David Simpson’s reading of Scott’s crusader novel *The Talisman*, where “Scott suggests that the culture of chivalry is a European invention—implicitly denying the arguments . . . that it was in fact of Arabic origin and imported into Europe through Spain—and that it has had a moderating influence on the primitive barbarism of the desert dwellers” (99-100). Indeed, it is “Saladin who is now the exemplary bearer of the chivalric ideal” (100). In the novel, the figure of Saladin—and his talisman, capable of curing madness—functions as the *pharmakon*. Unlike romance, the talisman “loses its power . . . when it moves north and west without its proper master” (94). The question of passion appears in the novel as a matter of timing: “when applied to the purposes of indulgence and debauchery . . . it weakens the intellect, and undermines life”; but one may use its “virtues in the time of need” (96).

author's liberal conversion of the Persian text into eighteenth-century poetic diction and novelistic narration.⁵² In this sense, D'Israeli's translation seems like a reenactment of Romance's movement from wild passion to the possession of genius; possession, here, is reflected in the assimilation of an Oriental legend into an English literary genre. Indeed, the very subtitle of D'Israeli's work—"The Arabian Petrarch and Laura"—makes the analogy to these Western poetic characters central to this work. The advertisement of the translation, however, seeks to convince readers of the superior feeling of the Arabic version:

A maniac and a lover! Vehement genius at variance with the tenderest domestic feelings! Cherishing the social duties, yet still violating them by the fatal energy of an unhappy passion! The catastrophe involving the fates of himself, and of all whom he loved! . . . In a word, I discovered a new Petrarch and Laura; but two fervid Orientalists, capable of more passion, more grief, and more terror. Instead of the petty solitude of the Valclusa [sic] of Petrarch, an Arabian desert opened its numerous horrors; instead of the cold prudery of the Italian Laura, I have the resolute ardour of the Arabian Leila; and instead of a poet, so elegant and delicate, that his passion some suspect to have been only a fine chimera, I have a Lover whose sincerity every one acknowledges, since he is distracted with his passion! (1)

D'Israeli praises the expressivity of this Arabian romance against the chaste love of European lyric to demonstrate the vitality of the former.⁵³ The lover who testifies to this passion through mania makes Petrarch's "elegant and delicate" love look like a chimera. Interestingly, here, the sincerity of passion is judged in the lover's capacity to lose himself in love, in love's ability to be more than itself. "Every one acknowledges" the sincerity of the lover who has become a maniac. In being possessed by love, the maniac represents the possibility of a love that can be shown absolutely—like the Arab-knight's devotion to his task, and like the ode in passion that predicts the end of the world. Mania is the state that can prove its passion in taking it to the destructive, wasteful end of obsession; it is the "fatal energy" of love that would threaten the "social duties" the lover "cherishes." In his use of Arab's mania to embody authentic feeling, D'Israeli participates in—what Sianne Ngai has described as—the "animation of the racialized body," which "involves likening it to an instrument, porous and pliable, for the vocalization of others" (97). Here, the figure of the poet passionate enough to lose his identity is a truer expression of the passion that dwells ephemerally in poetry.

The conflation of love and mania is central to the narrative's transformation from Kais to Mejnoun, which D'Israeli, translates as "maniac." In the Arabic tradition, Kais's devotion to Leila culminates in his name *Mejnoun Leila*. Mejnoun Leila is a possessive phrase (or *idaafa*) used to describe one's genealogy and possession. It can be translated: the madman of, or belonging to, Layla, the madman descended from Layla, and the madman who consists of Layla.

⁵² D'Israeli opens the translation by narrating the discovery—by him and his two "fervid Orientalist" friends—of an illuminated Persian Manuscript, which they soon found to contain the tales of Majnoun and Leila. However, in the next paragraph, D'Israeli slyly hints that his text is not a translation of the Persian text, but a translation of a French "skeleton of the story" by M. de Cardonne, published in the *Bibliothèque des Romans* in July 1775 (according to D'Israeli's own footnote). D'Israeli borrows much from Cardonne, including the comparison to Petrarch and Laura, which Cardonne begins his translation by invoking. Preferring to let the tale exist as a nameless legend, Cardonne attributes no author to the tale. His version is most likely a composite of the revered and widely circulated Persian adaptation of the story by Nizami and other Persian rewritings of the story.

⁵³ D'Israeli makes "romance" equivalent to "lyric" here, suggesting that both contain a narrative component.

“Majnun” (mad or possessed) interestingly derives from the root *j-n-n* (to hide, conceal), which also forms the word for *jinn* (or genie). A *majnun* is simultaneously one whose reason is “hidden” and one who is hidden from himself, being possessed by jinn that remain hidden to human sight. D’Israeli hints at this difference in a footnote, suggesting that Oriental madness is more akin to “inspiration” than the pathological state of mania, since “the Orientals (observes M. Cardonne) do not consider *madness* as so great an evil as we Europeans” (89).

In D’Israeli’s narrative, which bears similarities to Darwish’s poem, the love between Kais and Leila is forbidden by both of their fathers after Kais’s verses to Leila gain him notoriety among the tribes. After losing Leila, Kais wanders the desert reciting verses dedicated to his beloved, drawing in crowds of listeners. Eventually his passions overcome his senses, and he begins to roam the wilderness in search of Leila. In this nomadic desert existence, Kais becomes a figure of the passion that precedes and opposes the civilizing impulse. Indeed, in many ways Kais is a condensation of the Romantic images of poet and the vagrant; he is one who fully embodies Wordsworth’s dictum that the poet should “let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with [the persons he describes]” (*Lyrical Ballads* 300). Unlike Wordsworth, however, Kais submits entirely to his identification with his beloved—so much so that he loses his name. The transition from Kais to Mejnoun marks a passage from an identity that can be separated from the passions to an identity that is subject to all the contingencies of passion. In the narrative, moreover, it represents a shift in his social standing. In becoming Mejnoun, Kais is turned into a public symbol, first mocked by the community and later revered by poets.⁵⁴

The matter of possession is also a textual one here. D’Israeli claims to have “discovered” this pair from the wilderness of a Persian manuscript, but he is one in a long line of poets and storytellers who have laid claim to it. Appropriately enough, however, D’Israeli’s translation derives from the adaptation of these Arabic fragments into Persian epic romances, which “invested the legend with temporal extension, thus allowing its events to go beyond the mosaic, almost atemporal, juxtaposition of anecdotes” (Khairallah 103). D’Israeli’s text, like the Persian versions of the tale, narrativizes the poet’s passage to anonymity at the end of the poem. After waiting days upon “the point of a rock” in expectation of his friend, who will bring news of Leila, Mejnoun is stunned to learn that his love has passed away. Mad with grief over Leila, Mejnoun eventually dies at the foot of this rock. The tribes of Leila and Mejnoun decide to “raise a tomb” where Mejnoun died, “in memory of the lovers” (202). D’Israeli’s text ends by gesturing towards such eternal transience, in a moment of halting that could have come from *The Prelude*:

The caravans of Syria and Egypt, which traverse the desert in their way to Mecca, once stopped near the consecrated spot; the tender pilgrim once leant over their tomb, and read and wept. The spot is now only known by tradition. The monument has left no vestige, and the trees no more wave their melancholy boughs; nothing remains but THE HISTORY OF THE LOVERS. (202)

What was once a “consecrated spot” of profane reverence for the religious pilgrim traversing the land towards Mecca has become a site that one simply passes over. Nature—whether we take it

⁵⁴ In D’Israeli’s text, Kais does not transform into a Mejnoun until the second part of the narrative, when a guard watches his specter, shadowed by a gazelle, traverse a narrow mountain bridge while “chaunting in fantastic measure,” which—we are later told—is “always beginning and never finishing” (89, 91). Kais becomes an Arab specter “so wan, so woe-begone, so shadowy, it seemed an unblessed spirit” (89).

to be a restoring force or a destructive one in this poem—has reclaimed the gravesite, leaving no trace of a site that was commemorated. This final image of the end reminds us that the desert, with its endless inscriptions and erasures, is a place of transience.

Like other eighteenth-century philologists and historians, D’Israeli believes that the history of the lovers preserves the memory of their union and their dissolution. In being effaced, the lovers’ history can truly be made eternal and universal in various retellings and translations. It is this very logic that allows D’Israeli and Wordsworth to make the Arab their vessel for the passion of poetry. The Arab is noble enough to defend the life of poetry, and wild enough to sustain the life of its passion. As a figure of unfinished and unregulated human nature, the Arab contains the history of poetry and passion. But perhaps the Arab passes out of history with these works. Passion extinguishes with the body, its history lives on through human nature, and in those “consecrated works” of poetry that exalt it through reason or genius. But the latter lacks a “nature” that could preserve it from destruction. In the end, poetry may be no more “protected” than the maniac lover forced into a nameless existence in the wilderness.

Similarly, the death of Kais embodies the fear that the “great works” and “geniuses” may be lost to history. Wordsworth wishes to assuage his fear with a faith that poetry lives on in the minds of men, but when the dream imagines the moment of inheritance—in which time and space are brought together *telepoetically*—the fate of poetry is placed in the hands of the Arab “maniac” who “passes on” towards the horizon, not heeding the dreamer. He is rushing to carry on the knowledge in which he will remain nameless; but it is passion for this potentially futile errand that propels him. In his task, the Arab illuminates something delirious in the calling of poetry itself. The passing of Mejnoun, the other Arab maniac, is also effaced from earth, being claimed by the wilderness that sheltered his dissolution. In his death, he lives as a testament to all passion that consumes utterly. In the erasure of Kais, the legend of Mejnoun is born—a legend that implores, in a maniacal voice, “do not thy passions circulate in thy veins till they consume that existence to which they gave birth? Foolish man! thou thinkest this world made for THEE, when all around thee bears the image of thy fleeting existence” (*Romances* 94).

The message of D’Israeli’s Mejnoun brings us back—which is to say carries us onward—to the final words of Darwish’s Qyys. In a world literary culture, in which dispossessed voices are often no more than symbols of transience, how should we take Qyys’ accounts of himself as “an idea for a poem without land or body”? In Arabic, the word *qṣīda* (poem) derives from the root *q-ṣ-d*, meaning to proceed straight-away or to intend; *qṣīda* signals at once the straightness of form and the unfinished direction of the poem. In this sense, Darwish’s placement of “an idea” next to *qṣīda* reminds us that the poem is always uncertainly aspiring towards what it claims to be. At the same time that Qyys represents an idea for the poem that does not end, he also carries an idea for the poem that has not yet arrived.

Coda

Towards a Theory of Translation in Walter Benjamin and Édouard Glissant

In each of the previous chapters, I have sought to trace the ways in which British knowledge (in pedagogy, biblical criticism and philology) both forms and is transformed by the translation of non-Western works and genres. “Translation,” as I have used it in this dissertation, describes the assimilation of gestures into familiar signs as well as the capacity to be transformed by what remains outside of available structures of thought and language. This latter version of translation suggests that translation is an unfinished and ongoing process—one that challenges, contradicts, or alters the dominant discourses of a culture. Thus, it is through a reading of the *Arabian Nights* that Coleridge finds a model for the itinerant and associative form of *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, and through his engagement with Hebrew proverbs that Blake argues for the value of obscurity in knowledge’s transmission. More than a sign of linguistic and cultural equivalence, translation, in these cases, describes a relation between traditions that challenges nationalistic and linguistic identities—a release from culture’s assimilative force that allows us to reconsider poetry’s relation to its time and place.⁵⁵ In this coda, I will look at the work of Walter Benjamin and Édouard Glissant to begin to sketch a theory for this second kind of translation. For both Benjamin and Glissant, translation is a kind of creative (and re-creative) act, rather than a linguistic practice. Both theorists gesture towards the possibility of a nonappropriative relation between cultures that begins with translation’s labor. In their different works, both theorists ask: what can translation carry across singularities without succumbing to generalization and forced equivalence?

Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” first appeared publicly in 1923, as a foreword to his German translation of Charles Baudelaire’s *Parisian Scenes*. Rather than using this introduction to address the practice of translation, Benjamin asks the more philosophical and theological question: what is translatable in a work? In considering the translatability of a work, Benjamin thinks of a “work” not as a linguistic object, but a relational entity of language—something that bears the trace of an unrealizable connection between selves, historical moments, and languages. He proposes this against the idea that a work is reducible to what it communicates to a recipient. Indeed, he begins the essay by arguing that even though art may *contain* something of its recipient’s life, it is not directed towards its immediate reception: “art . . . posits man’s psychical and spiritual existence, but in none of its work is it concerned with his

⁵⁵ Such relation is not only important for thinking about the complicated relationship between Romantic poetry and Eastern texts and genres; it is also crucial for reconsidering “literature” and “poetry” as world categories with recognizably Western genres. I began my chapter on Wordsworth by gesturing towards the traces of an alternative genealogy of world poetry in a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, whose ongoing poetic and philosophic project may be said to question the attachment of poetry to the monolingualism of the nation-state. Though a thorough discussion of the Romantic vestiges within Arabic poetry is beyond the scope of this project, it is crucial to note that the relation I sketch in this dissertation also characterizes modernist Arab poetics’ turn to Western aesthetic traditions. Consider, for example, the Syrian poet Adonis’s claim that he “did not discover modernity in Arabic poetry from within the prevailing Arab cultural order and its systems of knowledge,” but in his reading of French Symbolist and Surrealist poets, which simultaneously allowed him to see “what is richest and most profound in [Arab poetic] heritage” (*Introduction to Arab Poetics* 81).

attentiveness” (253). Even as a work may reach out to a recipient, “no poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience” (254). It is the singular multiplicity of a work’s language that all translation must reckon with, as it seeks to carry something from the original language into another language. Already, in the first two paragraphs of this essay, Benjamin introduces the central paradox of his enquiry on translation—no poem is intended for its reader, and yet every poem that must be read is intended for someone.

Benjamin’s essay, I would argue, is motivated by his desire to differentiate “intending *for*” and “intention,” or what he elsewhere describes as “what is meant” and “the way of meaning” (257). To “intend *for*” implies a subordination of the message to the reception. For Benjamin, this subordination is caused by a recipient who believes that a work’s message is *fully* carried or translated in his or her reception. For a work to be “intended for” a reader would mean that the work would be reduced to known, legible forms for the one receiving it. For Benjamin, the “literal translation” and the “poetic translation” are the epitome of this. The former regards translation as a passage from one system of signs into another, equivalent one. The latter puts too much emphasis on the “unfathomable or mysterious” side of the work, and ends up communicating an exaggerated form as the only content.

“Intention,” on the other hand, suggests the multiple and opaque ways in which a work bears meaning—implied in the fact that all works require interpretation in order to be received. Though the “intention” of the original is bound up with its language—because it is “aimed solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects”—translation (like its near kin, interpretation) gives voice to a “way [or ways] of meaning” that the language of the original contains in its effort to express something beyond a literal meaning (258). Though Benjamin speaks of “works” in general, it is crucial to note that his essay has its basis in poetry, where the difference between intention and language is perhaps most noticeable. The figurative language of poetry suggests that language contains what exceeds its prosaic, communicable form. For Benjamin, the intention of a work opens up the more general point of the “suprahistorical kinship between languages” contained in the idea that “in every [language] as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by any single individual, but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another: the pure language” (257). Benjamin takes it as a truth that the singularities of languages are connected by their intentions—that languages are nothing without the unrealized totality of their intentions. Elsewhere, Benjamin likens this inarticulate pure language to a vessel of glued together fragments (260). Translation, here, forms each fragment of this vessel that may only be thought whole through the metaphor of the vessel. This metaphor is a particularly representative one for Benjamin, who later likens the communicability of language to “the symbolizing” and the incommunicability of pure language to “the symbolized” (261).

Although this essay is written almost a decade before “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility,” his idea of the supplementary of intentions seems to presuppose the question of what happens to translation under the reduction of language to a culture of rapid reproduction and communicability. Towards the end of the essay, we see Benjamin start to critique a reductive monolingual idea of language when he claims that translation reveals the displaced origin of all language. Because “unsupplemented language” (Benjamin’s phrase for untranslated language) is rooted to a single system of meanings, its language is assumed to be tantamount to its communication. Translation, on the other hand, gestures towards something incommunicable that dwells *in* language itself—an irreducible intention that may be never expressed *through* language. He ends his essay by imagining a divine language that would “no

longer mean or express anything” (261). Such language is not for us, but, Benjamin writes, “it is the task of the translator to *release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues*, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work” (261, my emphasis). If translation, here, is able to release an inarticulate, pure language from imprisonment in an unsupplemented language, it is because languages are estranged companions to one another.

Benjamin posits this relation as *a priori* to the existence of any particular language, but how, we might ask, can Benjamin’s idea account for the reduction of so-called minor or marginalized languages within a globalizing and imperialistic logic of supplementarity? Shaden Tageldin has recently critiqued Benjamin’s idea of language by arguing that “in his schema of linguistic supplementarity, the specter of political inequality between languages remains just that, a specter, not a material presence” (*Disarming Words* 25). For Tageldin, Benjamin’s idea of a pure language shows that “imperial universalism . . . continues to haunt translation theory, even at its most sensitive to the incommensurability of languages” (24-25). While I do not entirely agree with Tageldin’s assessment, I think that Benjamin’s account of translation is certainly limited by his presumption that all languages are equally estranged. We might say that Benjamin is more interested in defending language from its nationalistic possession rather than preserving minor languages or works that fall victim to the logic of supplementary. It is for this reason that I think Édouard Glissant’s work offers an interesting rejoinder to Benjamin’s essay. Glissant’s articulation of each language’s “right to opacity” offers a different vocabulary for thinking about the “kinship of languages” in the presence of language’s forced translation.

Glissant publishes *Poetics of Relation* in French in 1990, almost seven decades after “The Task of the Translator.” *Poetics of Relation* is a sprawling and epic reevaluation of literary, cultural, and linguistic universalities within a postcolonial context. As the title suggests, too, it is a work of poetics—one engaged in redefining the relational possibilities of poetry. The basic problem or question of the book is: how does one imagine language or linguistic tradition that is not constituted by a possessive right to existence? Or to put it more opaquely: how can we imagine a world in which we are singular and (to quote Fred Moten’s oft-repeated line of Glissant’s) we can “consent not to be a single being”? In one sense, Glissant’s proposal of this “consent” seems analogous to Benjamin’s idea of translation’s “release” of pure language from the original; this language is *permitted* only through a prior relation to another. But Benjamin’s theory cannot account for the forced, appropriative “release” of a universal language under imperial or globalized cultures.⁵⁶ Glissant’s idea of language, on the other hand, reckons with the aftermath of imperial structures of world knowledge—Babel-like systems of codification that posit Western tradition as the standard against which all other world languages and cultures are measured (104). Though Glissant, like Benjamin, is interested in poetic works, Glissant does not limit his poetics to the discussion of the work as a singular entity. Indeed, it might be said that Glissant is writing in a moment in which the translatability of non-Western works is too often taken for granted. In this sense, he is also interested in the transmission of language within a culture, which precedes its condition as a linguistic entity—language learning and translation “being two fundamental mechanisms of relational practice” (115).

⁵⁶ A key example of this, in my research, is the Occident’s imagined relation to the Orient in the eighteenth century French and English translations of the *Arabian Nights*. The relation to the Orient, in these translations, was predicated upon a fantasy of the Orient as a place of “release” for the Occident. How can we think of “release” enabled in these translations in a way that does not naturalize a relation of domination?

In a section of *Poetics* titled “To Build a Tower”—which rewrites the image of Babel as a universal language—Glissant starts by thinking of that old colonial injunction—placed upon “any population demanding the right to speak its own language”—to “live in seclusion or open up to the other” (103). “To open up to the other” entails a conversion of a particular culture into a generalizable discourse. To “live in seclusion,” on the other hand, would represent a detached, monolingual and nativist embrace of language and culture. For Glissant, thinking about the proliferation of language that mixes as it is transferred, this choice is a false one. If the right to speak one’s language has hitherto been mediated by the cultural, linguistic, or economic powers that delegate that right, Glissant wants to think of a “right to speak one’s own language” that is both of itself and of the world. He concludes this section by gesturing towards an unreachable totality of each particularity—a world in which “it is possible to build a Babel—in every language” (109).

Elsewhere in the book, in his discussion of language’s transmission, Glissant thinks of this right to speak in terms of each being’s “right to opacity,” which precedes and exceeds the “transparency” of imperial languages and structures of knowledge. I think the formulation of “transparency” and “opacity” within language and linguistic works offers an interesting contrast to Benjamin’s distinction between “intending for” and “intention.” As Glissant proposes, the reduction of a language or a linguistic work to its communicability is one of the biggest threats posed by an imperial or globalized culture. In a section on “Transparency and Opacity,” Glissant considers Creole’s right to opacity against the transparent forces of French and English, and in relation to literary text as a “producer of opacity” (115) Glissant sees the minor language like Creole and the literary text as subject to the same scale of equivalence, which reduces the world to an image of the West. With regard to “vehicular languages” of the West (which Glissant understands as both “vehicles” for expansion and displacement), Glissant critiques the insistence on neutralized equivalence that marks French’s “language of the Rights of Man” and English’s expansion as a language of pure transmission (113). Creole, by contrast, is a language “whose genius consists in always being open . . . never becoming fixed” (34).

The literary text similarly “produces opacity,” even as translation and language learning attempt “to give ‘some transparency’ back to a text” (116). For Glissant, moreover, “writing’s relation to that absolute is relative; that is, it actually renders it opaque by realizing it in language” (115). This notion of opacity can be read as a continuation of Glissant’s poetic philosophical project from 1969, *Poetic Intention*, which looks at intention as a “constant and often incommunicable compulsion for openness across a poetic oeuvre” (29). Here Glissant approaches an idea of a work’s intention that is quite similar to Benjamin. Within Glissant’s *Poetics*, too, the opacity of language and works is the *poetic* condition of their irreducibility. On the opposite side, any “lingua franca is apoetical,” because it reduces multiplicity to a function of its transmission (112). Metaphorizing a postcolonial world, Glissant declares that “transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image” (111). In its stead, “there is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and explored even today . . . and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing” (111). Glissant reconfigures a primary metaphor of identity—the mirror—to reveal that the superficial “reflection” of the water has hidden the shared opacity that comprises the world.

To “demand a right to opacity,” Glissant writes, is to demand the singularity of one’s language that dissolves the law of equivalence. And yet this demand for singularity must not be singular, if it is to resist the imperial right to possess. This is not an “autarchy,” but a

“subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (190). To have subsistence within a singularity is a minimal relation to self that “accepts difference” (190). For Glissant, such acceptance would extend beyond some multiculturalist scale of difference, which reduces opacity to transparency and perpetuates a relationship of dominance. Rather, it is constituted by the shared right of each language’s and culture’s opacity. Glissant ends by pronouncing a world in which “every Other is a citizen, and no longer a barbarian” and “what is here is open, as much as this there” in a gesture that seems similar to Benjamin’s postulation of each language’s exile (190). It is similar, but not the same; different, but not other. Glissant show us that such relation is only made possible by remaining open to another. Benjamin suggests that translation hearkens back to a relation that exists prior to language’s separation. For both Benjamin and Glissant, however, translation opens a space for a subtle permission that can only be granted by another—a “release” and a “gesture of giving-on-and with” that derives from the fact that no language, culture, work, or self is alone (195).

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