

Introduction. Reading beyond Redemption:
Historicism, Irony, and the Lessons of Romanticism

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The historian is a prophet facing backwards. — Schlegel

Grounding is philosophizing. Thinking is poetry.
("Ergründen ist filosofieren. Erdenken ist Dichten.") — Novalis

Among the motifs of cultural criticism one of the most long-established and central is that of the lie: that culture creates the illusion of a society worthy of man which does not exist; that it conceals the material conditions upon which all human works rise, and that, comforting and lulling, it serves to keep alive the bad economic determination of existence. This is the notion of culture as ideology, which appears at first sight common to both the bourgeois doctrine of violence and its adversary, both to Nietzsche and Marx. But precisely this notion, like all expostulation about lies, has a suspicious tendency to become itself ideology. . . . To identify culture solely with lies is more fateful than ever, now that the former is really becoming totally absorbed by the latter, and eagerly invites such identification in order to compromise every opposing thought. — T. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

Most intellectuals (particularly those reckless enough to have ventured into the professional minefield of editing a collection of highly diverse critical voices) will probably agree that the subject of Romanticism tends to give rise to complex questions, even strong convictions, yet offers few conclusive answers. Mystified by this state of affairs some seventy years ago, Arthur Lovejoy was already prepared to abandon all hope for an objective definition of Romanticism. After sketching out the term's complex genealogy and pathology within the history of ideas, Lovejoy proposed the remedy of an investigation that would render "psychologically intelligible how such manifold and discrepant phenomena" as are customarily associated with the Romantic period "have all come to receive one name." To do so, he suggested, would entail a patient sifting through the seemingly inexhaustible "verbal confusions" of the concept of Romanticism and its unlimited capacity to corrupt "the

movement of thought in the past century." In short, the study of such confusions "might make it easier to avoid them" (Lovejoy 8). To be sure, Lovejoy's intellectual manifesto is likely to elicit a skeptical, even incredulous response in today's highly professionalized academic disciplines and subdisciplines, whose theoretical and methodological sophistication and self-awareness might make Lovejoy's Enlightenment positivism appear to be rather naive. Yet Lovejoy's own argument soon anticipates that skepticism, for only a few lines after outlining his ambitious program for a recovery of Romanticism as a meaningful term, he appears to sacrifice the entire project to what, at first glance anyway, seems a lexical pseudo-resolution promising little more than an infinite regress: "Any study of the subject should begin with a recognition of a *prima-facie* plurality of Romanticisms, of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes"; and, taking almost cruel pleasure in confounding the very expectations for a clear definition that he himself had raised only moments before, Lovejoy further insists that even "when certain of these Romanticisms have in truth significant elements in common, they are not necessarily the same elements in any two cases" (9). From here on, it is all downhill until, in the last paragraph of his essay, Lovejoy succinctly describes Romanticism, particularly in its German incarnation, as having brought forth, "from a single root, both an 'apotheosis of the future' and a tendency to retrospection" (22).

In light of the negative evidence amassed by Lovejoy, it would follow that (historical) knowledge, whether it has been produced by the modern historian of ideas or his Romantic predecessor in the field of poetic retrospection, is always pseudoknowledge. It is, in fact, coeval with a utopian (and originally Romantic) apotheosis with which, we are told, it shares "a single root." In order to articulate the purpose of a critical anthology dedicated to Romanticism and Pedagogy, it may be important to further trace what Lovejoy here so dimly and wearily hints at: the idea of a quasi-conspiratorial dialectic between the various academic disciplines and subdisciplines of historical retrospection and the utopian or eschatological motivation realized by such academic pursuits, as it were "in a finer tone." Precisely this ambivalent mission—of "objective" comprehension and a submerged (subjective) interest in the redemption of that object by the very activity of its sociohistorical or stylistic comprehension—has given rise to, refined, and institutionalized two seemingly opposed paradigms of reading. Somewhat elliptically, the first of these may be characterized as the practice of a strictly text-immanent reading. It produces knowledge in the guise of a spontaneous, unpremeditated, and irrefutable revelation and, according to a tradition reinforced from Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual* (1816) to T. S. Eliot's late writings on Christianity and culture, such reading takes the crypto-Anglican, New Critical form of a hermetic exegesis of texts. Both at

a technical and institutional level, this paradigm of reading reinforces its own, constitutive premise: that of the literary artifact as a simulacrum of "life" itself, something organic, inviolable, and sacred. The first prominent dissenter from the New Critical paradigm, Northrop Frye, thus speaks of an empathetic or "pre-critical" mode of reading aimed at the reader's progressive identification with the literary work by submitting to the holistic effect of its discrete rhetorical functions. Under this dispensation, what is called "comprehension" coincides ultimately with the reader's belated self-recognition as a construct or effect of the literary text's operations:

[T]he end of reading or listening is the beginning of critical understanding, and nothing that we call criticism can begin until the whole of what it is striving to comprehend has been presented to it. Participation in the continuity of the narrative leads to the discovery or recognition of the theme, which is the narrative seen as total design. This theme is what, as we say, the story as been all about, the point of telling it. What we reach at the end of participation becomes the center of our critical attention. (Frye 123)

Predictably, this paradigm of reading as the affective emulation of a text's organic rhetorical design—appropriately named "The Road of Excess" (this being the Blakean title of Frye's well-known essay)—would sooner or later be perceived as begging the question of comprehension by drawing our attention to the apparently dialectical relationship between object and method in criticism. While few readers today would suppose that a definition of Romanticism as the object of our cognitive pursuits could be established before the actual work of criticism begins, the alternative hypothesis—namely, that any understanding of the period is contingent on the specific critical methodology at work—proves more of a truism than a resolution. Still, that alternative, perhaps best exemplified by Romantic Historicism, has for nearly two decades articulated most authoritatively the postmodern discontent with the New Criticism's preemptive faith in the scriptural strength of the poetic word. To this aesthetic conception of the poetic text as a type of secular Scripture—one whose prosodic and narrative balance was meant to fortify supposedly "fallen" audiences against the impingements of their dis/harmonious world—the New Historicism has responded with ambitious, counter-intuitive narratives. Indeed, for some time now, a comprehensive historicist critique of the Romantic ideology has been unfolding with (counter)conspiratorial intensity, arguing in so many ways that the period's subtle, figural idioms were fundamentally aimed at *aestheticizing* the period's political, gendered, and economic antagonisms, thereby effectively preempting any possible consciousness of those antagonisms.

Before turning to the analysis of some of the theoretical contradictions intrinsic to the project of historicism (old and new), a few remarks, more speculative in kind, are in order about the wide spectrum of interpretive functions covered by narrative form, beginning in early Romanticism yet extending all the way to contemporary criticism. What I propose is to tease out how a logic endemic to some philosophical, gothic, and prophetic narratives in early Romanticism turns out to be replicated in today's accounts of historicist and materialist criticism as they purport to circumscribe for us the overall intelligibility of that period. Naturally, such an undertaking rests on hypotheses of its own, and the principal one can be formulated thus: The narratives of early Romanticism and the postmodern critique of its ideological efficacy are grounded in the same epistemological paradigm, that of forms conspiring against their belated discernment, and they perpetrate the same moral utopia, that of an absolute evaluation of the other performed from a putatively value-free and clairvoyant position. In short, the fantasized authority of "writing under the guise of reading, which is to say, believing under the guise of doubt" (Mileur 10)—the dream of belated clairvoyance that I will shortly trace in Blake, Godwin, and Kant—continues to be reproduced, however unwittingly, by the languages of contemporary criticism. The basic features of that mostly negative (and almost entirely nonironic) fantasy may be reiterated as follows:

1. As in any conspiracy, its critic (or analyst) disavows responsibility for its existence; that is, from the vantage point of those occupied with its critical articulation, a conspiracy is by definition always "elsewhere," specifically in the past. Such a premise effectively revives the New Criticism's faith in a formal-rhetorical analysis untainted by any methodological or material presuppositions. Behind the figure of conspiracy, then, stands the dream of criticism as a form of revelation, a mode of producing knowledge indemnified from all charges of methodological complicity in the construction and articulation of its objects.

2. There also exist conspiracies of a nonintentional kind, perhaps best known through Freud's account of the preemptive, counter-transferential strikes launched by the unconscious against its impending, critical (dis)articulation. In such a case, the absence of intentionality—and its eventual reconstruction (as the agency of the unconscious) through the work of analysis—renders a conspiracy "subjectless" or transindividual. According to that model, it is precisely the incompleteness or dysfunctionality of an individual or a community that furnishes the symptom that will, in due course, produce its belated analysis. The alleged muting of an authentic historical understanding by the specious eloquence of aesthetic forms (among other ideological mechanisms)—arguably the pivotal axiom

of contemporary historicism—exhibits striking parallels with psychoanalytic accounts of trauma as a conspiracy not merely located in the past but defining that past as having preemptively conspired against its critical articulation in the present.

3. In order to defend against (and thus overcome) the traumatic resistance of the past to its critical articulation, the present devises complex, counter-intuitive methods of reading ("against the grain"). Method and disciplinarity thus enact postmodernity's longing for salvation in specialized discursive forms and forums. However, in their almost exactly inverse reconstitution of those ideological obfuscations ascribed to the past, our critical methods of reading also tend to display a distrustful, even paranoid quality. Even so, such an aggressively counter-intuitive, and avowedly counter-conspiratorial, quality is commonly hailed as confirmation of the enlightened, postideological potential of our critical present, and as evidence of great disciplinary prowess in our historical moment.

4. Finally, this project of a critical reconstruction and overcoming of what has been called Romanticism's aesthetic ideology—the trauma preventing a historical configuration from achieving a more valid (i.e., more reflexive) sense of its own historicity—also reinforces the authority of its practitioners. For it allows us to glimpse, as it were, "in progress," the methodological and conceptual agonies of the historicist critic martyred by the opacity of that aesthetic tradition. After all, it takes a heroic effort to reclaim the past by sustaining critical dissent from the symptomatic aesthetic surfaces deemed to have "conspired" so lastingly against a more authentic understanding of that past.¹

My (slightly facetious) catalog aims to highlight a paradox already noted by others, namely, that recent historicism and cultural criticism frequently premise their institutional and methodological authority on an obliquely moral charge against their aesthetic objects (be they texts and their writers, or other artifacts, their producers and consumers): to be what they properly *ought* to have been, past representations should have given the type of account now furnished by historicism itself. Before we can hope to conceptualize Romanticism with any specificity, it seems imperative for us to demarcate that concept's conspiratorial potential with some precision: Is it strictly confined to the historical moment of its aesthetic output, or is it the coefficient of postmodernity's critical commitment to "identify[ing] and interrogat[ing] the . . . representational choices" (Levinson, *Rethinking Historicism* 18) of Romantic writing itself? So formulated, the methodological and disciplinary questions raised by Romanticism begin to coalesce with those concerning the implicit cognitive limits and eschatological motives of its historicist conceptualization today. As we shall see, these conceptual

preliminaries will ultimately prompt us to rethink comprehensively the relationship between Romanticism and Pedagogy, the issue so centrally explored in this collection of essays.

In the view of the historicist tradition originating in Spinoza, and extending via Herder, Ernesti, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Gadamer to the New Historicism of today, it is no longer plausible to approach texts as autonomous and expressive embodiments of determinate intentions. Rather, texts ought to be understood as modular forms necessarily embedded and operative within (and at least partially determined by) a twofold grid of coordinates: the diachrony of what Hans-Georg Gadamer had elaborated so magisterially as a transindividual "process of tradition" (*Überlieferungsgeschehen*), which, in turn, can be partitioned into an infinite number of synchronic relations (e.g., Hirsch's notion of contextualism). These two, largely complementary forms of historicism can ultimately be traced back to Hegel's conception of philosophy as a sustained reflection on the phases of historical time that will result in our becoming conscious of the very rationality that guided both the historical process and its narrative reflection. Hegel's system, that is, conceives of all individual meaning (*Meinung*), along with the formal-aesthetic particulars of its appearance, as beckoning the philosophical master-narrative to redeem it from its vagrant and contingent existence within the flux of time. The "critical" intelligibility of the local, the particular, and the contingent involves its transformation from a merely incidental meaning into a functional component of the macrohistorical process that is being reflexively articulated in the philosophical present. In order to uncover its immanent, critical truth, then, all local or individual expression (*Äusserung*) must undergo a partial alienation (*Entäusserung*) from itself. This totalization of historical process first conceived in the idealist figure of *Reflexion*—yet covering the entire political spectrum from Hegel to Ranke, and from Marx to Lukacs and (as some have argued) Jameson and Althusser²—institutes and empowers criticism as the profession of a specific metalanguage. Perhaps, as Theodor Adorno has suggested, it is on account of its intrinsic fatigue—or a "bourgeois coldness that all too eagerly endorses the inevitable" (90)—that the past appears so eager to surrender its aesthetic forms and contingent beliefs to an account whose professed universal, value-free logic will spare them the indignity of any further struggle with competing forms and beliefs.³ Notwithstanding their otherwise discordant claims and emphases, the grand historical narratives of speculative, positivist, and materialist thought associated with the names of Hegel, Ranke, and Marx all share a deeply instrumentalist understanding of historical criticism, be it on behalf of a nation in the process of reconstituting itself (Hegel's and Ranke's Germany after 1815 and 1871, respectively) or by breaking epistemological

and political ground for a (socialist) community conceivable only as the emancipation from the contradictions of that dominant bourgeois society and its official historiographers. Truly *avant la lettre*, Friedrich Schlegel already perceived a new intellectual and potentially institutional strategem of nation building to be on the rise, and he responded to it with his characteristic blend of impatience, distrust, and witty irreverence: "The two main principles of the so-called historical criticism are the Postulate of Vulgarity and the Axiom of the Average. The Postulate of Vulgarity: everything great, good, and beautiful is improbable because it is extraordinary and, at the very least, suspicious. The Axiom of the Average: as we and our surroundings are, so must it have been always and everywhere, because that, after all, is so very natural" (*Philosophical Fragments* 3, no. 25).

By now, of course, grand philosophical narratives appear not only highly unpopular but, for some time, have been subjected to intense theoretical scrutiny. Hegel's reflexive sublation of intentionalism into a history of freedom has been displaced by a seemingly incompatible model of historicism, at once suspicious of the old historicism's epistemology and strenuously dissenting from its implicit (Protestant bourgeois) morality. From this postmodern perspective, the objectivist assumptions of traditional *Historismus* are just as untenable as the objectivization of the aesthetic perpetrated by the New Critics' scrupulous textualism or the affective complicity in the literary work exhibited in the phenomenological studies of Roman Ingarden, Lucien Goldman, Georges Poulet, or the early Geoffrey Hartman. As an alternative, then, the recent development of Romantic Historicism views any criticism premised on the autonomy of aesthetic form, the writing subject, or grand historical narratives as unconsciously indulging (or consciously participating) in a far-flung intellectual and material conspiracy: that of occluding the political and economic significations transmitted by the text and, furthermore, maintaining an order presumed to be morally and materially inequitable, if not outright oppressive.⁴ Thus the New Criticism's interpretive covenant between text and critic is essentially dismissed as obfuscating the critic's alleged failure to detect and respond to the oblique social determinacy of the aesthetic in general, and the encrypted referentiality of Romantic writing in particular. While opposing the New Critical paradigm of reading as a formal technique designed to recuperate eschatological structures in vernacular and prosodic forms—thereby contributing, in T.S. Eliot's formulation, to "the organization of values and [the] direction of religious thought" (4)—contemporary New Historicism appears energized by utopian hopes of equal intensity. Characterized in transparently Hegelian terms as "the completed form of criticism" (McGann 56), this approach produces knowledge in the form of two closely intertwined (liberal) utopias: that of a steadily

advancing and eventually all-encompassing, “deeply interpretive” contextualism, and the fantasy of retroactively liberating the aesthetic object from the “visible darkness” (to use Marjorie Levinson’s allusive phrase) of its own referential obfuscations.⁵ Predicated on a set of heavily revised Marxist and psychoanalytic concepts, historicism has reconceived literature as an intuitive or unconscious knowledge that, being untranslatable into direct propositional form, came to be encrypted in aesthetic forms specifically available at its historical moment, as for example the affective concision of the shorter lyric or the inwardness ventriloquized in the “mazy motion” of Romantic autobiographical narrative.

Central to the historicist project is its own, narrative unfolding of a dialectic between the critic operating “as [a] privileged, essential subject” (Levinson, *Rethinking Historicism* 30) and the text, now gradually unraveled as containing its own (unconscious) other, one said to have been silenced by the self-privileging eloquence of the aesthetic. In opposing the volubility of its own critical narrative against the referential autism of the period’s aesthetic, Romantic Historicism has effectively sought to rewrite and change—not the future but the past, a past allegedly forestalled by the (unconscious) conspiracy of its formal-aesthetic values and practices. For Marjorie Levinson such a “self-consciously belated” (*Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* 12) critical practice mobilizes “our consciousness to cure the past of its objectivity: in effect, its pastness.” Thus the “origin coalesces as a structure, one which is really, suddenly, there in the past, but only by the retroactive practice of the present” (*Rethinking Historicism* 28, 23). It is not entirely clear whether we are to read Levinson’s account as a bizarre and overdetermined endorsement or as a *reductio ad absurdum*, a sly critique of the historicist’s unabashedly self-privileging view of the present—one “edified but not *changed* by its scholarly operations” (*Rethinking Historicism* 29; emphasis in original).⁶

We are thus faced with a paradoxical, indeed uncanny, resemblance between the Hegelian and the New Historicist notion of totality. Where Hegel’s narrative affirms the power of the idea (and thereby, indirectly, its own narrative authority), the New Historicist inescapably traces all heterogeneous matter back to an equally monolithic idea of power. Like Hegel’s “cunning of reason,” the postmodern idea of power as a nonintentional yet ubiquitous (or structural) effectivity, appears implacable, even revolutionary (like Marx’s famous definition of Capital) in its assimilation of all heterogeneous and discordant matter. Yet where the rule of the Hegelian idea was still credited with legitimacy—though less in a moral or ethical sense than on account of its logical exclusivity—the postmodern historicization of the Real conceives of power almost entirely as a malevolent, conspiratorial dynamic.⁷ The speculative movement of Hegel’s historiogra-

phy of reason—the narrative self-realization of the idea of freedom—thus contrasts with New Historicism’s static account of the essential impossibility or illusory nature of freedom. Nonetheless, the end result of these two paradigms remains virtually identical: that is, Hegel’s oppressively holistic narrative of the becoming of freedom is effectively inverted by postmodernity’s specious liberation of the individual through the knowledge of its inescapable extrinsic determinacy.⁸ In each case, the operation of criticism (*Reflexion*) unfolds in an insistently counter-intuitive manner, namely, as the present subject’s attempt at recovering from the past by subsuming all detail, be it incomplete or oppressive, into the order of discourse and knowledge. Criticism emerges as the postmodern idea of practice, a strictly virtual pursuit aimed at the retroactive liberation, or salvation, of the past from its inauthentic symbolic order. In the end, historicism appears caught up in one of two versions of epistemological redundancy: the first of these conceives critical knowledge as the belated discovery of an independent developmental logic, one brought to completion by the unconscious rationality of historical process; the second version, inversely, denies all notions of process and, positing in its stead the continuous displacements and deceptions of power, ends up with the negative knowledge of the critic’s irremediable abjection. It may say a lot, not only about the institutions and practices of historicism but also about Western culture’s intuitive sense of history for the past two hundred years or so, that its critical representations designed to render the past comprehensible are continually predicated on an *extreme* form of affect, be it one of euphoria or despondency.

My assessment of historicism as a deeply conflicted intellectual project also raises several spiritual and ethical questions, and I will shortly consider them in more explicit form. First, however, we may have to pursue a little further the curious epistemological filiations between the allegedly false, erroneous, or partial (because expressive and aesthetic) phenomenal order known as the past and the intellectual countermeasures formalized and institutionalized in the present under the generic name of “critique.” The recuperative interest in past phenomena—shared by Hegelian and Foucauldian thought, however different the valences attached to the resulting knowledge—is perhaps best thrown into relief by Walter Benjamin’s brilliant reflections on historicism as a phantasmagorical interplay between danger and redemption. In his sixth thesis on the concept of history, Benjamin argues that “to articulate the past . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. . . . Th[at] danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism

that is about to overpower it" (*Illuminations* 255). And yet, insofar as the historicist's "image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption," historicism's moment of analytic mastery proves unstable. For precisely that past, Benjamin now argues, had already "carried within itself the temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a *secret agreement* between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have a *weak Messianic power*, a power to which the past has a claim" (*Illuminations* 254; italics mine). "Critique" thus emerges as a moment of interference between an intuitive commitment to action and an encroaching consciousness of one's epistemological abjection, because, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, "the field of action . . . includes the past: its relation to the crisis at hand." Thus perplexed, "criticism approaches the form of fragment, pensée, or parable: it both soars and stutters as it creates the new text that rises up, prankishly, against a prior text that will surely repossess it" (75, 82).

Benjamin's idea of an unconscious compact between the formal and material sedimentations of the past, and the critical narratives of the present seeking to redeem both that past from its aesthetic involutions and the critic's present from entrapment by the aura of such a past, constitutes among other things a cautious reformulation of Kant's most ambitious philosophical hypothesis: that of an all-encompassing teleological configuration of our faculties of cognition with their so-called objects. As Kant argues in some detail in his *Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, our reflexive apprehension of that teleological bond gives rise to the aesthetic universality of pleasure (*Lust*) associated with what Kant calls "knowledge in general" (*Erkenntnis überhaupt*), a pleasure merely exemplified in our "aesthetic judgment" on the beautiful but, in fact, constitutive of all cognitive practice. Kant's overarching hypothesis of an inherently unprovable, quasi-conspiratorial agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) between the dynamic form of human knowledge and the (supposedly) immutable form of its objects reverberates in Benjamin's reflections. And yet, while illuminating the redemptive motives undergirding a historical critique premised on an inscrutable "secret agreement" between the present and the past, Benjamin also hastens to remind us of the modern critic's "weak Messianic power," a power less conferred by the past than purloined from it. The uneasy relationship between the "Theses on the Concept of History" and the more affirmative, even strident programs of New Historicist and Materialist critique is the result of Benjamin's profound sense of despair over any instrumentalist and totalizing model of cognition. At its most cautious, then, historicist practice can be understood as the postmodern academic expression of a simultaneously nostalgic *and* utopian yearning or, in Benjamin's vocabulary, as vicariously manifesting the deep-seated

"messianic" longing for a cognitive equilibrium between the past and the present that identifies the critic "inextricably [as] a figure of pathos *and* aesthetic play" (Hartman 84). By contrast, in its more systematic (Hegelian) incarnation as a retroactive mastery or sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the past as the inadvertent prefiguration of present clairvoyance, the project of historical cognition betrays "our fascination with technique, with neat solutions and totalitarian harmonies" (Hartman 83). There is ample reason, then, not to hail our postmodern, scrupulously reflexive models of ideological critique as insuring a rational, conclusive, and guaranteed overcoming of the representational surfaces customarily assembled under the heading of a "romantic aesthetic ideology." In fact, what renders this antithesis between aesthetic surfaces, said to have lured Romanticism's historical subjects into a consumptive suspension of disbelief, and the methodological acuity of contemporary historicism offering salvation to a past allegedly ensnared by its own "prolific" imaginary ultimately insupportable is the startling fact that the same opposition turns out to be a constitutive feature on Romantic narratives. That is, the oppositional model at issue loses its critical force once we examine how philosophical, fictional, and prophetic narratives of early Romanticism are predicated on precisely those conspiratorial, redemptive forms of intellectual production subsequently mobilized as a means of overcoming the period's "aesthetic ideology."⁹ Three short examples may help clarify the point.



My first case in point involves the ambiguous temporal logic prevailing in Blake's early prophecies, books whose commitment to illumination is informed by the alleged spiritual and political oppression said to have issued from Albion's past and by the writer's hope for a retroactive "correction" or "redemption" of that past from the "ninefold darkness" of priestcraft, tyranny, and reason. Recent historicist work has drawn our attention to the often inextricable lines of division between the eschatological beliefs of London's millenarian, mostly artisan communities during the 1780s and 1790s and the fervent rationalisms of intellectuals like Paine, Priestley, Thelwall, Spence, or Godwin.¹⁰ Blake's *Book of Urizen* frames this antagonism as one between faith and law, between the radical antinomian "energy" of the present and the oppressive traditionalism of the state and state religion, as well as the implacable rationalism perceived to have dominated the opposition to these institutions. Such ideological tensions ultimately converge in the rhetorical tension between prophetic "words articulate, bursting in thunders" and "the Book / Of eternal brass, written in . . . solitude" (plate 4a, lines 4, 32-33). Consequently, Blake's early prophetic books offer themselves as the contrary of these oppositions by

continually shifting back and forth between implementing belief as an unconditional intuition and critically reflecting on a past now understood to have significantly shaped the emergence of *all* beliefs. Blake's Lambeth books predict no plausible or fantasized future, nor do they aim to recover some empirical past. Instead, their mesmerizing visual and rhetorical patterns urge readers to "illuminate" (or "retroactivate") a past that has not yet been lived and experienced precisely because it was occluded from vision by the dullness of empirical memory and repressed sensuality. Much like contemporary critiques of ideology, that is, Blakean prophecy seeks not to predict a determinate future but to respond to the false determinacy of the past. Put differently, it seems intent on recovering an as yet unrealized, imaginative past from the one that had usurped its place and that had gradually reproduced itself through the oppressive psycho-political institutions of memory, morality, and state-sponsored art. Blake's *Book of Urizen* gives vivid expression to this conflict in the recurrent motif of division (see fig. 1), including Urizen's fragmentation of eternity into history ("dividing / The horrible night into watches" [plate 9, lines 9–10]) and Los's agonized recollection of eternity ("White as the snow on the mountains cold") now rapidly consumed by general "Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!" (plate 10, lines 23–24). Exaggerating Urizen's instinctual fear of the "myriads of Eternity" contained in everything particular, Blake rewrites received myths of creation and rationalist theories of progress in precise accordance with the defensive and pathologizing attitude toward the body that these accounts had once inaugurated. Sensual, embodied humanity can now be remembered only a fortiori, that is, as the physiological torment of birth and aging, with Blake's text here recalling the skeletal figure of plate 7 (fig. 2):

A vast Spine writh'd in torment
 Upon the winds; shooting pain'd
 Ribs, like a bending cavern
 And bones of solidness, froze
 Over all his nerves of joy.
 And a first Age passed over,
 And a state of dismal woe.
 (Copy D, plate 9, lines 37–43)

To the prophetic voice of Blake's *Book of Urizen*, the past always begs to be redeemed from the mythic involutions of its own unconscious. And yet, to attempt such a redemption is to repeat the very Urizenic project of dominating eternity that, the prophet's voice tells us, had produced the aesthetic and political horrors of our empirical history to begin with. This paradox manifests itself formally in Blake's nonperspectival portrayal of iconic figures gazing into the void of historical time and becoming conscious of the

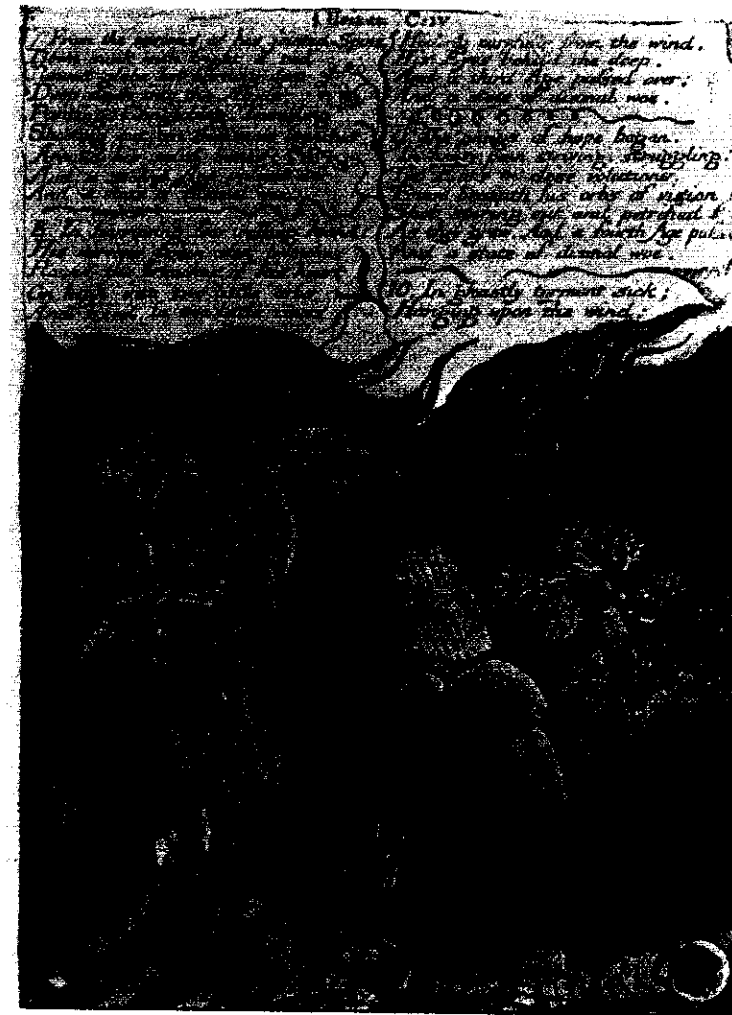


Figure 1. "From the caverns of his jointed Spine" (*The Book of Urizen*, Plate 9, Copy B, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PM1.63139).

past's ineffable monstrosity. Furthermore, the pivotal division of eternity into two distinct states, embodied by Los and Urizen, also casts doubt on the ultimate desirability of historical knowledge. For the intellectual capital of such knowledge would almost certainly lead to the resurgence of a (Urizenic) unconscious within ourselves, implacably conspiring against the infinity and integrity of our spiritual intuitions. Given our inescapable

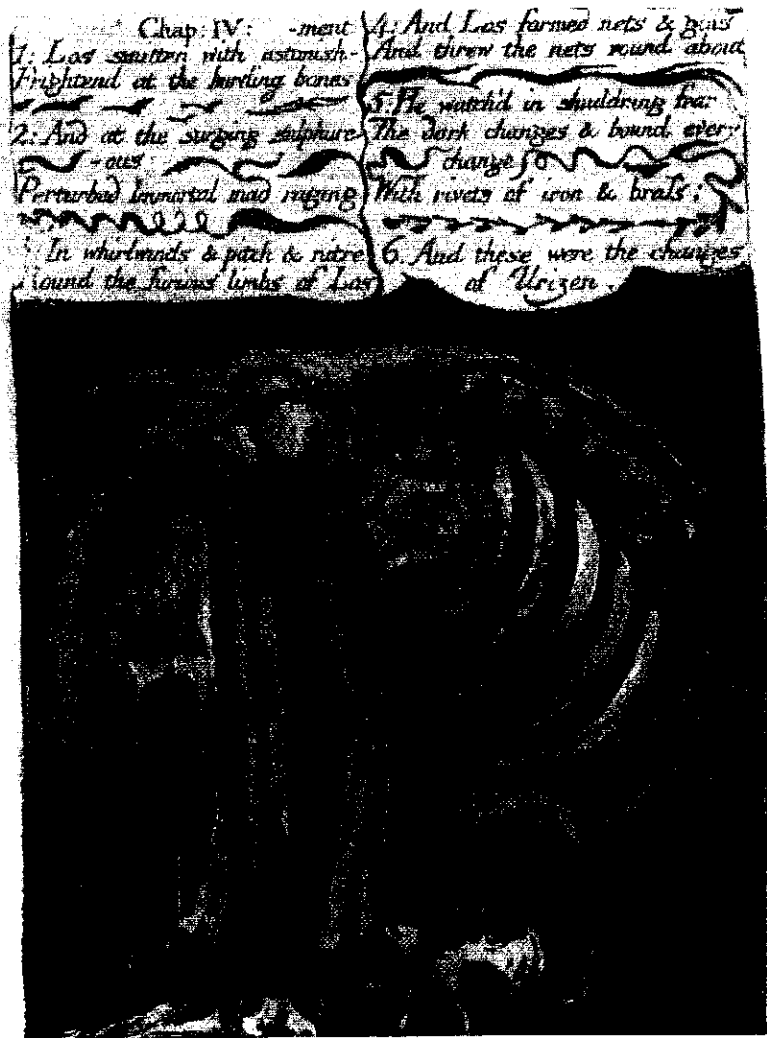


Figure 2. "Los smitten with astonishment" (*The Book of Urizen*, Plate 7, Copy B, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PML 63139).

implication in the Urizenic terror unfolding from the past and still "surging sulphureous / Perturbed Immortal mad raging" (plate 7, lines 4–5; fig. 2), the utopian overcoming of history through its completion as critical knowledge is no longer possible.

And yet, even in a world, like Hamlet's, where the pale cast of thought

has seemingly corroded the individual's native hue of resolution, all is not lost; for Blake's idea of the book is itself an attempt to mobilize what Walter Benjamin was to call our "weak Messianic power," that is, the materially and spiritually vivid illumination of a catastrophic history that, *from its very beginning and by virtue of that beginning*, has compromised all means for our recovery from it. To grasp that inescapable "nexus of guilt among the living" (*der Schuldzusammenhang von Lebendigem*) (*Selected Writings* 307)—a phrase defining what Benjamin understood as myth and what we may call ideology—is to contemplate, actively and imaginatively, a past of which we, our curiosity, and our expressive capabilities are all joint (and irremediably corrupt) effects; plate 14 of Blake's *Book of Urizen* dramatizes that moment:

Thus the eternal prophet was divided
 Before the death image of Urizen
 For in changeable clouds and darkness
 In a wintery night beneath
 The Abyss of Los stretch'd immense
 And now seen now obscured to the eyes
 Of Eternals the visions remote
 Of the dark separation appear'd.
 As glasses discover Worlds
 In the endless Abyss of space
 So the expanding eyes of Immortals
 Beheld the dark visions of Los,
 And the globe of life trembling
 (Copy D, plate 14; fig. 3)

Most vividly, plate 6 depicts Los, "Groaning! gnashing! groaning!" over his own "wrenching apart" (fig. 4)—defeating his arms' desperate attempt at preserving his bodily integrity—the primordial crisis (Gr. *krinein* = division) already imaged so luminously on plate 7 (fig. 2). It is the vivid illumination of a mind traumatically divided ("rifted with direful changes") between the vivid, and often oppressive, experience of its historical existence—a quasi-Burkean past choked with the implacable moral law of tradition—and the anxious, if doomed, quest for techniques capable of rendering that past existence intelligible and thereby ensuring our survival. Appropriately enough, the plate's iconic force—reminiscent of nonperspectival medieval representations—grows out of the violent contrast between the "depthless" *Gestalt* of Los trapped "in dreamless night" and his gaze of catastrophic expectation (reinforced by the toothless, seemingly disfigured mouth). Specifically, his eyes show Los craving nothing so much as perspective and distance on "formless unmeasurable death." Blake's figure, which utterly dominates the plate, strikingly anticipates

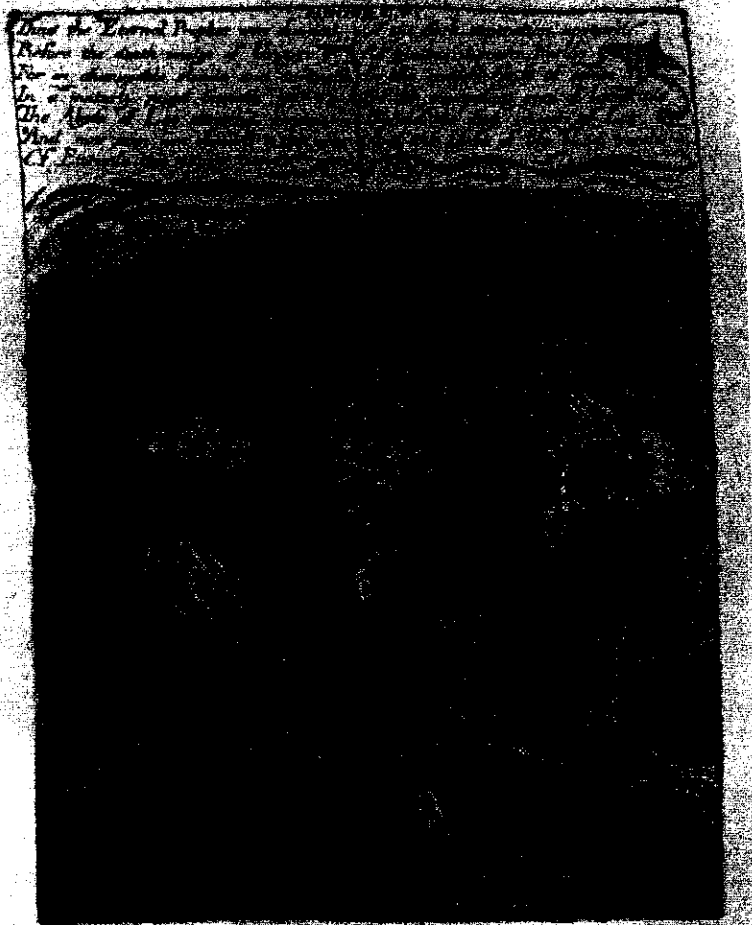


Figure 3. "Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided" (*The Book of Urizen*, Plate 14, Copy B, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PML 63139).

Walter Benjamin's account of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, the "angel of history": "His eyes are staring, his mouth is open[.] . . . His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm . . . irresistibly propels him into



Figure 4. "Los howld in dismal stupor" (*The Book of Urizen*, Plate 6, Copy B, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PML 63139).

the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (*Illuminations* 258). In Blake, as in Benjamin, the image is itself the most vivid and forceful articulation of perspective as a moment of conflict or interference: that between a fantasized, authoritative, and conclusive mode of historical cognition and the abject intuition that any intellectual promise of epistemological self-

sufficiency inevitably resurrects the nefarious (Urizenic) forces of history from which it was purported to redeem us. The images of Blake, in other words, are anticlassical and, in the best sense of the word, postmodern, for they articulate a purposely oblique (depthless) pathos. That is, they no longer conceive pathos as the timeless verity of a self transfigured in the semblance (*Schein*) of the aesthetic; instead, they “illuminate” pathos as the moment of catastrophic recognition that no mere image (or concept, or critical narrative) will ever reconstitute the spiritual and cognitive equilibrium whose loss they themselves dramatize with such intensity. Analogously, Benjamin’s ninth thesis—itsself but “the written space of a contradiction”—offers a fleeting glimpse of history as the source of a wholly new kind of pathos, the suffering of a subject “who is denied the image as a place of repose or as an icon blasted out of the past” (Hartman 77, 78).



My second example of the curious affinity between Romantic fictional and disciplinary constructs and what Paul Smith has analyzed as a “kind of ‘meta-paranoia’ [underlying the] humanist practice” (97) of contemporary historicism involves Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794). Believing himself persecuted by Falkland’s “eye of Omniscience,” whose unrelenting gaze Caleb’s invasive behavior had so artfully courted, Caleb concedes that “my sensations [in London] at certain periods amounted to insanity” (316). The novel’s original ending heightens our sense of the plot’s undecidability by observing how Falkland’s fetishistic attachment to “his reputation” as something to remain “for ever inviolate” curiously “harmonized with the madness of my soul” (339). Precisely this paranoid lucidity prompts Caleb—terminally imprisoned both by material walls and by his own, unconfessed compulsions—to embark on writing the very story of his life now available to us as *Caleb Williams*, the novel. Drawing sustenance to the very end from the negative fantasy of his unending persecution and impending destruction, Caleb notes: “I feel now a benumbing heaviness, that I conceive to have something in it more than natural. I have tried again and again to shake it off. I can scarcely hold my pen. Surely—surely there is no foul play in all this. My mind misgives me. I will send away these papers, while I am yet able to do so” (345). Thus Caleb winds up his account by reinforcing once more the very conspiratorial affect that we encounter in the book’s familiar opening paragraph: “My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity. I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny” (5). And if Caleb the protagonist concludes his tale of woe by furnishing Caleb the narrator with his conspiratorial hypothesis, the latter’s first-person voice in turn reproduces a self-confirming logic plotted (once again in

advance) by the author himself. Thus Caleb’s opening, subtly equivocal assurance that “my story will, at least, *appear* to have that consistency which is seldom attendant but upon truth” (5) echoes Godwin’s 1832 account of the composition of *Caleb Williams*: “I felt that I had great advantage in . . . carrying back my invention from the ultimate conclusion to the first commencement of the train of adventures upon which I proposed to employ my pen. An entire unity of plot would be the infallible result; and the unity of spirit and interest in a tale truly considered, gives it a powerful hold on the reader, which can scarcely be generated with equal success in any other way” (349–50). Writing one’s own story thus amounts to a compulsive and hermetic game of *fort/da*, an elaborate attempt at reasserting symbolic governance over a reality intuitively grasped as utterly inchoate and in need of symbolic condensation. The novel’s tightly wrought plot achieves that control by neatly balancing the negative romance of Caleb’s persecution of, and eventually by, Falkland against Caleb’s (and Godwin’s) narrative enthrallment of his readership. Just as Caleb’s decision to set himself “as a watch upon my patron” induces in him “a new state of mind”—“watchful, inquisitive, suspicious, full of a thousand conjectures as to the meaning of the most indifferent actions” (112–13, 128)—so Godwin’s authorial conduct of “employing my metaphysical dissecting knife in tracing and laying bare the involutions of motive” of his subjects caused him to feel “in a high state of excitement” during the composition of his book (351, 350). In a deceptively straightforward manner, the novel thus develops Caleb’s professed innocence and Falkland’s alleged corruption as two mutually discrediting metonymic series, the one compulsive and the other premeditated. Such a design effectively baits the reader’s analytic proclivities by hinting regularly at the symptomatic quality of either protagonist’s behavior. The conspiracy at issue, then, is not contained in the text but perpetrated by it; for no matter how thorough our interpretive industry, the vigilant logic undergirding *Caleb Williams* will ultimately defy all closure precisely because it had baited the analytic industry meant to produce such closure in the first place. To that end, the novel repeatedly “plants” evidence in the form of countless “mysterious fatalities” and “instantaneous impulse[s]” of character and circumstance, details designed to instill in the reader an (illusory) consciousness of analytic mastery that will eventually be dismantled by the book’s political and psychological developments. Recalling, nearly forty years later, his excited state of mind during the composition of *Caleb Williams*, Godwin tells us how he had resolved to “write a tale, that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before” (350).



That same, utterly transformative ambition harbored and so defiantly asserted by Godwin and Blake also undergirds Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the last example to be considered here. Again, the stated goal (and the intellectual hypothesis) of the narrative is that it, the text, will constrain the audience to reconceive its cognitive relationship to phenomena ostensibly external to the subject. Kant thus opens his argument not with an outright rejection of the concept of experience but with the curious hypothetical statement that "experiential knowledge might quite possibly be already something composite (*ein Zusammengesetztes*) of what we receive by way of intuition and of what is spontaneously furnished by our cognitive faculties (*Erkenntnisvermögen*), an additive (*Zusatz*) that we cannot distinguish from the basic matter [of experiential data] until extended practice has drawn our attention to this circumstance and has schooled us to make discriminations in this manner" (1787 version B: 1–2; my translation). In this introductory sentence, Kant offers two, mutually confirming, claims: first, that the possibility of knowledge rests on something logically prior to the deceptive primacy of experiential data and, also, prior to our intuitive mechanisms for the reception of such data; and, second, that in order to grasp such a counter-intuitive theory of knowledge, we must effectively abandon all hope for speedy proof and submit to the "extended discipline" (*lange Übung*) of transcendental reflection. Not surprisingly, Kant's *Critique* offers itself as the best or, in any event, the only manual for such mental calisthenics. In other words, he "constructs theoretical entities that serve his purpose. There is no empirical confirmation of Kant's hypothesis, however, since what counts as experience, and also as confirmation, is created by our acceptance of that hypothesis" (Rosen 25).

Kant's concept of experience as grounded in an imperceptible synthesis of our intuitive and conceptual powers will yet have to confront its ultimate, repeatedly deferred presupposition: whether to view mind itself strictly as one more *effect* of this synthetic transcendental apparatus or, alternatively, to argue that mind (as "pure self-consciousness") actually governs this synthesis itself a priori. Recognizing that his term "transcendental" has been functioning in ways virtually indistinguishable from "hypothetical," Kant calls the question: does mind exercise rational governance over "its" representations (including those of "itself"), or is it merely a contingent and logically belated effect of its own subterranean synthetic activity? Given the apparent impossibility of justifying a project whose internal organization rests on our acceptance of a hypothesis about matters prior to experience—thereby precluding all verification or falsification by experience—Kant introduces a new type of preconscious symbolization in order to ensure both the self-conscious integrity of the philosophical subject known as apperception and the rationality and legitimacy of its

representations as knowledge. This symbolic activity is introduced under the name "schematism" and is further characterized as a "product and, as it were, a monogram, of pure a priori imagination, through which . . . images themselves first become possible." Posited as the hidden capstone for Kant's analytic edifice, however, this schematism—troped with such revealing poignancy as a "monogram"—must perforce remain inscrutable and indemonstrable.¹¹ As Kant notes, "in its application to appearances and their mere form, . . . [the schema is] an art concealed in the depth of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to uncover, and to have open to our gaze" (183). The Kantian schema curiously recalls Blake's Urizen—that cocooned embodiment of Reason—philosophy's ultimate presupposition of "silent activity / Unseen in tormenting passions; / An activity unknown and horrible; / A self-contemplating shadow / In enormous labours occupied" (*Book of Urizen*, plate 3, lines 17–22). In Kant's transcendental theory, then, all justification is necessarily internal, a metonymic chain of hypotheses that, by virtue of their repeated usage as pseudo-explanations, congeal into valid components of what Kant calls "transcendental reflection." Having charged all possible experience with conspiring to claim independence when, in fact, it is utterly incapable of representing itself, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* seeks to remedy the situation by offering its own hypothetical account as a logically viable answer to this conundrum. Kant's answer comes in the form of something he calls "transcendental schematism," a subterranean synthetic activity designed to restore the epistemic coherence of the subject and its world from which Kant's argument, until just now, had taken such pains to estrange us. The kind of conspiratorial hermeneutics here at issue has been described as "a method for begging the question on a grand scale," which is to say, a "method for proving things, independent of empirical appeals, by demonstrating that they are self-evidently presupposed by what is (supposedly) self-evident" (Smith, 1988, 128).



A circular structure of retroactive prophecy, of correcting the past from the plight of its illusory and oppressive cohesion, thus governs not only the prophetic and fictional narratives of Blake and Godwin but also Kant's contemporaneous project of philosophy as transcendental discourse. The fetish of cognitive autonomy—so jealously pursued by Godwin's Caleb Williams and Blake's Urizen—also structures the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In so doing, it causes Kant's narrative to display the same ambivalence of hubris and hypothesis, mythic violence and performative skill, that choreographs the relationship between Caleb and Falkland, or Los and Urizen in those narratives. Pivoting on the *strictly hypothetical* agency of

a “transcendental reflection” charged with detailing all formal (a priori) constraints on human cognition, Kant’s philosophical narrative thus reproduces the very circularity for which it purports to offer a rational accounting. From here, then, it is no great leap toward the postmodern academic project of a thorough ideological critique and historical comprehension, a project whose metaphoric overtones of a “hands-on” activist practice aimed at a definitive “grasp” of the past betrays its affinity with Urizen’s, Falkland’s/Caleb’s, and indeed Kant’s fetish of an independent, all-encompassing, and unscrupulously efficient mode of cognition. We may have good cause, then, to read prophetic, fictional, and philosophical arguments of the kind just examined as hubristic attempts at exposing an allegedly illusory or potentially uncontainable otherness—that is, the utter indeterminacy of the noumenon in Kant, the inscrutable impulses and cathections of Caleb, and the ever “expanding eyes of Immortals” in Blake. In alarmingly similar manner, the discourse of postmodern ideological critique also appears to unfold with an intellectual concision virtually indistinguishable from the formal-stylistic integrity of those historical representations whose aesthetic obfuscations it purports to correct. It may not be surprising to find a number of recent critics drawing our attention to the persistence of a strong formalist current within the New Historicist project. However deleterious, such persistent formalisms also bespeak a deep-seated blindness to the ironies slumbering just beneath the surface of methods whose practitioners seek to anchor their intuitions and passions in a grid of objective propositions and rigorous methods. This resilience of the New Critical aesthetic, meanwhile, constitutes not only a disciplinary echo of Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s faith in the simulation of subjective affect in organic textual forms; it also reproduces the outline of Benjamin’s more critical, quasi-postmodern understanding of representation (be it textual, imagistic, cinematic, architectonic) as a comprehensive simulation of formal (pseudo)experiences designed precisely so as to allow individuals and communities to defend against the threat of an utterly inchoate and ineffable history.

In the prefatory musings on his late book, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Paul de Man draws our attention to the peculiar circumstance that “the apparent coherence *within* each essay is not matched by a corresponding coherence *between* them.” Sensing an imminent shift from the rhetorical to the historical dimensions of the Romantic text, Paul de Man continues in an ironic, even self-deprecating, manner by observing that,

as far as the general question of romanticism is concerned, I must leave the task of its historical definition to others. I have myself taken refuge in more theoretical inquiries into the problems of figural language. . . . I feel myself compelled to repeated frustration in a

persistent attempt to write as if a dialectical summation were possible beyond the breaks and interruptions that the readings disclose. The apparent resignation to aphorism and parataxis is often an attempt to recuperate on the level of style what is lost on the level of history. By stating the inevitability of fragmentation in a mode that is itself fragmented, one restores the aesthetic unity of manner and substance that may well be what is in question in the historical study of romanticism. Such is the cost of discursive elegance . . . (viii–ix)¹²

The ironies in this passage abound, indeed increase exponentially; for if we feel tempted by the historicist project, de Man insists, we will eventually also have to address the contradiction between its totalizing methodological imperatives and its incompleteness as an empirical practice. To this impending recognition of historicism as a type of liberal utopia in disciplinary form, we may choose to respond with further reflections on the general status of the humanities, historical knowledge, and the aesthetic’s resistance to definition, and so on, though such reflections could logically no longer be sanctioned by any authority other than that of the critic writing. Even then, and in inverse proportion to its “discursive elegance,” the articulate project of rhetorical analysis displays traces of those historical concerns whose utopian and implausible character it seeks to evade. In de Man’s Schlegelian preface—itself something of an extended, self-ironizing aphorism—statements of criticism have been pared down to articulate traces of the (now abandoned) historicist fantasy of our complete critical purchase on that past.¹³

The “prolific” fragmentation into numerous Romanticisms predicted (perhaps with a hint of Urizenic mischief) by Arthur Lovejoy so many decades ago has thus produced two equally troubled and truly post-Romantic responses: first, the particularist approach of the New Historicist and materialist inquiries that, by now, have fragmented the “field” of Romanticism into discrete nationalisms, regionalisms, and localisms (ranging from studies of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh Romanticisms to vivid and detailed accounts of Clare’s Northamptonshire or Blake’s Lambeth) and the geopolitics of Romanticism’s early imperial and colonial cultures. In a similar vein, the conception of Feminist Romantic Studies—that is, the editorial and critical projects aimed at defining a gendered Romanticism “of their own”—may also be seen as the product of an almost instinctually “liberal” academic tradition whose practitioners react to the perceived incompatibility of critical paradigms of Romanticism by splitting that difference rather than sharpening its terms to the point that unpremeditated insight and learning can occur. Observing the precarious tendency of intellectual pluralism to slide into cognitive fatigue and moral indifference, Adorno sometime ago repudiated an “aesthetic tolerance that simply acknowledges

works of art in their limitation, without breaking it, [and] leads them only to a false downfall, that of parallel existence (*Nebeneinander*) which denies the claims of a single truth."¹⁴ To the extent that the quest for a definition of Romanticism has bequeathed us a more precise sense of epistemological crisis, the historicist spirit in which localisms, particularisms, and pluralism have been proffered as solutions perpetuates the (utopian) longing for a unified field-theory for Romanticism by dispersing it in a number of increasingly solipsistic specializations with political valences of their own. As Alan Liu has argued, this paradigm of extensively fragmented historicisms has thus left us with the inherently formalistic paradox of the critic as "a subject looking into the past for some other subject able to define what he himself, or she herself, is; but all the search shows in its uncanny historical mirror is the same subject he/she already knows: a simulacrum of the poststructuralist self insecure in its identity. . . . Whereas before the action of the Hero discovered historical plurality to be literary unity, the 'expressive' action of the new hero, modern subjectivity, discovered just the reverse. *History* was now the dominating unity that had to be expressed as literary plurality" ("Power" 733, 737).¹⁵

The larger question to be addressed by the methods of cultural historiography (of which Romantic studies is a vital part) is how to respond to a past that has defined the rhetorical, disciplinary, and institutional mechanisms that the historical positivism of the last century and the New Historicism of ours have been devising in the hope of transcending that past. As the narrative models of Kant, Godwin, and Blake variously demonstrate, any attempt at redeeming the past either through exhaustive contextualization or by articulating its contradictions through a "self-consciously belated" hermeneutics of disbelief is to take the bait of hypothetical narratives that rose to prominence in an age of rapidly collapsing revolutionary ideals. Having thus anticipated, indeed predetermined, the professedly "critical" future responses to its aesthetic and philosophical output, Romanticism also defines for us the larger methodological and critical stakes of the humanities today. Once again, Benjamin offers suggestive hints for reconfiguring our own critical moment with that of its historical object. Arguing, as so often in his early writings, against the restrictive positivist appropriation of Kant's critical philosophy by the Neo-Kantians, Benjamin contends that any philosophy contented with explaining "the true . . . in terms of correct understanding" is a "theory of knowledge, but just that—a theory." For as long as it is being construed exclusively as a matter of technique, epistemological practice

can never hit upon the unity of existence, but only upon new unities of various conformities to laws, whose integral is "existence." However, the original and primal concept of knowledge does not reach

a concrete totality of experience in this context, any more than it reaches a concept of existence. But there is a unity of experience that can by no means be understood as a sum of experiences, to which the concept of knowledge as teaching is *immediately* related in its continuous development. (*Selected Writings* 107–9)

The question of criticism is thus always more than academic, and answers to it will have to be larger in scope than can be hoped for from disciplinary or methodological adjustments. Given our strong intuition that the past conspired in the manufacture and transmission of the very intellectual methods and institutions through which we might attempt to comprehend and redeem it, criticism arguably should continue to be written with dedication, albeit not the dedication to the transient methodological and thematic predilections of a "profession." Rather, Benjamin suggests, "the object of this teaching [*Lehre*], this totality of experience, is religion, which, however, is presented . . . in the first instance only as teaching" (*Selected Writings* 109). Academic "field work"—teaching and writing—should proceed with genuine critical fervor, though the strength of our critical intuitions will no longer be underwritten by the methodological coherence of a given critical idiom, nor by the indignant acuity with which critical languages conduct their topographical survey and mapping of history as a complex aggregate of aesthetic, economic, and religious obfuscation. For inasmuch as the study of history now appears to have exhausted its disciplinary resources—having recognized them, finally, as belated "effects" or unconscious "supplements" engendered by the very *object* of its study, the past—questions of criticism will cease to be merely intra-institutional matters, in which form they could always be solved by following curricular and methodological paths of our own devising. Instead, they replay the same ethical dilemma that, in the view of current critiques of ideology, past aesthetic models of representation had allegedly foreclosed. The *telos* of knowledge thus would surrender the utopianism endemic to any abstract rationalist process in favor of an arguably more fluid dynamic of teaching, a process no longer governed by the formal-technical correctness of disciplinarians but, ideally, by the ethical responsibility variously met by the choreography of knowledge as a process whose continued existence (and afterlife) we locate in writers and their audiences.

The lesson of Romanticism thus could never be plausibly determined by the pursuit of greater methodological and professional sophistication that currently undergirds the ongoing project of tabulating that period's philological and aesthetic forms and their supposed ideological implications. For Benjamin, as for Schlegel, Novalis, or Coleridge (to name only a few provocative figures), knowledge implies something holistic, not cumulative, and it lives on the intensity of its articulation, not on the conceptual

and evidentiary scope of a technique. "Isn't whatever can't be multiplied after a certain point just as much a historical entity [*Einheit*] as something that can no longer be divided?" Schlegel asks.¹⁶ And if indeed "all systems [are] individuals just as individuals are systems at least in embryo and tendency" (*Athenaeum* 242:51), then the critical project of historical knowledge amounts to an attempt at clarifying and symbolizing intuitions of an ethical or, in Kant's and (partially) Schlegel's language, "practical" motivation: "The subject of history is the realization of all that is practically necessary" (*Athenaeum* 90:29). In Schlegel's and Benjamin's alternative to the fetish of an objectivism that continues to legitimate, even now, various critical approaches as epistemologically correct and (at least by implication) as politically and morally necessary, criticism no longer names a professionalized method but, as a conversation ceaselessly questioning its longing for narrative authority, it (like Schlegel's concept of *Bildung*) pivots on a subtle dialectic of disillusionment and freedom, irony and religion. At his most Blakean, Schlegel effectively suggests that discursive conventions and methods are obfuscations of responsibility for the knowledge that the critic purports to communicate. Yet, when thought of as what Schlegel and Benjamin refer to as a holistic culture (*Bildung*) or teaching (*Lehre*) respectively, knowledge constitutes a total mediation of the self; in an uncannily Blakean turn of phrase, Schlegel thus insists that a true "mediator is one who perceives the divinity within himself and who self-destructively sacrifices himself in order to reveal, communicate, and represent to all mankind his divinity in his conduct and actions, in his words and works. If this impulse is not present, then what was perceived was not divine or not really his own. To mediate and to be mediated are the whole higher life of man and every artist is a mediator for all other men" (*Philosophical Fragments* 98; no. 44). Such teaching is precisely *not* moralizing but an irreducible transferential and counter-transferential production of the self through the cultivation of the other, and vice versa. In Schlegel's words, "no occupation is so human as one that simply supplements, joins, fosters" (99; no. 53). No longer a simple matter of technique or doctrine, teaching and knowledge unfold with the full ironic consciousness of their disciplinary and conceptual impossibility. To speak of irony here, Schlegel insists, is not to concede epistemological defeat. Indeed, it could spell defeat only for those craving personality rather than individuality, personalities whose exaggerated sense of self accounts for their failure to understand criticism as "work that divinely surpasses every intention" (99, 107; nos. 60, 136). To put it in positive terms, the irony at stake is "the clear consciousness of eternal agility," and a criticism undertaken in this spirit strongly resembles the antinomianism of what Blake calls illumination or what Schlegel defines as virtue, namely, "reason transformed into energy" (100, 96; nos. 63, 23).

Crucial to the idea of criticism as a unique mode of intellectual production is its ability to maintain a speculative, indeed constitutive, distance to its intellectual object or issue. Some of the more thoughtful accounts of intellectual practice (by no means always compatible)—including those of Adorno or Heidegger—thus insist on a cautious, reflexive attitude toward method (be it positivist or dialectical), particularly because any outright identification with a given method invariably entails a fetishization of the objects or issues supposedly rendered intelligible by it. In the final analysis, fetishization always comes down to some form of projection, something echoed by Alan Liu's description of "the New Historicism [as] in effect a profoundly narcissistic method" ("Power" 746). We may thus view the exigencies of Romantic historicism as an instance of "negative transference," that is, as affirming the wholly contentless lucidity of the critic through an axiomatically suspicious critical narrative that purports to name, in the form of an indictment, its *essential* other: the past. Commenting on "the inability of historicism to specify a social or political good that historicism might help to achieve," Steven Cole offers this summation: "What historicism wants is evaluation without values. . . . The politics of romanticism is located somewhere else, and as yet historicism has done nothing to indicate where that somewhere else might be" (Cole 48–49). In other words, a method of purely formal or technical correctness will produce a knowledge so rigidly circumscribed as to privilege the formal competence of that method's practitioners to the virtual exclusion of all intuitive or ethical matter.¹⁷

My arguments here against a purely formal-logical style of analysis committed to overcoming the past as a repository of allegedly deleterious aesthetic forms and political values—and against the oddly contentless exegetical confidence of postmodern critiques of ideology—recall the analogous break of the Jena Romantics with the formalisms of Fichte's philosophy of 1795–97. Arguably the most probing and articulate member of that group, Novalis insisted that by paring down the idea of *Reflexion* to a mere form or technique, criticism could never generate values and, consequently, could never enrich and cultivate (*bilden*) the individual.¹⁸ Where the "raw discursive thinker" mobilizes his scholastic technique to assemble an "intellectual artifact" (*Gedankenkunststück*; 2.314), a genuinely searching, poetic conception of intellectual life would be the "living reflection" (*lebendige Reflexion*; 2.316), a process aimed at defining "real philosophy" (*reale Philosophie*) as a "lived theory" (2.318). For Novalis, language itself embodies this repudiation of systematic philosophy in favor of a poetic, living "cultivation" (*Bildung*) of intuitions that thought knows will never entirely merge with *any* discursive or propositional form. Thus his "magic" conception of language renounces any epistemology premised on "general

signs" and, instead, enjoins thought itself to conceive of "each word as one of conjuring" (*Beschwörung*; 2.313). Thought, however, not only destabilizes its objects by drawing them into the sphere of subjective intelligibility; for corresponding to this transfiguration of an "other" into knowledge is a fundamental transfiguration of the self: "I can experience something only by assimilating it to myself; it is, consequently, both an alienation (*Alienation*) of myself and a dedication or transformation of a foreign substance into mine: the new product differs from both factors" (2.340-41). Like Fichte, whose lectures he attended in 1795, Novalis understands all critical reflection as containing systematic intentions. Yet unlike his teacher, Novalis identifies it as the "purpose" and "destiny" (*Bestimmung*) of all critical thought to be translated into expressions of an intensity and lucidity that will effectively transfigure the self: "The act of leaping beyond one's self [*des sich selbst Überspringens*] is always the highest—the point of origin—the *genesis of life*" (2.345).

Where Schlegel speaks of *Bildung* and *poiesis* as a dream of narrative mastery continuously succumbing to irony, Novalis views intellectual practice as modernity echoing an irrecoverable mysticism: parallel to its intuitive grasping of an object, thought is constrained by the reflexive awareness that it will only ever achieve an etiolated or provisional relationship to life. While translating its intuitions into a knowledge that will prove inevitably contingent and provisional, thought does so already aware that it can approach its intuitions *only* in the alienated and belated modality of critical reflection. From Schlegel and Novalis to Benjamin and Adorno, the question forever pressing is that concerning the distance we ought to maintain toward the objects of knowledge—as well as toward the affect generated by our knowing—while exploring the complex historical and aesthetic phenomena of romantic culture.¹⁹ Adorno in particular insists on a certain degree of "irresponsibility, of blitheness springing from the volatility of thought." Whereas the Marxist and Nietzschean hermeneutics of suspicion risks deteriorating into a self-privileging and totalizing negative politics, Adorno rejects Materialism (cf. epigraph) because it "reduces the detachment of thought to a reality, [one] that reality itself no longer tolerates." Instead, he contends, thought must retain a speculative (though no longer systematic) quality, "an element of exaggeration, of over-shooting the object, of self-detachment from the weight of the factual."

As soon as thought repudiates its inviolable distance and tries with a thousand subtle arguments to prove its literal correctness, it founders. If it leaves behind the medium of virtuality, of anticipation that cannot be wholly fulfilled by any single piece of actuality; in short, if instead of interpretation it seeks to become mere statement, every-

thing it states becomes, in fact, untrue. . . . If, on the other hand, it tried to claim its distance as a privilege, it would act no better, but would proclaim two kinds of truth, that of the facts and that of ideas. That would be to decompose truth itself, and truly to denigrate thought. Distance is not a safety-zone but a field of tension. (126-27)

To conceive of criticism as a practice no longer constricted by the self-privileging methods and false utopian motives of retroactive mastery, we will have to gauge the distance between the institutional settings and discursive practices that we continue to inhabit, and our intuitive understanding of what "critical" practice might—indeed *ought to*—be. If Novalis disconcerts us by transforming criticism into the uncompromisingly individual, even mystical domain of transcendental poetry, Benjamin and, even more so, Adorno balance the Romantic account by drawing our attention to the inherent risks of any intellectual position that is radically antiformalist and antisystematic. Far from glamorizing the tensions and impasses contained in the notion of Romantic irony as some breathtaking epistemological advance—such as can be observed in the discourse of antifoundationalism today—Adorno seems fully aware that both the mystical or antinomian affirmations of the individual in writers like Novalis and Blake *and* the retroactive disarticulation of their faith by the accounts of positivist or dialectical historicisms will invariably restrict knowledge either to something supposedly authentic yet incommunicable, or to a discursive yet wholly negative matter; in both instances, the terms of such knowledge appear strictly (indeed often narcissistically) controlled by its producer.

And yet, notwithstanding its partial blindness to that conundrum, the concept of *Bildung* operative in writers like Godwin, Blake, or the Jena Romantics often enough anticipates Adorno's description of intellectual activity as inherently divided between its declared focal point and the reflexive awareness of thought as abiding at an unbridgeable remove from "its" objects. At their best, writers like Blake and Novalis anticipate the ideal of Romantic pedagogy as a process in which the narrative fantasy of organic development is continually punctured by the interventions of thought, at once unrelentingly reflexive and provisional. Rather than seeking to overcome the antagonisms between epistemological technique and ethical motivation, Novalis and Schlegel conceived transcendental poetry itself as the medium in which to inscribe the irreducible tension between knowledge as a formal pursuit (criticism) and as a dynamic intuition (life). Following the Jena Romantics' idea of *poiesis*, we may thus conceive of criticism in terms of ethics rather than technique, a mode of thinking, teaching, and writing always obligated to reflect on (though never able to indulge in) the seduction of methodological and narrative closure. For any

attempt to reify the past in purely discursive and conceptual form invariably loses all perspective or distance on the ideological dynamics of the present in which such belated knowledge is being produced and circulated. As Lee Patterson has put it, "To apply the conditions of our scholarship to life is an almost inevitable transaction, but it in fact denatures, because it dematerializes, our historical existence. Indeed, the lines of influence ought really to run the other way, from our lives to our scholarship" (63).

The remarkable collusion between the cultural output of Romanticism—in the broader sense of European cultural history as it unfolds between the later eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century—and the historicist methods committed to identifying and resolving the enigmas and antagonisms of that output suggests that one of the motives encoded in the formal and material practices of the Romantic aesthetic involved the emergence of criticism (and its institutional forums) as a desirable and legitimate supplement to that aesthetic. Given the logic of Romanticism's critical, fictional, and prophetic narratives examined earlier, the project of a belated, "critical" articulation of Romanticism's allegedly symptomatic (or aesthetic) ideology may, in fact, constitute but a repetition, a supplemental effect of that very symptom. In reconsidering our present technologies of critical knowledge as having been shaped, a fortiori, by the very culture that these technologies hope to possess in conceptual and disciplinary form, we may not only accept but, perhaps, welcome Schlegel's distinction between criticism as a form of intellectual conquest ("a laborious game of dice with hollow phrases") and as the reflexive experience of the *Idea*, that "continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts." Romanticism, we find, is an idea in the spirit of Schlegel's definition: "An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony" (*Athenaeum* 121:33). Schlegel's concept of irony thus throws into relief the undecidable place of criticism (*Kritik*): Can it legitimately hope to correct (retroactively, as it were) Romanticism's ideological entanglements, or is that period distinguished by having bequeathed us the irony of a critical enterprise vacillating between a quest for conceptual and methodological authority and a reflexive understanding of that quest as an impossible one? The unending supersession of one critical paradigm by another—effectively adding up to a concise history of cultural institutions and politics over the last hundred and fifty years or so—also suggests that, being so intricately bound up with this irony, Romanticism has survived by continually reinventing itself through its belated other, the reader, the philologist, the critic, the cultural prophet, the liberator of marginalized or otherwise forgotten voices, forms, media, and traditions.

Indeed, it appears that the idea of Romanticism—whether we choose to limit it to a merely heuristic fiction or pronounce it as a dignified (if polyvalent) critical object—was simultaneously prepossessed and retroactively

defined by the critical potential slumbering beneath, say, the enigmatic textual surfaces of the Wordsworthian ballad, the transparently nostalgic historicism of Scott's fiction, or the encryption of economic and gender politics in the shrewd choreography of voices in Jane Austen's novels. The same teleological bond may also be found to account for the overwhelmingly institutional understanding of our own cultural modernity, quite arguably an echo of the same psychology that caused various London middle-class communities and Regency provincial towns and cities to pursue and realize their quest for an abiding cultural capital in the interactive forums of widely subscribed literary reviews, new symphony halls, or sumptuous art exhibits and galleries that redefined taste as "educated yearning . . . accompanied by an exchange of goods and money" (Eaves 47).²⁰ Without diminishing the role of other demographic, regional, and spiritual communities fashioning their own aesthetic, it could be said (and I have argued the point in greater detail elsewhere)²¹ that the most abiding and powerful bequest of the Romantic aesthetic involves the ideal of an enlightened, liberal, and formal-aesthetically discriminating middle-class consciousness, a vision that to this day commands enormous (perhaps excessive) moral and cultural credit. Above all, its sustained authority appears vested in the highly pragmatic and flexible symbolization of its interests as seemingly universal, quasi-natural beliefs. Hence, in shrewdly intuitive ways, the Romantic bourgeoisie avoided any unmediated, fully explicit, and self-conscious articulation of its beliefs. For to do so would have constrained it to become conscious of its historically contingent, "interested" situation and, before long, would have vitiated its presumptive moral credit. Both in the formal-aesthetic and disciplinary-institutional sense, the cultural movements and figures examined in the following essays thus constitute part of Romanticism's constitutive and sheltering investment in *mediation*, that is, in the negotiating by individuals of their economic and moral interest (and the ambivalences typically associated with it) through the dynamics of community, and in turn configuring the interests of communities through aesthetic and contiguous discursive modes of representation. Long ago—and much to the surprise and dismay of the more orthodox core of a temporarily vibrant Marxist community in the United States—Kenneth Burke argued that communities rest on a symbolic infrastructure, specifically on certain rhetorical forms particularly suited to sustaining a given community's beliefs by "expressing" them in the form of aesthetic "ideas" and "forms."²² Eschewing the adversarial dynamics of public discourse in the affective, private concision of an expressive aesthetic, the various constituencies of Romanticism's new demographic paradigm, the Nation, thus seek to preserve their political unconscious with what Hegel was to call "the cunning of reason." In other words, com-

munity rests on a (Kantian) aesthetic pleasure (*Lust*), a state of eloquent not-knowing, which has been characterized as the submerged cunning of our vernacular culture, a "continuous flow of diurnally enacted genial relationships which constitute unaffected moral association" (Oakeshott 68).

It may thus be sensible to take up the idea, first advanced by Morse Peckham some twenty-five years ago, of giving Romanticism a *functional* rather than "attributional construction." To argue that "the problem of understanding Romanticism is the problem of locating with accuracy its problem" (Peckham 218, 217) is to trace the evolution of the bourgeois aesthetic as the reflex of an inherently divided, specialized, and alienated culture. Such a society, Schiller had argued, ought to seek redemption from the alienated consciousness of its own modernity in the exclusive sphere of aesthetic simulacra, a community of individuals joined by their "virtual" (symbolic) productivity and expertise, and by hermeneutic experiences that would incrementally mediate them with the idea of the State itself. Premised on, and further nourished by, their self-confirming, near-axiomatic faith in a shared quasi-universal sensibility, the "middling" classes—whether rural, provincial, or metropolitan; vested in manufacture, trade, or the professions—appear all but inextricable from this cultural capital. Indeed, the relationship between class and culture is intricately dialectical in that the distinctness and continued viability of a middle class is premised on its being scrupulously discriminated from the allegedly desiccated cosmopolitanism of "polite" culture and from the presumptive "vulgarity" of lower-class artisan life. The integrity and truly representative character of this demographic formation thus depends on its ability to transfigure previously vernacular modes of production into aesthetic forms that are to emerge as the new gold standard of national culture.

To understand Romanticism's idea of aesthetic education as the development of a representative type of symbolic proficiency in a large number of individuals is thus also to relate questions of genre (however implicitly) to larger political and economic issues. If only at a provisional, synecdochic level, then, this collection of essays also wishes to draw attention to the continuities between the textual, musical, and visual encoding of the period's various incarnations of a "demographic unconscious." As the rich array of contributions makes so abundantly clear, the study of Romanticism's diverse cultural communities invariably begins by scrutinizing distinctive material and discursive practices devised in an (often unself-conscious) attempt to secure a more precise and abiding type of affect for their participants. Central to the project of shaping such communities, ranging from the salon culture to the imagined demographic body of a nation of "Britons" is, once again, the effectivity of the aesthetic as an obliquely pedagogical endeavor. As I have argued earlier on, we have good

cause to conceive criticism as an instance of self-conscious crisis, a fleeting moment of negotiation between our fantasy of an objective methodological purchase on the past (and hence on our own present) and our simultaneous, abject awareness that such a project, far from being objective, might effectively reproduce the very terrors of history from which it purports to shelter us in the commodity form of critical knowledge. If the response to a consciousness of crisis ought to be, as I have also argued, one of ethical commitment to unfolding that crisis in the various forums and modes of teaching—the pursuit whose humanity, as Schlegel had suggested, lies in the fact that it "simply supplements, joins, fosters" (*Philosophical Fragments* 99; no. 53)—the essays in this collection, taken cumulatively, do just that. What weighs more, they do so by exploring how the elaboration of communities in the Romantic period essentially followed the same logic: that of producing community and stability through the subtly regulative play of an aesthetic model continually anticipating and predetermining the conditions and terms of its belated critical reception and elaboration.

Notes

- 1 In his study of the idioms of contemporary criticism, Jean-Pierre Mileur draws our attention to its shared "sense of the heroism of renunciation—a sense that something of value, something of desire must be traded away in exchange for moral and intellectual authority. Unfortunately, when imaginatively inadequate or unsatisfying use is made of that authority, criticism lapses into nostalgia, pines for what it has renounced" (10). More recently, Steven Cole has worked out several analogous incongruities in the rhetoric of Romantic Historicism, such as the paradox that its "pursuit of a self-consciousness unmediated by any ideological content has produced an escalating standard of critical purity," an almost contentless "ethereal insistence that the primary purpose of criticism is to resist any complicity with social or cultural structures of power" (36, 37).
- 2 See Lee Patterson's reading of Jameson and Raymond Williams (48–57) and Steven Cole's insightful account of the logical tensions intrinsic to Romantic Historicism's understanding of agency and value.
- 3 As Lee Patterson notes, "the methodological assumption [of traditional historicism] that historical context can produce interpretive correctness inevitably serves to stigmatize the discordant, the variant, and the deviant as incorrect—as, in effect, nonexistent" (45). Adorno's account of positivism is, if anything, even more pointed.
- 4 For a general account of the critical transformation here alluded to, see Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*; Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism*; Jean-Pierre Mileur, *Critical Romance*; and Paul de Man's discussions of Husserl, Georges Poulet, and Formalist Criticism in *Blindness*.
- 5 Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* 25. Her allusions are to *Paradise Lost* (1.63) and to *The Book of Urizen* (plate 4, line 17).
- 6 For an incisive reading of Levinson's conception of historicism, see Steven Cole, 44–48.
- 7 The notions of conspiracy and of a structural (nonintentionalist) conception of power

- are not incompatible. In fact, as Gordon Wood has shown, the late eighteenth century witnessed a widening in the gap between *intentions* avowed by the individual and the *effect* of actions supposedly taken to realize such intentions. Inasmuch as the rise and (temporary) legitimacy of conspiratorial modes of explanation respond to that contradiction, "conspiracy" can be understood as an explanatory mechanism designed to *preserve* the idea of intentionality, if only in substantially modified form. Shifting from an originary to an inferential concept, intention now appeared knowable only by reading retroactively, something to be traced from (discordant) effects back to the (hidden) cause of an agency either unconscious of its desires or seeking to obfuscate its true objectives. Needless to say, an agency thus reconstructed existed entirely at the mercy of individuals or institutions committed to its (belated) interpretation, and nothing that the subject in question might say or show in an effort to disavow intentions now ascribed to him or her could possibly dispel its inferential construction by an other. On the epistemological and historical aspects of conspiratorial hermeneutics, specifically in 1790s England, see n9 below.
- 8 Steven Cole makes similar observations (48): "Just as Hegel found that only the standpoint of a transhistorical totality allowed *Geist* to forgive the failings of experience, so historicism fantasizes a future from whose standpoint our present occlusion from the Real might in turn be redeemed" (emphasis in original).
 - 9 On the historical origins of conspiratorial models of argumentation in the Romantic period, see Gordon Wood, "Conspiracy"; Jerome Christensen, "Detection"; Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations*; and my own "Paranoia." On the conceptual interest of paranoia and conspiracy for humanist practice, see also Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* 83–99; and Michael Dummett, "Can an Effect Precede Its Cause?" and "Bringing about the Past," in *Truth*.
 - 10 See the works by E. P. Thompson, Iain McCalmain, Jon Mee, and David Worrall.
 - 11 For accounts of the centrality and logical convolutions of the Kantian schematism, see Martin Heidegger, Ernst Cassirer, and Ernst Robert Curtius. As I have argued elsewhere, the crisis of the subject at the very moment of its logical determination becomes itself the point of origin for an essentially *narrative* conception of philosophy in the work of F. W. J. Schelling, who paid particularly close attention to the schematism in his early writings. See my *Idealism* 8–36.
 - 12 The figure of thought offered in this passage mirrors, at the level of theory, de Man's earlier qualification of literary history as a series of textual and rhetorical models of progressively greater demystifying capacity. In his 1967 essay "Criticism and Crisis," he notes "how certain developments in nineteenth-century realism . . . can be interpreted as a gradual demystification of romantic idealism. This leads to a historical scheme in which romanticism represents, so to speak, the point of maximum delusion in our recent past, whereas the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represent a gradual emerging from this aberration, culminating in the breakthrough of the last decades that inaugurates a new form of insight and lucidity, a cure from the agony of the romantic disease. Refining on what may appear too crude in such a historical scheme, some modern critics transpose this movement within the consciousness of a single writer and show how the development of a novelist can best be understood as a successive process of mystifications and partial demystifications. . . . The function of the critic then naturally becomes coextensive with the intent at demystification that is more or less consciously present in the mind of the author" (*Blindness* 13–14).
 - 13 Levinson offers a similar understanding of the transferential character of historicist practice (*Rethinking Historicism* 12–15). See also Frances Ferguson ("On the Num-

bers"), who argues that Meyer H. Abrams's thesis of the French Revolution as the pivotal and all-encompassing historical context for British Romanticism "provide[d] a formal version of politics, the political [being] waged through implicit means." In an equally formalist inversion of that thesis, "Pluralism, the critique of and escape from generalization and collectivization, becomes for McGann both a scholarly method and a political program" (475, 479).

- 14 *Minima Moralia* 75–76; I have modified the translation slightly.
- 15 Recently, David Simpson addressed a further mutation of what Levinson had called the New Historicism's version "of history as the ongoing proliferation of minimal units" ("On the Numbers of Romanticisms" 479), namely, the marked displacement of comprehensive critical narratives by the increasingly self-referential habits of "storytelling, anecdotes, and conversation in current academic criticism" (Simpson 64–71). Indeed, it seems highly improbable that an imaginative response to the problem of historical knowledge should be found in the curious hybrid of professionalism and hedonism that has lately been offered up under titles such as *Confessions of the Critics* or, in more generic form, as "experimental critical" writing. The first to draw attention to the dubious attempt at compensating for the conceptual and logistical inconveniences of macrohistorical and macrotheoretical analysis with such an *ersatz* kind of ethics, a privileged, privatized hedonism" was Terry Eagleton. To theoretically and historically proficient critics (and to the majority of contributors in this volume), this "new style of meditation on the body, on pleasures and surfaces, zones and techniques" (Eagleton 7) remains a politically suspect dissimulation of the critics' affluent professionalism in the form of languid prose reminiscences wholly devoid of any transpersonal intellectual agenda and responsibility. It hardly needs to be pointed out, then, how such an idiom replicates the rhetorical form (and the evasive politics) of those canonical works of Romanticism over whose critical analysis it so evidently despairs.
- 16 In his *Athenaeum* fragments, having argued that it is impossible to study history without hypotheses, Schlegel goes on to state that "if one refuses to recognize this, then the choice is surrendered to instinct, chance, or fate; and so one flatters oneself that one has established a pure solid empiricism quite a posteriori, when what one actually has is an a priori outlook that's highly one-sided, dogmatic, and transcendental" (*Philosophical Fragments* 48–49; no. 226).
- 17 As Cole further notes, "the evasion here of ethical argument, the refusal to specify precisely what the 'objective Real' might be, and to explain why it is a good thing, typifies historicist accounts of romanticism. . . . Perhaps the greatest indication of the failure of historicism is the impossibility of its own position producing the politics it wants to defend" (48–49).
- 18 *Werke*, vol. 2. For a translation of some of these fragments, known as Logologische Fragmente, see Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*. All translations here are my own, and the parenthetical citations follow the German edition.
- 19 See Lee Patterson's insistence "that historical criticism must abandon the hope of any theoretical foundation and come to rest instead upon its own historically contingent moment, and upon convictions that find their final support within experience" (48).
- 20 See, for example, Joel Sachs, or, for the professionalization and institutional reification of the visual arts, John Barrell and Morris Eaves.
- 21 See my *Wordsworth's Profession*, especially pp. 19–37, 143–51.
- 22 See Frank Lentricchia's account (21–38) of Kenneth Burke's highly controversial address to the 1935 American Writers' Congress.

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