

SIGNATURES

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SIGNATURES

Wordsworth's Black Combe Poems: The Pastoral and the Geographer's Eye

John Wyatt (Chichester)

Black Combe is a mountain in the South West of Cumbria, distinctively shaped when seen from the coastal plain and from the Duddon Estuary. A modern poet described it thus: “yet, when you raise your eyes above the willow-line, you see the unmistakably Cumbrian bull-neck of Black Combe”¹. Cumbrian it certainly is, not only in its looming shape, but also in its unpredictable weather. Facing the Irish Sea, it is often rain swept and its summit, though not among the highest in the Lake District, disappears in clouds and fogs. Geologically it is distinct from the surrounding area, being an “inlier” of ancient (Ordovician era) rock at the western end of a long chain of high fells to its east with the low coastal plain to the west. The appearance of the mountain from the Duddon Estuary, from the sea or from the coastal plain around Bootle has intrigued tourists, for with its weather moods and perhaps its forbidding name, it bears an air of mystery. In the period 1810 to 1813, the main focus of this article, William Wordsworth described its moods in verse, but also gave it respectful authority in prose in his *Topographical Description* (later to be called *A Guide to the District of the Lakes*, here called *A Guide* for convenience). In what we now name “The Unpublished Tour”, he claims a preeminence for it:

“Ascend to the top of the Mountain Black Comb, from which I can assert, on the best authority, may be seen a more extensive view than any other eminence the Island affords”². Later, in the 1835 edition of *A Guide* Wordsworth elaborated on this “best authority”. The purpose of this article is to examine the shift of perspective displayed in *A Guide* and in three poems which the mountain inspired in 1810 and 1811 during these middle years of the poet’s long life.

There were two poems written directly about Black Combe in the summer of 1811, during or shortly after a six week holiday taken by William, Mary, Thomas and Catherine Wordsworth by the sea at Bootle, about three miles to the north west of the mountain. “Written with a slate pencil on a stone, on the side of the mountain called Black Comb”, started in 1811, but probably not completed until 1813, was published in 1815, along with “View from the top of Black Comb”. Both are relatively short poems, of twenty-nine and thirty-four lines respectively. A third poem is longer, two hundred and seventy seven lines and in decasyllabic couplets. This more formally constructed poem is “Epistle to Sir George Beaumont, Bart, from the South-west coast of Cumberland – 1811”, published in 1841. As

was common with Wordsworth's publications, the first two poems were regrouped and separated in later collections of verse. There is also a later poem, a sonnet composed in 1833, "In the Channel, between the coast of Cumberland and the Isle of Man", which is a reflection on the two summits, Scawfell and Black Combe, observed from the traveller's ship.

No apology should be necessary for an examination of poems of Wordsworth's later years, although it is still unusual to take seriously the considerable output which growing numbers of his contemporaries admired. In his own lifetime, and particularly in the years under consideration, many judged Wordsworth's talents to be in decline, but, as Gill illustrates, in Victorian times, Wordsworth's reputation amongst other influential groups was certainly not dimmed and eventually he was awarded the mantle of national seer and teacher³. In the immediate decade after 1807, however, only a relatively small group of devotees regarded him as a poet with a future. The poems of the summer of 1811 and the context in which they were written should be of interest precisely because they are from this fairly low period in the poet's fortunes, both literally and artistically. Four years later he was able to publish another manifesto of his poetic destiny, the Preface to *Poems 1815*. In these years of preparation for that statement, he continued to carry in his poetic portfolio the tradition of English landscape and prospect poetry and saw himself not as its destroyer but as

its developer. At the same time his intellect and his emotions were absorbed in the national and international affairs which were uprooting the old established regimes of Europe. Wordsworth was also equally well aware of the social and industrial changes affecting England, including the rapidly growing fields of science. The Black Combe poems of 1811 mark a period of transformation, in which he turned again to the pastoral tradition but changed it by using new perspectives on landscape.

The occasion for the Wordsworths taking a holiday at the seaside was the health of the two children. On top of the smoke – ridden discomforts of Allan Bank and the alterations and disturbance of the subsequent move to the Old Rectory at Grasmere, illness had struck the young family. Whooping cough spread rapidly with serious symptoms. It was decided to try the effects of sea air and bathing to restore the children's health. The family set off in good weather, with a local woman leading their cart over Yewdale and down to the Duddon valley. They stayed first at Duddon Bridge, but, finding it too far from the sea, they moved to a house at Bootle. Juliet Barker⁴ conjectures that Wordsworth was taking a significant personal step in moving close to the sea, because, since his brother, John's death in 1805, he had avoided any association with the source of the tragedy.

The summer weather was not kind, with stormy seas, winds, and rain. The poet's cares at this period were artistic as well as domestic. Although the great project, "The Recluse", had in a sense been tackled by the composition and the imminent publication of what in 1814 became *The Excursion*, this was not the full scale enterprise that Coleridge and he had planned. Coleridge was indeed the missing element. The autumn before the Bootle trip had been the time of the great estrangement between the Wordsworth family and Coleridge and the division deepened. Wordsworth's closest family began to worry about his lack of poetic composition. To his credit (and occasionally this was literally true) there were productions in prose, notably the polemic on the Convention of Cintra and articles for Coleridge's journal, *The Friend*. new type of long poem, "The White Doe of Rylstone", had been written and almost reached publication, but was withdrawn under difficult circumstances. *The Topographical Description* had emerged to accompany Wilkinson's etchings of Lake District scenes. Posterity has judged that this is a major work of prose⁵, but at the time it must have seemed merely a piece of journalism to raise money, diverting Wordsworth from his main mission. In the early summer of 1811 from Grasmere, the first signs of improvement came with a sonnet accompanying a letter to a long-standing friend and patron, Sir George Beaumont. The summer excursion to the seaside therefore came at a depressing time, yet something was emerging.

The Blinded Geographer

The poem "Written with a slate pencil" is a tightly written short piece of prospect verse. In its opening lines it appears to be firmly in the traditional mode of many prospect or hill poems of the previous century. A traveller, a "Bold Adventurer", is climbing Black Combe and the poet asks him to rest while he informs him of the nature of the hill he climbs. In the manuscript version, the traveller is allowed to reach the summit before the message of the poem is revealed. As in John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* of 1726, the climber ascends laboriously before a kind of revelation occurs as a reward for his exertions. There are other examples of this genre, stretching back to John Denham's *Coopers Hill* of 1642 and on to the Spring section of Thomson's *The Seasons*, where the poet imagines Lord Lyttelton on a prospect-viewing height in Hagley Park⁶. Crowe's *Lewesdon Hill* is another instance of this kind of hill prospect poem which, in earlier years, Wordsworth admired. But this is Wordsworth in 1811.

The narrative moves on to the moment of revelation on the summit. The Bold Adventurer is told of another brave man of the hills. A "geographic labourer", that is to say an Ordnance surveyor, is carrying out his duties from his tent with his maps and instruments. His ordered, scientific world is literally overshadowed by the primitive forces of the strange mountain:

He made report
That once, while there he plied his studious work
Within that canvass Dwelling, colours, lines,
And the whole surface of the out-spread map,
Became invisible: for all around
Had darkness fallen – unthreatened, unproclaimed –

The poem ends with a Miltonic ring:

total gloom,
In which he sate alone, with unclosed eyes,
Upon the blinded mountain’s silent top.⁷

This is a very Wordsworthian moment, a “spot of time” no less, although without the shifts in mood that the poet himself relates vibrating around such moments in *The Prelude*. It bears another sense of a “Wordsworthian moment”, for the episode of the sudden shift in the weather on the Lakeland summits is heard in Dorothy Wordsworth’s account of the climbing of Scafell⁸ repeated in the appended “Excursion” to her brother’s *Guide*⁹. The family party on that occasion were walking on Scafell in beautifully clear weather, but an experienced guide warned them of storm about to burst. They perceived a small cloud over the Irish Sea and, before they reached the lower

ground, it had formed into heavy rain which obliterated all views.

At first reading it is easy to see the episode in the poem as a joust, a simple victory of elemental Nature over intrusive technology and modernity. Indeed, the poem begins with a figure of the battle (“tournament and war”), but that describes a struggle of the elements. Here is no attack on prying and poring by the scientific mind. In “Star Gazers” (1807) Wordsworth had pitied the credulity of the crowd in Leicester Square queueing to look at the moon through a showman’s telescope. Deprived of all sense of wonder, there they “slackly go away as if dissatisfied”. Here the mountain surveyor is no callow gaper at the skies, no facile showman. He is, like the person addressed in the poem, an Adventurer with a lonely, exposed task. Like the shepherds of the hills he is privileged:

To him was given
Full many a glimpse (but sparingly bestowed
On timid man) of Nature’s processes
Upon the exalted hills.¹⁰

His loss of vision was an earned experience. Who was this man of the hills permitted to join the ranks of Wordsworth's elite?

According to the record made by Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth obtained the account of the "geographic labourer" from a neighbour at Bootle. The Reverend Dr Satterthwaite was then the incumbent of the Bootle parish (later he was to hold the wealthier living at Lowther). James Satterthwaite (1773—1827) may also have provided intellectual conversation and perhaps the use of his library while the family were on holiday. He was no small country parson. He was a friend of Wordsworth's increasingly successful clerical brother, Christopher, and a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. The Fenwick note does not actually name the surveyor in the anecdote. Satterthwaite "had the particulars from one of the engineers who was employed in making trigonometrical surveys of the region"¹¹. Wordsworth correctly identifies the nature of the surveyor's task: "With books supplied and instruments of art/ To measure height and distance". These are indeed the two dimensions of a trigonometrical survey and printed tables for adjusting measurement made by instruments would be necessary. Perhaps it is not surprising that a Cambridge graduate with an interest in mathematics would be aware of the principles of triangulation. This practical mathematical interest had been seen in

a poem written at least seven years before, "The Pedlar", later to be incorporated into *The Excursion*. There the central figure of the Pedlar (the Wanderer in 1814) as a young man amuses himself by self-taught mathematics on the lonely hills:

While yet he lingered in the rudiments
Of science, and among her simplest laws,
His triangles – they were the stars of heaven.
The silent stars! Oft did he take delight
To measure the altitude of some tall crag
That is the eagle's birthplace, or some peak
Familiar with forgotten years . . .¹²

The surveyor in James Satterthwaite's anecdote would be no amateur. During the period immediately before the Wordsworth's holiday, the British Ordnance's triangulation of the North of England had been vigorously pursued. Although the vast scheme, urged on the government and the Royal Society by William Roy after his successful mapping of the Highlands following the 1745 rebellion, had commenced with the measurement of a baseline on Hounslow Heath as early as 1784, the final components of the triangulation did not reach Yorkshire, Lancashire, Westmorland, Cumberland and East Scotland until the seasons of 1807, 1808 and 1809¹³. The actual mapping and full secondary triangulation followed in later

years. Certainly, by 1809, teams of surveyors would have been familiar figures, some in their distinctive blue uniforms, even in remote parts of the country; perhaps even more so there because they had to seek the most prominent heights with the longest sitings to the other surveying stations. The enterprise was of national significance and therefore of national prominence, not only for military reasons during the Napoleonic Wars, but also for commercial and scientific ends. There was close liaison between the British and French map makers, hostilities permitting, particularly to fix the datum line of Longitude. The surveyors' task included not only the fixing of positions and measuring heights, but also the identification of the Meridian and the relationship of stations to it. For this purpose, like Wordsworth's Pedlar, the surveyors took astronomical readings. The main instruments for the terrestrial horizontal and vertical readings identified by Wordsworth were carefully assembled rods and chains for the major base lines elsewhere in the country, and, in each area, on stations on towers, steeples and mountain summits, the grand theodolite, a formidably heavy and expensive scientific instrument which required many labourers for moving and assembling in difficult terrain.¹⁴

It is not easy to confirm that the surveyor on Black Combe's summit was engaged in a "lonely task". Certainly, he would have been at work for "week after week", but usually, according

to the reports of the Ordnance Survey, a team of labourers, some of them soldiers, as well as professional military engineers (the term used correctly by Wordsworth to Isabel Fenwick) was employed. There would be a senior officer in charge of the expensive operation. It has been surmised that the officer on Black

Combe was Colonel William Mudge. Although there is no direct evidence that he was the person involved in the "black out", Mudge enters by name in *A Guide*. Writing about the River Duddon and its extensive estuary, Wordsworth explains Black Combe's key position: "[The estuary] is overlooked by the solitary Mountain Black Comb, the summit of which, as that experienced observer, the late Colonel Mudge declared, commands a more extensive view than any point in Britain. Ireland, he saw more than once, but not when the sun was above the horizon." This comment appears in an edition of *A Guide* as late as 1822, but there is an earlier reference to the preeminence of Black Combe, with a ring of authority about it in a footnote to the next poem for consideration: "Black Comb stands at the southern extremity of Cumberland: its base covers a much greater extent of ground than any other mountain in those parts, and from its situation, the summit commands a more extensive view than any point in Britain".¹⁵

Colonel Mudge (later General) Mudge (1762—1820) was no mere “geographic labourer”. He was made Director of the Ordnance Trigonometrical Survey in 1798 and promoted to Surveyor General in 1819. By 1811 he had produced the three volume report on the trigonometrical survey of the nation, the first public report of this kind. Previously, records of the survey had been available in the Transactions of the Royal Society, of which Mudge was a Fellow. His close knowledge of the Survey came from conducting field work and it is highly likely that he was personally involved in the North of England phase. He was, for instance, known to another of Wordsworth’s associates, Jonathan Otley, the Keswick geologist, guide, and writer of a *Guide to the District*. Wordsworth used Otley’s map of the Lake District, first published in 1814 in his own *Guide* of 1835. This map lists the heights of the peaks, including Black Combe. Otley reported that Colonel Mudge was the authority on the heights of the Lake District’s Pikes.¹⁶

Mudge listed the stations from which his team’s observations were taken. The note on Black Combe says that the station is “on the highest part of the mountain and is rendered remarkable by a large quantity of stones place round the lowest part of the (surveying) staff”.¹⁷ Black Combe earned its reputation for having a “more extensive view than any point in Britain ” by serving as a major reference point in the triangulation of

the North West and into Yorkshire and Southern Scotland. The tables and the map appended to Mudge’s report demonstrate the considerable concentration of surveying lines raying out from this focal position: to the north to Scotland, over to the east to Ingleborough, to the west to the Isle of Man, and to the south to Poulton in Lancashire. There is no mention of the weather, although there are indications that clear views and skies were not always available. Just occasionally one catches a glimpse of the romantic nature of this outdoor enterprise. In the second volume of Mudge’s report for instance is an example which might have fired a poem. In 1801 in Dorset, the surveying party had to wait until April to take readings related to the measurement of longitude. April was important because of the Pole Star: ” because the star comes to its greatest elongation from the meridian at those times, when the sun produces a little tremor in the air, by which means the staff to which the Pole Star is referred, in good weather is easily perceived”.¹⁸ The stars are part of the working life of the surveyor, as they are of the lonely shepherd and of the Pedlar’s youth. During the early nineteenth century, geologists, closely associated professionals who also created maps, assumed Romantic roles, being seen out in the wildest countryside in some of the roughest weather with their clinometers and their hammers. The surveyors might well have shared this romantic glow from their own exertions in high places.

Wordsworth's appreciation of this new breed of hill people is perhaps only available to us in this brief poetic glimpse, but biographical evidence, which is increasingly attending to the later years of Wordsworth's life, shows that his friendship group extended to the kind of professions and academic territories in which Mudge shone.¹⁹ A year after the Bootle holiday, Wordsworth was in London, principally in order to see if the breach with Coleridge could be closed. During this visit Wordsworth met a wide range of influential people. One was a colleague of Mudge's, Charles Pasley (1780—1861). Pasley was a distinguished officer in the Engineers. He had awards for bravery against the French and, after the war, was employed in training future engineers, as indeed, in a different sphere of the army, so was Mudge at one point. Pasley had met Coleridge during their work in 1805 in Malta, but the principal reason for Wordsworth's interest in him was Pasley's pamphlet on the strategy of the British army written a year before. Wordsworth was able to intercede to help Pasley with his preferment because the poet had been dining a few nights before with Lord Mulgrave, the Master General of Ordnance, and friend of Sir George Beaumont. By 1811, Wordsworth was associating with a variety of nationally significant figures whom we would now call technologists. Equally as important as tracing the "networks" of the famous at this period is to note that technology, science and the arts had not yet become divided culture. Mudge, for instance, had excellent literary and artistic

credentials. His godfather was no less than Samuel Johnson and his father an associate of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

A Guide's Point of View

One further strand needs to be unravelled in tracing the interest of Wordsworth in the new world of map making. The poet was thoroughly prepared for the shift in perspective necessary to comprehend a complex mountain region and to teach others how to describe it. Wordsworth demonstrated in *A Guide* how different his approach was from the traditional travellers' Guides, yet he was not breaking entirely new ground in his chosen region. As Sykes Davies²⁰ remarked, the sequence of contemporary guide books to the Lake District was remarkable because the authors (admired by Wordsworth) were composing much more than simple compendia of directions for viewing picturesque features. West, Gray, Gilpin and Clarke all prepared the way for Wordsworth to develop a unique way of seeing the region. One amongst many unique qualities of Wordsworth's contribution was to grasp the whole of the complex geography of the District and to convey a sense of order to what for a generation of carriage or horse travellers had been a confused geography dotted with approved viewing stations. Wordsworth took an unusual location, looking down from the best vantage point in

order to show his visitor – readers how to see the structure of the land they were visiting. In short, he took up the survey station of a mapmaker.

To understand how different this approach was, the modern reader has to understand that in the first publication of *A Guide* (1810), Wordsworth began his account, not with the traditional gazeteer of routes of approach to the district (although this became the first chapter in later editions), but offered the reader a striking illustration of looking down on a mountainous region. Even more strange, in the context of a guide book to an English region, is that he chose to illustrate this approach with a tourist attraction from Switzerland. In Lucerne on public display was a model of the Alps and of the lake. Standing on a platform the spectator can admire the landscape “lying at his feet; all things being represented in their appropriate colours”. The effect is to add “a more substantial pleasure” to the tourists who are already impressed with this “sublime and beautiful region”. With the device at their feet, they can now comprehend the mountain masses and ranges and the valleys, and appreciate “their bearings and their relations to each other”.²¹

The appropriateness of this foreign wonder to the author’s local purpose is that he is enabled to elevate the imagination of the tourists to a similar view and so assist their understanding

of what is a “more orderly arrangement of nature” than the apparently confusion of range upon range of mountain crests and peaks when seen from below. This time there is no need for a model:

I know not how to give the reader a distinct image of these more readily than by requesting him to place himself with me, in imagination upon some given point; let it be the top of either of the mountains Great Gavel or Scawfell; or rather, let us suppose our station to be a cloud hanging midway between these two mountains, at not more than half a mile’s distance from the summit of each, and not many yards above their highest elevation.²²

From this observation point, Wordsworth, like a trigonometrical surveyor, methodically directs the reader’s sight lines to the radiating valleys. He is effectively recreating here what he had approved of in the Lucerne model, the bearings and the relationship between natural objects.

The imagery of suspension in mid-air is a traditional figure for English pastoral and didactic poetry. Carnochan²³, in his study of the poetry associated with flight, by reference to poets from Milton to Thomson, asserts that the device continues

uninterrupted into the Romantic era. Wordsworth is a frequent summoner of the idea of imaginative flight, often invoked with the figure of "Fancy" or an air-borne Muse. In the strange Prologue to "Peter Bell", the narrator seeks a "car shaped like the crescent moon". As if to deny that he is confined by contemporary issues, he insists his vehicle is not a balloon but some ethereal device to visit the heavens and then the countries of the earth. In poems written later than *A Guide* or than the Black Combe group, Wordsworth again uses the imaginative leap out into space in order to convey a wide ranging poetic vision. In 1816 in "To – on her first ascent of Helvellyn" the power of the hills is once more invoked, but on this occasion this empowerment enables the subject of the poem to comprehend the far countries of the world and the phenomena of the heavens. There is an echo of *A Guide* in "Desultory Stanzas", the poem that concluded the Itinerary Poems of 1820, following a tour to Europe:

Fancy has flung for me an airy bridge
Across thy long deep Valley, furious Rhone!
Arch that here rests on granite ridge
Of Monte Rosa – there on frailer stone
Of secondary birth, the Jungfrau's cone;²⁴

In another set of Itinerary Poems, the 1836 collection from the Italian tour (published in 1842), it is the "local Genius" which hurries the poet aloft to remember a *Guide*-like prospect in his homeland as he sits home-sick in noon-tide heat:

There to alight upon crisp moss and range
Obtaining ampler boon at every step,
Of visual sovereignty – hills multitudinous,
(Not Appenine can boast of fairer) hills
Pride of two nations, wood and lake and plains,
And prospect right below of deep cover shaped
By skeletal arms . . .²⁵

A View of the Country's Destiny

This last quotation leads to the issue of the values which a view from above can give, other than preparing the artistic sensibility of the tourist. The comparison between the English prospect and the Italian vista opens the matter of national pride and national destiny. The second poem in the Black Combe set introduced this theme of patriotism. "A view from the Top Of Black Comb" is a geographical vision linked again to the traditional theme of flight. Black Combe is awarded a religious significance in the first line: "This Height a ministering Angel might select". The main theme, the British territory

stretched out before the imaginative climber, is quickly sketched as a geographical and patriotic vision. Key sources of the great rivers of Britain are listed as being dimly visible from Black Combe: the Trent, the Annan, Tweed and Clyde. Out to the West across the ocean,” right at the imperial station’s western base”, is the Isle of Man, lost at times in the mist. Ireland’s coast may (or may not) be glimpsed. The visual itinerary leads to the climax of the final five lines;

Of Nature’s works,
In earth, and air, in all-embracing sea,
A revelation infinite it seems;
Display august of man’s inheritance,
Of Britain’s calm felicity and power!²⁶

Written in 1811, published in the year of Waterloo, with the mixed emotions of fear of defeat and whiff of victory associated with any long war, it is not hard to appreciate the context of the patriotic poem. Understanding the poetic tradition for this kind of effusion also assists. This is far from being a departure for Wordsworth. In a sense, he was writing patriotic verse from his early publications onwards, witness the sonnets of 1802. He was also continuing a seventeenth and eighteenth-century tradition with close links with prospect poetry. O’Hehir²⁷ in his edition of *Coopers Hill* (1642) claims that

Denham initiated the Augustan tradition with this prospect poem. The poet looks down from a small hill at Egham in Surrey on a range of historic sites – Windsor, St Anne’s Hill, St Paul’s, Runnymede, the Thames – and intones a hymn of praise to England’s history. A century or more on, Thomson in the Summer section of *The Seasons* surveys the Thames at Twickenham from Shene Hill and similarly muses on England’s greatness:

Happy Britannia ! where the Queen of Arts,
Inspiring vigour, Liberty, abroad
Walks unconfined even to thy farthest cots,
And scatters plenty with unsparing hand.²⁸

If Wordsworth can be seen as the inheritor of a patriotic tradition linked with prospect verse, he is not the last flickering of the genre. Indeed he may have encouraged its continuation. Consider, for instance, Tennyson’s romantic story within a story, *The Princess, a Medley*. After the major excursion into the fable of women’s education, the chief protagonists watch the departure of working men and women who have been entertained by the Lord of the Manor to a festival in his grounds. They look down on contented villagers and also out to sea, where they believe they can see the coast of France, a

threatening prospect. The son of a Tory MP compares the garden of England with the revolutionary European nations:

God bless the narrow sea which keeps her off,
And keeps our Britain whole within herself,²⁹

Returning to Wordsworth, it is important to identify more fully the tradition in which he was writing patriotic verse. The association between the pastoral, the picturesque, and the political is from a very ancient source, the Georgic inheritance. In Virgil's First Book of *The Georgics*, the political success of Caesar is invoked in the Proem and an even more obvious sustained patriotic theme is played in the Third Book.³⁰ The Virgilian and the Horation themes of retirement are political statements in themselves,

reflecting on the corruption of the city and the state. In another dimension, the classical authors inspired the seventeenth- and eighteenth- centuries' development of the ideal landscape through the artistic intermediaries of Claude, Poussin and Salvator Rosa and the British poets of the eighteenth century. For a reader and admirer of the classics such as Wordsworth (and indeed for many of his readers), Virgil, the original spring, had not dwindled in time, but flowed on in the

new world of post- 1800 industrial Britain and in its rapidly changing countryside.

An Epistle to an Artistic Patron

The theme of classical allusion and its transference to the early nineteenth-century setting takes us to the third poem to emerge from the Bootle residency. The sonnet, "Upon the sight of a beautiful picture", had been written before the Bootle interlude. It was to be published in the 1815 collection. From Bootle a second message is addressed to Wordsworth's patron, Sir George Beaumont "The Epistle to Sir George Beaumont, Bart", however, was not a public document until 1842, in the last collection of Wordsworth's life.³¹ In 1811, the friendship was alive and well and, if we are to follow the argument of the poem, a welcome distraction for the poet at a dull time of exile from home. Black Combe broods over the place of exclusion.

We sojourn stunned by Ocean's ceaseless roar;
While, day by day, grim neighbour! huge Black Comb
Frowns deepening visibly his native gloom,
Unless, perchance rejecting in despite

What on the Plain we have of warmth and light ,
In his own storms he hides himself from sight.³²

The opening lines continue with a sense of desolation (“Rough is the time”). Accompanying the sea’s roar is a symbol of frustration, a wind-distressed plane tree. Much of the imagery is from a form of pastoral art. The desolate tree has a flavour of Salvator Rosa. The wave battered beach is a wilderness as if from a Charlotte Smith sonnet. The scene is a reflection of the poet’s inner disturbance. Unlike his patron, he claims he cannot paint or draw, nor can he make music, but he can make verse and hence this Epistle. The roughly finished house and the view, both to Black Combe and out to sea, are no assistance. The Isle of Man is fleetingly seen, but there are no clear messages of human activity over the misty waves or from the clouds (“our telegraph”).

In true pastoral style Wordsworth summons the Muses to his aid and then decides to relate a family event, the journey to the Duddon valley. The poem’s mood changes to the traditionally picturesque idyll of the contented family and warm community life of a rural Eden. The classical convention of an expeditionary, excursive poem is adopted. The travellers are

warmed by cheerfulness. Their sunny morning journey slips by, singing with the woman who guides their cart, being greeted by an old acquaintance waving to them from her cottage, then sitting down to a hospitable country meal . The note of controlled melancholy is struck, pausing at Loughrigg Tarn where George

Beaumont had planned to build a cultured pleasure house, but had been frustrated and so a golden opportunity for a cultivated artistic retreat was lost.

What is striking about this poem, apart from the return to the themes of the conventional pastoral, is the strange half withdrawal from some Wordsworthian moments. It is likely that the formative incidents related in the then unpublished *Prelude* and elsewhere would have been familiar to close associates like George Beaumont. The travellers meet a grotesque figure in the mist, shaped like one of the goblins or creatures of fairy tales, but it proves to be only a curate’s dog. The incident is packed with the language of the “spots of time” and yet develops into a half humorous, cosy anecdote:

Even now I think of him as lost
In second-sight appearances, or crost
By spectral shapes of guilt,

The young woman who waved to them is one sign of joy that summer morning, but there is a glimpse of something else:

Only the centre of the shining cot
With door left open makes a gloomy spot,
Emblem of those dark corners sometimes found
Within the happiest breast on earthly ground.³³

The home where the family sit down for their welcoming breakfast also may hide sufferings and sorrows which the poem does not wish to explore: “those secret springs / I leave unsearched”. At Bootle, the sun breaks through above the waves and the poem ends with a simple offering of the poem to Beaumont. “The Epistle” is in one sense a private poem. Wordsworth himself said that it “had long been suppressed from feelings of personal delicacy”.³⁴ Although it came into the public gaze in 1842, with a number of the usual careful emendations, it is still possible to read it as a piece of conversation with an educated friend who was fully versed in the Classical tradition in literature and in the picturesque in art.

The subject of the poem had one further privileged insight. He knew of Wordsworth’s earlier writing and would appreciate the half references to the kind of poem that the young Wordsworth had previously composed, the moments of revelation on which he turned his back in this “Epistle”.

Black Combe Twenty Years On

The third Black Combe poem, written in 1833, combines again something of the Georgic tradition and the modern. Wordsworth, taking one of his strenuous excursions despite advancing years, visited the Isle of Man and then Scotland by the new form of transportation, the steamship. The forces of steam and the transformation of the world of belief were very much present in his mind. From the sequence of itinerary poems there is, for instance, the twenty-fourth sonnet, “On the Frith of Clyde (In a steamboat)” with its contrast between “this dull Monster and its sooty crew” and the quiet peaks of Arran. Incidentally, Wordsworth again here invokes the image of flying in the “Peter Bell” manner to image an escape from the labouring noisy engine:

Who but must covet a cloud-seat, or skiff
Built for the air, or winged Hippogriff?
That he might fly where no one could pursue,³⁵

A similar projection of the mind is at play in the poem which identifies Black Combe composed on the journey out to the Isle of Man. ” In the Channel, Between the coast of Cumberland and the Isle of Man” is a sonnet beginning with the image of the shepherd “Ranging the heights of Scawfell or Blackcomb”. Like the geographer of the 1811 poem, the dweller on the peaks is entranced by the mountain’s weather. The Shepherd’s view of the Isle of Man, like the surveyor’s, is often obscured by cloud. What explanation does the simple, uneducated man have of these phenomena? ;

What he draws
From sense, faith , reason, fancy, of the cause,
He will take with him to the silent tomb,
Or by his fire, a child upon his knee,
Haply the untaught philosopher may speak
Of the strange sight, nor hide his theory
That satisfies the simple and the meek,

Blest in their pious ignorance, though weak
To cope with Sages undevoutly free.³⁶

Wordsworth’s short poems in the Itinerary or Memorials of travel collections are never fully available for our understanding of their first intentions if read in isolation from the poems in which they form a sequence.³⁷ This sonnet about the shepherd with his non-scientific explanations for the clouds masking the Isle of Man is followed first by a sonnet describing the mists which obscure the island and which have been a form of security from invasion in the past. The phenomenon has led to mythical explanations of magical protection. The third sonnet in the sequence continues with the theme of irrational belief and so faces the modern dilemma:

Desire we past illusions to recal?
To reinstate wild Fancy, would we hide
Truths whose thick veil Science has drawn aside?³⁸

The next line begins with an emphatic “No!”. The end is compromise. Science can not be ignored, but it has its own limits which can only be surmounted by “Imaginative Faith”. The shepherd on Black Combe is left behind with his irra-

tional explanation, although he continues to experience the mystery. The travelling observer journeys on.

This examination of the mountain – inspired poems from this brief period of Wordsworth’s middle age (and old age in the case of the final sonnet) has been studied from the point of view of two tendencies, the traditional and the modern. The traditional made use of the range of themes within the pastoral convention, particularly those associated with withdrawal and with the transformation that occurs in secluded

communion with Nature. The modern world on the other hand is typified by the map maker, understanding Nature by measurement and giving a rational authority to the complex world. The Black Combe poems are not presenting a simple conflict between the two world views. The eighteenth-century tradition of the pastoral prospect was never so concentrated into one theme or topic in any case. It included much of the contemporary, particularly in terms of patriotism and, from time to time, comprehended what we would call “science”. Wordsworth readily absorbed these features into his new work. The last sonnet shows him as the detached observer, riding the waves indeed on the most modern form of “station”, fully aware of older forms of recognising Nature but accepting the new knowledge, at least up to the limits of what it could explain. The geographer’s map, the technology of Reason,

could not always prevail. Black Combe, stretching out beyond the mass of the Lake District’s complicated eroded dome extended an arm of abiding strangeness to the poet as he voyaged on into the new world of the nineteenth century.

The dark and moody mountain and its mystery was eventually to inspire two other poets. In the twentieth century, Norman Nicholson, sharing with Wordsworth a commitment to the Lake District was fired by Black Combe to write three fine poems, “Cloud on Black Combe”, “The Shadow of Black Combe”, and “Black Combe White”.³⁹ All three explore the shifts of cloud and rain which Wordsworth observed in 1811. A stranger literary voice celebrated the dominance of the mountain, one which Nicholson sought out for his own anthology of the Lakes. It was Branwell Bronte, unsuccessfully teaching at Broughton in 1840. He also looked up at the black edge of the cloud-dominated mountain and found in it the echoes of his own shadowed condition:

Thus tempests find Black Comb invincible,
While we are lost who should know life so well.⁴⁰

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- 1 Norman Nicholson, *Portrait of the Lakes* (London: Robert Hale, 1963), p.55. The spelling of the mountain is an example of the shift of “authority” in naming occasioned by the map makers (see note 13 below). The modern spelling, “Combe” begins to be used in the mid-nineteenth century Ordnance maps, replacing the form “Comb” used by Wordsworth and by the Ordnance surveyors of 1811. Presumably the forces of analogy were at work, making for the common spelling of Combe. It was a false analogy, for a combe or coom in the south of England is a valley or declivity. Nicholson [28] points out the difference between the old form (implying a crest) and the new.
- 2 W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser (eds.), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.302.
- 3 S. Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 4 J. Barker, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), pp.418–9.
- 5 A major statement of confidence in *A Guide* is in J. Bate, *Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.42. Bate urges that we should bring this prose work from the periphery to the centre of critical attention.
- 6 See J. Sambrook, (ed.) *James Thomson, The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.28–9, lines 950–62. The full context of Wordsworth’s place in the literature and art of mountain top perspective would require a long essay, one which would have to span the Romantic painters. See, for instance, B. M. Stafford, *Voyage and Substance, Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760 to 1840* (Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1984). Caspar Friedrich’s lone figures look out from their crag-top stations to setting suns and to much else that is spiritual, like Wordsworth’s Wanderer and his companions in *The Excursion*. A shift in perspective away from, but still indebted to, eighteenth-century artistic models has to be taken into account when considering that Wordsworth was writing in the midst of a period of self-conscious artistic change.

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- 7 PW IV: p.199, lines 20–5 and 27–9. PW References here and following are to E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (eds.), *Poetical Works of Wordsworth, Volumes II, III, IV, and V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1944, 1946, 1947, 1949).
- 8 M. Moorman (ed.), *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Middle Years, Volume II, Part I 1806—1811* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p.501 and Owen and Smyser (1974), p.241.
- 9 PW II: p.220
- 10 PW IV: p.199, lines 17–20.
- 11 J. Curtis (ed.) *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth* (London: Classical Press, 1993), p.29.
- 12 PW V: p.17, lines 270–6.
- 13 W. Mudge and T. Colby, *An Account of the Operation Carried on for Accomplishing a Trigonometrical Survey of England and Wales, Volume III for the Years 1800, 1801, 1803, to 1809* (London: W, Bulmer and Co, 1811). This detailed primary source describes, and in some instances, such as in maps and diagrams of instruments, illustrates the process of map making constructed on trigonometrical surveying techniques.
- 14 J.B.Harley and Y. O'Donoghue (eds.), *Facsimile Edition of the Old Series Ordnance Survey Maps* (Lympne, Kent: Harry Margary, 1975) introduces the reader to the Survey's processes of gathering of information and refers to primary sources on government map making. A recent account of the difficulties of the early surveyors, partly contemporary with Colonel Mudge's work is given in J. Keay, *The Great Arc* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), an account of the triangulation of the Indian sub-continent.
- 15 Owen and Smyser (1974), p.161 and PW II: p.289.
- 16 J. Otley, *A Concise Description of the English Lakes* (Keswick: and London: Richardson, 1823). See also J. C. Ward, 'Jonathan Otley, geologist and guide', *Cumberland Association for the Advancement of Literature and Science* ii (1877), pp.125–9. The exact height of Black Combe presents an interesting (unsolved?) problem in defining

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- the authority of mapping. The modern Ordnance Survey defines its height as 1969 feet, but Otley's map (used by Wordsworth in *A Guide*) and Mudge and Colby (1811) mark it as 1919 feet. Because the final mapping of the first Ordnance Survey in Cumberland was not completed until the period 1847 to 1852, Mudge's old station may not have been used and perhaps a new site was established. The whole subject of "authority" in geographical details including the spelling of place names is explored in C. W. T. Withers, 'Authorizing landscape: "authority", naming and the Ordnance Survey's mapping of the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, 4, (October 2000), pp.532–554.
- 17 W. Mudge and I. Dalby, *Account of the Operations carried out for Accomplishing a Trigonometrical Survey of England and Wales, Volume I, 1784–1796, 1799* (London: W. Bulmer and Co.), p.80.
- 18 Mudge and Dalby, Volume II (1801), p.13.
- 19 See Gill (1989 and 1998) and Barker (2000).
- 20 H. Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.233.
- 21 Owen and Smyser (1974), p.18. At the end of the eighteenth century, models and dioramas of landscapes became popular attractions alongside the increase in the publications of maps in tourist guides. There was, for instance, a geological model of the Lake District or part of it in Keswick in 1847, which Otley recommended to Professor Adam Sedgwick as a basis for demonstrating stratigraphical features (See Ward 1877).
- 22 Owen and Smyser (1974). p.171, lines 532–9.
- 23 W.B. Carnochan, *Confinement and Flight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
- 24 PW III: p.199, lines 28–31
- 25 PW III: pp.203/204, lines 34–43.
- 26 PW II: p.2980, lines 30–4.

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- 27 B. O’Hehir, *Expans’d Hieroglyphicks: a Study of Sir John Denhams Cooper’s Hill with a critical edition of the poem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
- 28 Sambrook (1987), p.76, lines 1442–5.
- 29 A. Lord Tennyson, *Poetical Works* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p.216.
- 30 J. Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study of the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1969) is a comprehensive survey of the English poetic inheritance of the Classical form. An accessible translation with a good example of the use of the form for patriotic purposes is *Virgil, The Georgics* L.P. Wilkinson (ed. and trans.) (London: Penguin, 1982), Book II, p.81, lines 136–176).
- 31 The sonnet is a direct reference to Sir George Beaumont’s own artistic skills. The Wordsworth family owned his painting of The Thorn and Sir George provided an illustration for “Peter Lee” in the 1819 edition of the poem.
- 32 PW IV: p.142, lines 5–9.
- 33 PW IV: pp.146–7, lines 148–50 and: 149, lines 219–39.
- 34 PW III: p.419.
- 35 PW IV: pp.36–7.
- 36 PW IV: p.31.
- 37 See J. F. Wyatt, *Wordsworth’s Poems of Travel, 1819—1842* (London: Macmillan, 1999).
- 38 PW IV: p.31
- 39 N. Nicholson, *Sea to the West* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).
- 40 N. Nicholson, *The Lake District, an Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.46.
My thanks are due to the Library Service of the Ordnance Survey at Southampton and to the Library and Information Service of The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, London, for help and advice and access to their collections.

Style and Victorian Criticism: John Ruskin's Political Economy of Literature

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In all unimportant matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential.

Oscar Wilde¹

Introduction: Style and Sincerity in Victorian Criticism

Ruskin scholarship often focuses on the ethical significance of the faculty of vision. The cue is provided by Ruskin himself in the opening chapters of *Praeterita* where he provides an account of the factors in his early life that led to his development of an especially sensitive eye². Perhaps equally important to the practice of seeing for Ruskin, and by no means separable from it, is the fact of his having been, very early on “bred for ‘the Church,’” and again,³ the early chapters of *Praeterita* provide telling images of the young John Ruskin mimicking the oratory of a pulpit preacher, or reading the Bible with his mother, as in a loop, “which never ceased till [he] went to Oxford.”⁴ These two foundational faculties for Ruskin’s eventual, critical practice are described as one in Ruskin’s best

known statement about the importance of vision to a life’s work, when, in *Modern Painters* III, he writes: “To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion,—all in one.”⁵ The ability to see, and to tell what has been seen, are inseparable, and according to this passage, Ruskin’s prose, which aspires to communicate his sight, aspires to “poetry” and religious prophecy, at once. Seeing, and a powerful faith in the faculty of vision are key ingredients in the development of any philosophical or moral position for Ruskin, and in saying so I only restate what has become a truism for Ruskin scholars.⁶

The powerful expression of accurate vision should be understood as only the first stage in Ruskin’s larger motive to move his readers into action, and to achieve social change. As G. Robert Stange has put it, the object of Ruskin’s dazzling paragraphs of descriptive art criticism, for example, is not necessarily an account of the physical properties of a work of plastic art, “but the evocation of an aesthetic and emotional experience, deriving from a painting, but originating in Ruskin’s prose.”⁷ The prose carries the reader into a new domain of sight, and ultimately into an altered state of aesthetic and ethical perception. And yet, while this is an accurate (albeit

concise) description of the intended procedure of Ruskin's critical practice, the effect of his prose did not always successfully meet the mark of his intentions. As the century wore on, and as Ruskin moved from writing about art to writing about a variety of social issues, we find that Ruskin's situation as a critic comes to raise significant questions about how a writer's manner, or mode, of expressing something (an idea, for example) is perceived to be related to the truth of that idea, on the one hand, and to the truthfulness of the individual who is communicating that idea, on the other. These questions about the relationship between style and sincerity are especially pronounced if one considers the context surrounding Ruskin's early publications on political economy, the reception of these writings, and his defence of his chosen critical mode in the face of widespread attacks both on his right to profess within this particular discipline of knowledge, and on his manner of presenting his arguments.

Ruskin's prose style—and specifically his tactic of substituting the sonorous elements of language for the complexity of visual experience—often resulted in an effect opposite to that which Ruskin intended, for instead of focusing attention on the truth of the aesthetic *experience*, Ruskin's readers often focused on the elements of the stylistic tactic itself, at the expense of the referent the writing hoped to convey. Ruskin's critics tended to discuss him as an adept stylist within a specific mode of

writing. Ekphrasis becomes one important rhetorical category that aligns Ruskin's writing with that of the sentimental, pictorial aesthetic of the literary Annuals and Albums, on the one hand,⁸ and the extravagant prose of periodical reviewers, on the other. Ruskin had many associations to shed as he moved from art criticism to social criticism. As Dinah Birch has noted, Ruskin's initial role in teaching the appreciation of art was analogous to that of a governess, which seemed to preclude his participation in other, more “manly” kinds of discourse.⁹ Further, the didactic anger that so strongly dominates the tone of Ruskin's social criticism, and which was meant to work as a “most powerful remedy to apathy,” served as fodder for his critics who identified his dramatic style with the ravings of an hysterical woman.¹⁰ According to Ruskin, though, the power of his own words resides in the universal truth of what they refer to, which is often the Bible, and sometimes nature. Ruskin's knowledge of the scripture, and use of it in *Unto This Last*, for example, may be seen to fulfill this axiom of force in style.¹¹ However, because he chose as his congregation the readership of a very popular magazine (the *Cornhill Magazine* which had at times reached a circulation above 100,000)¹² and not a smaller, religious group who would be impressed by the scriptural truth of his re-definition of the key terms from political economy, his particular mode of sage writing was generally received as an extravagant mis-application of biblical discourse in the domain of science.¹³

What I hope to stress here is how the rhetorical techniques employed in his art criticism were understood by Ruskin to be the most “natural” way of communicating that knowledge implicit in his ability to see, and thus as an organic communication of truth. As Jeffrey Spear has noted, “Ruskin’s concern with words almost invariably turns to *the Word*.”¹⁴ Contemporary descriptions of his style as euphuistic, ornate and artificial were thus especially distressing to Ruskin because they challenged the integrity of his earnest pedagogical project. For Ruskin, the claim to a communication of truth that did not strictly adhere to “syllogistic demonstration”, and the technique of definition became especially controversial when he turned from writing about art (and defining such terms as “color” and “chiaroscuro”) to defining the key terms of political economy, such as “Wealth”, “Value” and “Utility” in *Unto This Last*, and most explicitly in the first chapter of “Essays on Political Economy” (1862) which, when republished as *Munera Pulveris* (1872), was entitled “Definitions.”¹⁵ My focus in this essay will thus be on a period of transition for Ruskin, a time when he took a respite from writing monographs about painting, and turned instead to writing periodical articles about a wide range of social and aesthetic issues that fell under his broad definition of Political Economy. This move from privately published books, to popular magazines and periodicals brought with it a significantly different discursive context for Ruskin’s writing. It meant an altered set of

rhetorical and generic prescriptions and assumptions that had some small influence on Ruskin’s mode of expression, but a large impact upon the reception of his writings, and on their consequent effect. Suddenly, Ruskin could be perceived as a periodical critic writing venomously, and outside his area of expertise. What did that mean at mid-century?

“Ruskin in The Clouds”: The Periodical Critics on his Style

Criticism during the 1850s consisted in large part of a rhetorically extravagant and market-driven mode of writing. As John Woolford has remarked, critics of this period had for the most part arrived at a firm belief that successful art reflected the desires of the public, and that the critic was a spokesperson for these desires. The critic functioned as a representative for the reader—sometimes a dramatic representative—“by foaming and gesticulating and grimacing and straining after hyperbolic extravagance”¹⁶ in his denunciation of works which apparently failed to fulfill these desires. That is, the voice of the critic speaking the public’s opinion was notoriously splenetic and emphatic. An ornate, judgmental criticism prevailed, characterized by one journalist of the period as “that slashing style which produces the greatest amount of effect with the least amount of trouble to [the writer].”¹⁷ Woolford characterizes the criticism between 1855 and 1864 as a primarily “adjectival’

criticism—a criticism in which performance has usurped the place of principle.”¹⁸ John Ruskin’s position as a critic within Woolford’s account is somewhat paradoxical, for although his writing arguably shared elements of this “hyperbolic extravagance,” and would thus come to be identified with the tendency of “the reviewer” to “overrate...the powers of the graphic and picturesque,”¹⁹ this manner of writing functioned, according to Ruskin’s own account, as an obvious discourse of truth; and although this kind of writing was generally perceived to be reflective of the public opinion, Ruskin’s writing was clearly aimed not at reflecting the public’s aesthetic and moral understanding, but at changing it.²⁰

Changing the ideas of his readership was arguably the primary reason that Ruskin turned to writing articles for the most popular periodicals of the late 1850s—the *Cornhill Magazine* and *Fraser’s Magazine*—after having published the first four volumes of *Modern Painters*, and although one can make a compelling case (as Brian Maidment has done) for Ruskin’s agency as a writer within this popular medium, the ultimate success of Ruskin’s principle attempt “to *create* kinds of readerships not available even to the periodical market” by “alienat[ing] and offend[ing] the propriety of serious mass-circulation journalism” is debatable.²¹ What interests me here are the factors that might have made Ruskin’s attempt to alter his public by circulating his critical prose in popular

magazines *unsuccessful*, for although Ruskin was not the typical “gesticulating” critic of the 1850s, it seems to me that he came to be judged by the same criteria that were held up against the “adjectival” critics of this period. As new standards for a more judicious “discipline” of criticism came to be prescribed in the early 1860s, Ruskin’s apparent similarities to the popular adjectival critics did not work to his advantage. By the late 1850s the identification of Ruskin with this style of periodical criticism already began to take hold. For instance, W. Forsyth, in his 1857 essay on “Literary Style” – the purpose of which is to point out contemporary specimens of “good” style, and to expose “false and vicious modes of style” – argues that Ruskin’s writing “indulges too much in rhetorical pomp” and sometimes “is betrayed into a conceit” because of the “too great exuberance of imagery, and too lavish a profusion of epithets” in his writing.²² Thus, what was to become a more general shift at the beginning of the 1860s away from what might be called emotionally explicit criticism, toward a critical practice that presented itself as more judicious and less implicated in the public temperament, worked to undercut the authority of Ruskin’s writing, in spite of his having little to do, in substance, with these critics of popular opinion. In other words, Ruskin was a principled writer who, in great part because of his manner of writing, was judged as merely performative by a developing movement in nineteenth-century criticism that saw these two categories as mutually exclusive.

An important factor in the dismissal of Ruskin's mode of criticism was the perceived inappropriateness of his ekphrastic style used so effectively in *Modern Painters* (where he repeatedly walks you through the details of a landscape as they appear, either in nature, or on canvas) when applied to the increasingly "scientific" discipline of political economy, in essays later collected under such titles as *The Political Economy of Art*, *Unto This Last*, and *Sesame and Lilies*. While the beauty of Ruskin's style in these writings is often acknowledged even by his harshest critics, this talent, along with the emphatic expression of moral indignation, and the disregard for the etiquette of scientific argumentation, is most often forwarded as proof of his inability to address economic issues with an appropriate, manly calm. As new rules for the discipline of criticism are consolidated, the gendered nature of the distinctions between serious critical prose, and mere irrational emotionality, becomes explicit.

During this period, critics attempted to discredit and effeminate Ruskin by referring to his "weeping and howling," his "voice choked with tears," his "female virulence" and his "feminine nonsense," all of which was fine "[s]o long as Mr. Ruskin confined himself to art" but which is identified as "dangerous" when he applied this manner of writing to social critique.²³ A review in *Fraser's Magazine* discussing *Unto This Last* argues with ironic condescension that "English literature

has got a tolerably good philosophical style...[T]he received scientific style—such, for instance, as Mr. Mill's... besides being lucid, or always aiming at lucidity, has the additional vice of being calm and good-tempered, which makes it still more unfit for the uses of a genius like Mr. Ruskin's, who is generally in a passion as well as in the clouds."²⁴ Similarly, the literary critic Henry Morley identifies Ruskinian prose with a newly rediscovered tradition of ornate prose in English, and labels this tradition affected, and untruthful. The revival of euphuism as a working concept with F.W. Fairholt's 1858 reissue (the first in over a century) of John Lyly's *Euphues* (circa 1580), led to the identification of this work as an originary text of *affected* English writing.²⁵ The identification of Ruskin's prose with this tradition led to the association of its two primary traits—its elaborate descriptiveness, and its overt display of emotion—with insincerity. Morley sets up the opposition between ornate (Ruskinian) prose, and a proper communicative style by pitting writing for "display" against a more "[d]irect, manly presentment...quietly told...with no paltry playing upon words, and no more stir of fancy or appeal to the emotions than arises naturally from the working of a mind intent upon its thought."²⁶ For Morley, the effeminate is both that which is showy and ornate, and that which is un-English (i.e. Mill as English man, Ruskin as foreign woman). Thus while Ruskin was being extremely descriptive and emphatic in his writing because he desperately hoped to

convey what he saw as the true injustices of the prevailing theories of political economy, the heavy description and emphasis he used to communicate his critique were increasingly perceived to be signs of irrational, and disingenuous expression.

New Critical Regulations of the 1860s

The harsh response to Ruskin's ekphrastic style in these new contexts brings out the increasing development of an identifiable series of rules for criticism. Two key essays from the period that address this problem of sincerity and excessive affect in prose indicate these new rules for by prescribing what criticism should be. The first of these, an essay by David Masson entitled "Genius and Discipline in Literature" (published in 1862 in *Macmillan's Magazine*), describes the problem of style as one of striking a balance between "the natural powers" of the writer, and "the discipline to which he subjects these powers."²⁷ Employing an extended military metaphor, Masson argues that very few writers of the day can be said to manifest an overarching strategy in their literary production, or to employ "the same noble self-discipline on a large scale...exercised on different material."²⁸ Rather, because most writing is done for the periodical press, a literary life is now "morselled out into a series of small or not very extensive

efforts," and an author employs "tactics...brought into a given situation" rather than a strategy which sees each tactical situation (or journal article) as part of a larger authorial plan.²⁹ Because of the non-strategic nature of most literary careers, Masson feels it is time to enunciate some principles of the "art of literary self-regulation."³⁰

Among the principles of "intellectual self-discipline" are a series of statements that sum up the concerns of the various critical responses to Ruskin's writings between 1858 and 1865. The principle of "negative Truth," for instance, states that one should never write what one doesn't really think, nor pretend to know what one does not know (a common judgment made against Ruskin in his essays on Political Economy).³¹ The principle of "temperance, or Suspension of Judgment" suggests that one should not use big words (of critical attack), when little ones will suffice, and one should keep one's literary genius in check by determining that "the words spoken shall be not only words of truth but also words of soberness."³² Further, under the heading of this principle falls the matter of professing knowledge that one does not have. Because of the present, fast pace of the publishing industry, and the competition among publications for readers and attention, "public writers" are especially liable to express opinions for which they have no factual basis. Against this error in judgment, Masson

argues that writers must respect the general principles of the disciplines about which they write:

There are such things as general principles of human nature, of political economy, of politics, &c., on the faith of which those who are in the possession of them may proceed to argue, in an *a priori* or deductive manner, on questions suddenly brought before them. Perhaps all the most valid argumentation on social subjects is of this kind.³³

Many of the attacks against Ruskin's writings on political economy tag him as an author who has launched "in a rage...a hurricane of superlatives" against a discipline whose general principles he has not learned.³⁴

The second article from this period that attempts to define the rules of composing a critical essay is Samuel Reynolds's "The Critical Character," published in the *Westminster Review* in 1863. Here, Reynolds identifies "[t]he special taste and knowledge which the critic requires" by drafting a comparative study of the respective faults and excellences of Ruskin and Matthew Arnold.³⁵ Arnold is considered by Reynolds to be "the very best critic we possess," and Ruskin "one of the most deficient in true critical character."³⁶ Ruskin is depicted by

Reynolds as a genius who writes "carelessly, recklessly even, and sometimes with a knowledge of his subject so slight as to be hardly distinguishable from total ignorance." Further, Ruskin's "sympathies and antipathies" are seen to appear "in ludicrous extremes," and his "whims and fancies" to be "more than feminine in their number and absurdity."³⁷

Arnold, on the other hand, is depicted as "a genuine critic" because he is "above all, always fair, always ready to see the utmost possible good in that which his nature does not lead him to sympathize."³⁸ His ability to write biography is noted as a sign of his great "width of sympathy," but most important is the calm and judicious manner in which this critical sympathy is employed and conveyed.³⁹ Arnold himself had much to do with this perception of his own critical character by developing, in the first edition of *Essays in Criticism* (1865), his idea of a criticism that rises above a tactical, "practical" view of matters, and strives toward a more "universal" outlook, based upon a critical "disinterestedness." In his essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," in particular, Arnold argues that what is needed is a "language innocent enough" to make "the spotless purity of our intentions evident" to practical-minded citizens, and this could not be accomplished by meeting them on their own terms."⁴⁰ As Chris Baldick has put it, Arnold "was to create a new kind of critical discourse which could, by its display of careful extrica-

tion from controversy, speak from a privileged standpoint, all other discourses being in some way compromised by partial or partisan considerations.”⁴¹ Precisely opposite to this kind of critical discourse, according to Arnold, were the approaches of the “smoke blackened” Cobbett, the “furious” Carlyle, and the “pugnacious” Ruskin, whose recent forays into political economy smacked too much “of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere.”⁴²

Arnold was not incorrect in categorizing Ruskin’s recent writings as practical and strategic. Unlike much of his art criticism, which appeared in volume format from the start, all of Ruskin’s writings on political economy were deployed strategically in the periodical press.⁴³ Regardless of the ultimate success or failure of this strategy, it is clear that the discursive choices Ruskin made during this period raised many questions about how an engaged, critical discourse should sound. In their discussions of Ruskin’s manner of writing about social issues, Ruskin’s critics generally conclude that while Mill’s style is appropriate to its purpose, and Arnold’s is judicious and “disinterested” in a way that makes criticism effective, Ruskin’s style, when removed from the task of art criticism, is either benignly pleasing and ridiculous, or, anachronistic and dangerous. Dangerous not only because it challenges the rules of newly established discursive categories, but because of its popularity among less talented imitators and

followers. In a passage that foreshadows future accusations of the corruption of the young that will be made against Ruskin’s pupil, Oscar Wilde, Ruskin’s manner of writing is described by Henry Fothergill Chorley as “mischievous to art, mischievous to literature, but mischievous above all to those young and eager minds, animated by the love of art and literature, which may mistake this declamatory trash for stimulating food.”⁴⁴ Such a criticism takes Henry Morley’s identification of Ruskinian prose with Euphuism to its extreme, utterly denying the possible motive to truth inherent in Ruskin’s prose.

The Political Economy of Literature

Ruskin was to become familiar with Henry Morley’s complaint regarding ornate style, that it had become “poor entertainment for the English people” as opposed to a mode of discourse that might bear truth. Rather than drastically adjust his manner of writing during this period, however, Ruskin defended his own style and attacked the contemporary state of reading which resulted in the failure to recognize the potential truth-value of such a style. In *The Political Economy of Art* (1857) we find a statement of his concern with the source of this failure. Here Ruskin locates the problem of the misunderstanding of his writing in the poor reading habits of a public which has access to too much literature, and thus does not give

the proper amount of time, attention and thought to those works that deserve careful reading: “[T]he amount of pleasure that you can receive from any great work,” he says, “depends wholly on the quantity of attention and energy of mind you can bring to bear upon it.”⁴⁵ It is this same problem that moved Herbert Spencer to propose a theory of style based on the need to make reading as easy as possible for the reader. According to Spencer’s thesis, a reader (the 1850 English reader) has a limited amount of mental power available to him, and so the goal in style is to use up as little of that power as possible, or, as Spencer puts it, “the economizing of the reader’s or hearer’s attention.”⁴⁶ Ruskin’s application of economic principles to this problem is very different from Spencer’s proposed “economy of mental energy.” To remedy the problem of the contemporary reader’s poor attention span he proposes that rather than cater to the needs of this easily exhausted public, we attempt to improve their reading abilities by applying the political economic principles of supply and demand to the market of books.

Readers don’t read well, Ruskin argues, because they have too much to choose from, and thus lack the incentive to cherish any particular work, and give it an ample amount of attention. His solution is to limit the number of books available by making them more expensive (except for those who could not afford to buy books under the new pricing system).⁴⁷ This is how

Ruskin’s political economy of literature would function, with the purpose of increasing the capacity for concentration of his reading public by giving them less to read, so that they would learn to read their limited supply more slowly and carefully. Only this “patient” kind of reader would properly understand Ruskin’s own writing which he felt was often misunderstood, and increasingly so from 1857 on.

Ruskin develops the reasons for his brief proposal of a political economy of literature in an appendix to “The Political Economy of Art,” from which I quote at length:

I have been much impressed lately by one of the results of our quantity of books; namely, the stern impossibility of getting anything understood that requires patience to understand. I observe always, in the case of my own writings, that if ever I state anything that has cost me any trouble to ascertain, and which, therefore, will probably require a minute or two of reflection from the reader before it can be accepted,—that statement will not only be misunderstood, but in all probability be taken to mean something very nearly the reverse of what it does mean. Now, whatever faults there may be in my modes of expression, I know that the words I use will always be found, by Johnson’s dictionary, to bear, first of all, the sense I use them in; and that the sentences, whether awk-

wardly turned or not, will, by the ordinary rules of grammar, bear no other interpretation than that I mean them to bear; so that the misunderstanding of them must result, ultimately, from the mere fact that their matter sometimes requires a little patience...

I was at first a little despondent about this; but, on the whole, I believe it will have a good effect upon our literature for some time to come; and then, perhaps, the public may recover its patience again. For certainly it is excellent discipline for an author to feel that he must say all he has to say in the fewest possible words, or his reader is sure to skip them. Generally, also, a downright fact may be told in a plain way; and we want downright facts at present more than anything else. And, though I often hear moral people complaining of the base effects of the want of thought, for my part, it seems to me that one of the worst diseases to which the human creature is liable is its disease of thinking. If it would only just *look* at a thing, instead of thinking what it must be like, or *do* a thing, instead of thinking it cannot be done, we should all get on far better.⁴⁸

Remarkably, in this passage, Ruskin is agreeing with almost all of the critical rules that have been wielded against his own writing style. He finds solace from his despondency over the general laziness of his readership in the fact that it offers the great challenge of “discipline” to the contemporary writer. He agrees with the rule of “compression” (use of the “fewest possible words”), and in the need for “facts” told “in a plain way”. However, in spite of what his critics might say, Ruskin claims to have been practicing these stylistic rules all along. Thus, although he recognizes the potential value of an economizing philosophy of style such as Spencer’s, Ruskin broadens the concept of perspicuous writing to include his own writing, and finally locates the problem of any misunderstanding of his sense, or a failure to see the transparency of his prose, in a faulty and impatient readership. In this way, Ruskin promoted the importance and value of seemingly complex and ornate styles of writing and art.

A philosophy of style such as Herbert Spencer’s, which called for a persistent use of the simplest words, arranged according to the simplest syntax was ultimately unsatisfactory to Ruskin because it limited the kinds of reality that could be represented in language, and detracted from the moral responsibility of the writer to represent the world as accurately as possible. Rather than prescribe a stylistic norm as that which best represents reality in all cases, Ruskin advocated a free range of styles, so

long as they were rooted in “Nature”, that is, so long as they would bear the purpose of a superior mimesis, and were not ornate and abstract for their own sake, without loyalty to an originary referent. This belief underlies the point made in the final sentence of the long passage just cited, where Ruskin asserts the moral priority of *looking over thinking*. Ruskin asserts that social change is best enacted by presenting a verbal image, the truth of which is unequivocal. Criticism as it was coming to be defined by the likes of Masson, Morley and even Arnold, was perceived by Ruskin to inhibit rather than encourage action.

To counteract this new enforcement of disciplinary proprieties and the fragmented (scientific) method of social criticism that came with it, Ruskin attempted to communicate key scenes and terms that could be grasped as sites of coherent knowledge, allowing one to *see* one’s role in the broader social structure.⁴⁹ Thus, the most politically expedient writing according to Ruskin would not be a narrow discipline identifiable as philosophical criticism, but a writing that instilled visions of social reality in the mind of the reader, which would in turn lead to appropriate action based upon this acquired, self-evident knowledge. For this reason, to suggest that Ruskin’s writing was merely beautiful and dazzling (on the complimentary side), or obscure and euphuistic (on the negative) was to threaten the underlying political and peda-

gogical motives of his work. To protect his own prose from accusations of a prettiness that was irrelevant to the matters it was addressing, or from being conceptually “in the clouds” when it should have been more judiciously grounded, Ruskin asserted his own definitions of the concepts of “Truth” and linguistic “accuracy.”

Ruskin’s Argument for Critical Truth

Ruskin’s conception of “Truth” is familiar from *Modern Painters* where Turner’s methods of representing “Nature” are championed over those of the Old Masters.⁵⁰ Turner is understood by Ruskin to be more persistently interrogative of his own methods of representing nature, combining an accurate recording of his impressions, and a skeptical review of the means of representing them.⁵¹ As a result, his work best exemplified for Ruskin the successful presentation of “distinct impressions” of nature, rather than a mere imitation of nature’s surfaces, and enacted Ruskin’s paradoxical but crucial idea “that [true] representation might be mysterious without being vague, and precise without being entirely clear.”⁵² “Imitation” Ruskin tells us, “can only be of something material” whereas truth “has reference to statements both of the qualities of material things, and of emotions, impressions, and thoughts.”⁵³ The primary message of Ruskin’s distinction

between imitation and truth is that the latter is morally superior because of its “universal application” and its communication of the mysterious element of nature that the semblance of likeness offered by imitation does not provide. Truthful representation must still respect a serious observance of nature, and be derived “straight from the natural scenery” (as Ruskin puts it in *The Two Paths*), but attempting to imitate the surface of the natural scenery is not enough.⁵⁴

Ruskin’s argument about proper reading and accurate writing, most explicitly stated in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) works from a similar conception of representation, save that the rootedness of visual representation in “the natural scenery” is replaced by a conception of the etymological rootedness of language in its own past. Working from the new models of the organic history of individual words found in Richard Chenevix Trench’s *On the Study of Words* (1851) and Max Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1864), Ruskin argues that linguistic accuracy is dependent upon a learnedness in “the *peerage* of words.”⁵⁵ The proper English reader, according to Ruskin, “knows the words of true descent and ancient blood, at a glance, from words of modern *canaille*; remembers all their ancestry—their inter-marriages, distantest relationships, and the extent to which they were admitted and offices they held, among the national noblesse of words at any time, and in any country.”⁵⁶ Ruskin then proceeds to give an example of how

this awareness of the ancestry of words would function practically in a specific reading, the result being his famous, detailed reading of twenty-two lines from Milton’s “Lycidas” in which he scrutinizes almost every word, and reads the poem as though it were an etymological allegory.⁵⁷ Thus Ruskin defines “reading” as a “word-by-word examination of your author,” rendering the activity of reading equivalent to biblical exegesis.⁵⁸

The philosophy of language borrowed from Trench and Müller suited Ruskin’s purposes well for they allowed him to locate the truth of words in their originary manifestations and to skirt accusations that he was attributing his own senses to them.⁵⁹ Language according to Trench was extremely instructive about the natural order, and the human’s place within it: “it should yield us so much, when we come to analyse and probe it; and yield us the more, the more deeply and accurately we do so.”⁶⁰ From this perspective Ruskin’s re-definition of the key terms of political economy – such as “Wealth”, “Value” and “Utility” in *Unto This Last* – represent, not his own personal understanding of them, but their “true” meanings, rediscovered and asserted through careful consideration, in opposition to their misapplication by the recent “investigation of some accidental phenomena of modern commercial operations” mistakenly called the science of political economy.⁶¹

As Hans Aarsleff has remarked, the replacement of a pragmatic approach to discourse with the evocation of the true, deeper meaning of words, was a favorite tactic of the Victorian Sage, for it allowed him to assume a position of knowledge, to suggest that the natural, deeper meaning was potentially available to all thoughtful readers, and to attribute a sense of depth to his own writing.⁶² While critics like Spencer were formulating theories of style which explained how readers could consume great amounts of material quickly, Ruskin's fastidious conception of reading allowed him to define literacy against the growing marketplace of books and journals, to argue that one "might read all the books in the British Museum...and remain an utterly 'illiterate,' uneducated person", or "read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter,—that is to say, with real accuracy" and be measured an educated person.⁶³ Just how effective Ruskin's conception of reading was, however, can be gauged, not only by its critical reception, but by the increased popularity of smart and snappy journalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. If we accept George Gissing's account of it, as presented in *New Grub Street* (1891), it is the careful and dedicated authors such as Edwin Reardon who die out, and the cynical opportunists like Jaspar Milvain who succeed by dashing off quick bits of gossip for easy consumption on the commuter trains.

In retrospect, it might be argued that Ruskin's exegetical program of reading was applied with the most fidelity by his own followers, to his own works. For instance, during the 1880s and 1890s Ruskin Reading Groups emerged, as well as "Ruskin extension courses with detailed exegetical handbooks, Ruskin magazines, and books interpreting Ruskin's works line by line."⁶⁴ The Cook and Wedderburn Library Edition of Ruskin's collected works, an incredible example of devoted and fastidious scholarship, stands as another example of the motivation of Ruskinites to engage in the careful kinds of reading that he advocated. Ruskin himself "was an obsessive cross-referencer, and his scholars individually and collectively weave intricate webs of rich meaning, taking on some of the lost and labyrinthine wealth of their author."⁶⁵

But as for Ruskin's complaint about the more general misapprehension of his words, his prevailing sense that any difficult idea he hoped to convey would "not only be *misunderstood*, but in all probability be taken to mean something very nearly the *reverse* of what it *does* mean," it is perhaps fitting to give Ruskin's pupil, Oscar Wilde, who had the first word in the opening epigraph of this essay, the final word as well. For at the end of the nineteenth century, Wilde would take Ruskin's complaint and transform it into a fully fledged attack on what he deemed to be the primary source of all such misunder-

standing, that is, the corrupted authority of public opinion, which was voiced in the prose of modern journalism:

When they say a work is grossly *unintelligible*, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly *immoral*, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true.⁶⁶

This statement from Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" may be read, anachronistically, as a voice calling out its consolation from the dawn of a mass culture, to a writer at mid-century who still hoped to limit the dissemination of words, so as to ensure their very careful consumption.

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- 1 Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellman (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1989) p.433.
- 2 John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p.12.
- 3 Ruskin, *Praeterita* p.16.
- 4 Ruskin, *Praeterita* pp.30–31.
- 5 John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903—12) 5 p.333.
- 6 Much Ruskin scholarship focuses on the significance of the visual sense to Ruskin’s critical identity. For instance, Robert Hewison’s *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*, Wolfgang Kemp’s biography entitled *The Desire of My Eyes*, and Elizabeth Helsinger’s *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*. Regenia Gagnier has called Ruskin’s autobiography “first and foremost” a “description of the things he has seen from the viewpoint of a privileged seer,” and has also remarked upon the “specular approach” of much Ruskin scholarship. Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 240; 306, fn. 24.
- 7 G. Robert Stange, “Art Criticism as a Prose Genre,” *The Art of Victorian Prose*, eds. George Levine and William Madden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp.46–47.
- 8 Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800—1850* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p.41.
- 9 Dinah Birch, “Ruskin’s ‘Womanly Mind,’” *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 38 (1988) p.313.
- 10 Mary Ann Caws, “Ruskin’s Rage and Ours: The Dramatic Style,” *Browning Institute Studies* 18 (1990) pp.39, 45.
- 11 For Ruskin’s use of the scripture in his political economic writings, see Michael Wheeler’s *Ruskin’s God* (Cambridge

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- and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.155–179.
- 12 Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837—1913* (Westport, Connecticut and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1984) p.83.
- 13 Russel Edward Kacher argues that Ruskin dropped the scriptural references of *Unto This Last* in his next series, “Essays on Political Economy” (later reworked and published as *Munera Pulveris*) because he saw that they prevented his work from being taken seriously. See Russel Edward Kacher, “Ruskin and the Reviewers: Studies in the Social and Economic Criticism, 1857—1866,” dissertation., University of Maryland, 1974, 93–99. However, the tactic of *definition* common in religious oratory is employed as aggressively as ever in the sequel to *Unto This Last*. For a useful account of the genre of Victorian sage writing, see George P. Landow, “Elegant Jeremiahs: The Genre of the Victorian Sage,” *Victorian Perspectives: Six Essays*, eds. John Clubbe and Jerome Meckier (Newark: U of Delaware Press, 1989) pp.21–41.
- 14 Jeffrey L. Spear, *Dreams of English Eden: Ruskin and his Tradition in Social Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) p.88.
- 15 See Ruskin, *Works* 17: 147–63. As Jeffrey Spear has noted in *Dreams of English Eden*, Ruskin’s approach to political economy, which entailed a definition of the first principles of the discipline by seeking the root meanings of an economic vocabulary also had precedents in the discipline; but this approach was notably archaic by the 1850s. As Spear writes:
Early in the nineteenth century Ruskin’s approach would have seemed less retrograde. Adam Smith quotes at least fourteen classical authors for illustrative material in the *Wealth of Nations*, and McCulloch actually opens his *Principles of Political Economy* by defining his subject in terms of the roots of *economy* from the Greek for house or family and law...[However,] the process that prevailed as far as the traditional terms of economic analysis are concerned was a gradual wearing away in economic contexts of the other connotations of such words as *value*. Then, as the

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study grew more and more technical, the historical terms found in modern textbooks were coined, and the blessedly neutral language of mathematics came to the fore. Spear 150–1.

George Bernard Shaw ranks Ruskin as one of the great economists “because he knocked the first great hole in classical economics by showing that its value basis was an inhuman and unreal basis, and could not without ruin to civilization be accepted as a basis for society at all.” George Bernard Shaw, *Ruskin’s Politics* (Oxford University Press, The Ruskin Centenary Council: 1921) pp.17–18.

- 16 John Woolford, “Periodicals and the Practice of Literary Criticism, 1855—64,” *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto P, 1982) p.116.
- 17 “The Cutting Style of Writing,” *Dublin University Magazine* 79 (1872) p.421.

- 18 Woolford, pp.111–2.
- 19 “Innovations in Style,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (1838) p.326.
- 20 Ruskin distances himself from the generally accepted role of the critic as the voice of public opinion in the preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters* I, where he writes: “I do not consider myself in any way addressing, or having to do with the ordinary critics of the press. Their writings are not the guide, but the expression, of public opinion.” (Cited in Brian Maidment, “Readers fair and foul: John Ruskin and the periodical press,” *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto P, 1982) p.41.
- 21 Maidment, “Readers” pp.39, 53.
- 22 W. Forsyth, “Literary Style,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 55 (1857) p.428.
- 23 *Saturday Review* 10 (1860) p.583.

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- 24 “Political Economy in the Clouds,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 62 (1860) p.656.
- 25 Nineteenth century accounts of Lyly’s writing—including those of William Gifford (1816), Nathan Drake (1817), Walter Scott (1820), John Payne Collier (1831), Henry Hallam (1839), Charles Kingsley (1855), George Marsh (1860), and Henry Morley (1861)—describe *Euphues* as an example of “affected” writing, meaning, writing that displays emotion excessively, and thus unconvincingly, in an overly “decorated” manner. For a brief history of the critical opinion upon Lyly up to 1868, See Edward Arbor, ed., *John Lyly: Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit, Euphues and his England* (London, 1868) pp.11–27.
- 26 Henry Morley, “Euphuism,” *The Quarterly Review* 109 (1861) p.382.
- 27 David Masson, “Genius and Discipline in Literature,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 7 (1862) p.81.
- 28 Masson p.85.
- 29 Masson pp.85–6.
- 30 Masson p.86.
- 31 Masson pp.86–87.
- 32 Masson pp.88, 89.
- 33 Masson p.89.
- 34 Masson p.88.
- 35 Samuel Reynolds, “The Critical Character,” *Westminster Review* 80 (1863) p.469.
- 36 Reynolds p.469.
- 37 Reynolds p.469.
- 38 Reynolds p.478.
- 39 Reynolds p.479.
- 40 See Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H.

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- Super (1865; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan P, 1962) pp.269–75.
- 41 Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848—1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p.25.
- 42 Arnold p.275.
- 43 See Maidment, “Readers” pp.43–57.
- 44 J.L. Bradley, ed., *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 240–250. This unsigned review by Henry Fothergill Chorley was originally published in *The Edinburgh Review* 103 (1856) pp.535–57.
- 45 Ruskin, *Works* 16 p.57.
- 46 Herbert Spencer, “The Philosophy of Style,” *Literary Style and Music* (1852; New York: Philosophical Library, 1951) pp.2–3.
- 47 Ruskin, *Works* 16 pp.59–60.
- 48 Ruskin, *Works* 16 pp.125–6.
- 49 Ruskin’s aversion to the “human creature’s...disease of thinking” comes straight from Carlyle who had made a similar analogy between critical inquiry and inaction some thirty years earlier. As Carlyle put it in his essay “Characteristics” (1831): “The Beginning of Inquiry is Disease: all science, if we consider well, as it must have originated in the feeling of something being wrong, so it is and continues to be but Division, Dismemberment, and partial healing of wrong.” Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics,” *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols. (1831; New York: AMS Press, 1969) 3 p.2.
- 50 For an extended discussion of Ruskin’s empiricist rhetoric in his definition of the “Truth of Chiaroscuro” and “Space”, see Jules David Law, *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception From Locke to I.A. Richards* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993) 204–233. Law depicts Ruskin as one who has taken the English empirical tradition (in which he includes, among others, Locke, Burke and Hazlitt) to its limits by consistently attempting to balance the issue of perception and representation, rather than stressing the importance of one over the other.

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- 51 See Law pp.209–214.
- 52 Law p.216.
- 53 Ruskin, *Works* 3 p.104.
- 54 John Ruskin, “The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art Over Nations,” *The Two Paths* (1858; New York: Chelsea House, 1983) p.20.
- 55 Ruskin, *Works* 18 p.65.
- 56 Ruskin, *Works* 18 p.65.
- 57 I say “etymological allegory” because the true, moral “sense” of the poem emerges as individual words are unpacked. For example, the reading of the expression “Blind mouths” which, Ruskin argues, might seem a careless, broken metaphor, but which would only appear so to a careless reader. As he explains:
Not so: its [the expression’s] very audacity and pithiness are intended to make us look close at the phrase and remember it. Those two monosyllables express the precisely accurate contraries of right character, in the two great offices of the Church—the bishop and the pastor.
A bishop means a person who sees.
A pastor means one who feeds.
The most unbishoply character a man can have is therefore to be Blind.
The most unpastoral is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed,—to be a Mouth.
Take the two reverses together, and you have ‘blind mouths. (Ruskin, *Works* 18 p.72.)
- 58 Ruskin, *Works* 18 p.75.
- 59 According to Trench, words were “fossils” of the natural order of man, including his art (“fossil poetry”), his moral structures (“fossil ethics”) and his actions up to the present (“fossil history”). Richard Chenevix Trench, *On the Study of Words* (1851; London, 1882) p.5. While the human’s agency over the development of his language was not denied, this agency was ultimately scripted by a transcendent order: “Man makes his own language...as the bee makes its cells, as the bird makes its nest; he

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cannot do otherwise” (Trench p.15). Thus, a presentation of the true meanings of words could be equivalent to a revelation of the much larger meaning of existence within a natural order.

- 60 Trench p.27.
- 61 Ruskin, *Works* 17 p.147.
- 62 See Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1982) pp.31–41.
- 63 Ruskin, *Works* 18 p.65.
- 64 Brian Maidment, “Reading Ruskin and Ruskin Readers,” *PN Review* 14.5 (1988) p.50.
- 65 Gagnier p.307.
- 66 Wilde p.273.

Writing the Self, the Text and The Body.

The Elision of the Feminine in Kenneth Branagh's 'Mary Shelley's Frankenstein'¹.

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I

My aim in this paper is to show how the presence of the feminine voice in Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is partial, and at times non-existent, and how Mary W. Shelley's gendered critique of the Romantic quest for (male) identity is severely challenged, if not completely erased. Branagh is a sensitive and committed filmmaker and, I believe, he is sincere when he declares that: "We felt that it was crucial in a modern movie-especially of a novel by a great woman writer and the daughter of a very important feminist-to make sure that she [Elizabeth] is represented by someone who isn't just a 'love interest'. It is not an attempt to be politically correct. It's just very much more interesting, and more accurate about the current evolutionary state of the relations between men and women" (Landau, 1994: 26) So what has happened? Why does he get caught in a perspective that, apparently, he does not really identify with?

In order to answer these questions and demonstrate my point of view, I will read Mary Shelley's text using a Foucauldian approach to point out the importance of the writing process in

the understanding of the novel and in the critique of the Romantic male ontology of the self that she carries out. I will compare her use of discursive/writing practices with Kenneth Branagh's reinterpretation and simplification of Shelley's complex analysis of subjectification within dominant discursive practices. Branagh's elision of a number of issues that Shelley, more or less, openly addresses in the novel is one of the reasons why he seriously weakens the presence of the feminine voice in the movie. The British director, as I will argue in the following pages, chooses to privilege Victor Frankenstein's narration and to silence the voices of the other two narrators in the novel, Robert Walton and the Creature. He also fails to delve deep into the process of education the Creature goes through and in so doing he erases both (and primarily) Mary Wollstonecraft's and William Godwin's messages, which are powerfully present in Mary Shelley's original novel. The result of this is the void in the text left by the author's presence. Her use of writing practices as a tool of resistance to the hegemonic order she does not completely identify with is ignored.

II

In 1994 the talented British film director Kenneth Branagh delivered his *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*, an adaptation of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*. Branagh himself has written in the introduction to the published script that: "Since this film is *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, our intent was always to arrive at an interpretation that's more faithful than earlier versions to the spirit of her book ... The idea was to use as much of Mary Shelley's as had not been seen on film before" (Landau, 1994: 9). With no doubt, and as various critics have pointed out (Frost, 1996; Hefferman, 1997; Laplace-Sinatra 1998), this is the adaptation which most closely reflects the original text² and that tries to pass on to the public Mary Shelley's message or, at least, part of it. Branagh is faithful to the Romantic context of the novel both from the philosophical and historical perspectives. The British director stresses more than once that his reading of *Frankenstein* focuses on some specific Romantic issues; he refers to "the myth of creation" (Landau, 1994: 9) or underlines how the novel "...ask[s] fundamental questions about our existence" (9) and how it has a grip on a contemporary audience that finds itself: "...at the dawn of a potential communications revolution which threatens our sense of identity or our sense of control ... and these gothic tales seem to satisfy a deep-seated fascination with the limits of human experience"

(10). He is sensitive to the Romantic ontological (male) quest for identity and to the powerful presence of the Promethean myth in Mary Shelley's narration of the events, and he brilliantly reshapes these ideas in order to seduce a contemporary audience. But in spite of all this, Branagh's adaptation of *Frankenstein* fails to convey to the spectator Mary Shelley's gendered critique of Romanticism³.

Kenneth Branagh declares that: "The novel does have some storytelling issues that a film must address. It was, after all, the work of a very young writer who is sometimes confusingly inconsistent with the plot. Our screenplay therefore came up with some inventions and redirections" (Landau, 1994: 9). Branagh is obviously not wrong. Shelley's text is notorious for such inconsistencies, but the film director's 'inventions and redirections' end up by focusing the spectator's attention only on some of the issues that Shelley addresses in the novel. For example, Michael Laplace-Sinatra, in his essay "Science, Gender and Otherness" (1998), stresses the overwhelming presence of gothic elements in Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and points out how the director himself reads the text mainly as a gothic novel. In this sense, the British director seems to forget that the novel is not only considered as a key text in science-fiction or gothic fiction⁴, but since the seventies a key text in feminist criticism and this cannot be forgotten or ignored⁵.

III

Michel Foucault devoted his life to analysing the discursive practices and the power relations which underlie the construction of the normative Western identity. During the last part of his life he focused his work on the importance of ethics in such processes. It is in this sense that from the beginning of the '80s till his death, he went on to reinterpret key moments in Western epistemology, as he did, for example, in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' where he started from the Kantian concept of autonomous subject to move on to the theorization on the role that history plays in his notion of the formation of 'new ontologies of the self'. But it is through the studies of the classics and the classical world that he shaped his idea of ethics as 'care of the Self'. I will base my analysis on a short essay called "Self Writing" which belongs to a wider investigation on the ethics of the self. This is how Michel Foucault introduces his argumentation: "These pages are part of a series of studies on the 'arts of oneself', that is, on the aesthetics of existence and the government of oneself ..." (1997: 207). Even though his attempt to delve deep into the process of subjectification starts from a series of writing practices which refer to classical culture, I do believe that they can be used as a guide to follow Mary Shelley's narrativization of identity in *Frankenstein* as during and previous the completion of her novel she was studying the classics, translating from Latin and busy learning

Greek. References to this heavy schedule of intellectual work can be found from 1814 to 1818 in her correspondence and diaries. In the entry dated Sunday 18 of September 1814, she writes: "M[ary] receives her first lesson in Greek" (1995: 27) and in the reading lists of her *Journals* she notes down, among other French, German, Italian and English texts, the following names and titles: in 1814, the Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro and Apuleius; in 1815, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁶, Virgil and Sallust; in 1816, *Vita Alexandri* by Quintii Curtii, Horace's odes (some of them, she does not specify which ones) and *De Senectute* by Cicero; in 1817, *Somnium Scipionis* by Cicero and *Annalium* by C. Cornelii Taciti; in 1818, *Aeneid* (she writes *Aenied*) and Terence⁷. So there is no doubt that she was familiar not only with the classics, but also with the notion of 'the government of oneself' and the ontology of the self which was to be found in their writings.

At the end of his essay, Michel Foucault summarises his insights with the following words:

In this case-that of the *hupomnemata*-it was a matter of constituting oneself as a subject of rational action through *the appropriation, the unification, and the subjectification of a fragmentary and selected already-said*; in the case of the monastic notation of spiritual experiences, it will be a matter of dislodging the most hidden impulses

from the inner recesses of the soul, thus *enabling oneself to break free of them*. In the case of the epistolary account of oneself, it is a matter of bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and that gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures one's everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living (1997: 221. my emphasis).

This quotation contains the elements that inform Mary Shelley's use of writing as a tool to carry out her critique of Romanticism; the Foucauldian reference to *hupomnemata* as 'the appropriation, the unification, and the subjectification of a fragmentary and selected already-said' can be related to Mary Shelley's quest for a feminine subjectification within the Romantic ontology of the self and the exploitation of the Western cultural tradition in order to construct a discourse of resistance to this same tradition. The result of such reinterpretation is Frankenstein's Creature and his learning process. On the other hand, she uses the epistolary practice to englobe in her narrative 'the gaze of the other', namely the silent presence of Mrs. Saville and the reader. Both elements have been ignored in Branagh's adaptation, but I will return to this issue later.

Michel Foucault's essay refers to the process of subjectification that has its origin in classical culture and that, according to the French philosopher, is basically divided into two central ideas: the *hupomnemata* and the 'correspondence'. He starts his paper by referring to the *Vita Antonii* by Athanasius by stressing that:

Here, writing about oneself appears clearly in its relationship of complementarity with reclusion: it pallidates the dangers of solitudes; it offers what one has done or thought to a possible gaze; the fact of obliging oneself to write plays the role of a companion by giving rise to the fear of disapproval and to shame ... the constraint that the presence of others exerts in the domain of conduct, writing will exert in the domain of the inner impulses of the soul. (1997: 208–09).

Foucault goes on in his analysis to encapsulate reading to the practices which compose the process of subjectification of the classics ("It is necessary to read, Seneca said, but also to write" Foucault, 1997: 208). This action is carried out through a process which consists of three phases: meditation (*meletan*), writing (*graphein*) and training oneself (*gumnazein*)⁸. The final result brings the subjects to internalize what they have read and meditated about and they finally transform this

discursive knowledge into ‘rational principles of action’ or into what Foucault calls, following Plutarch, “an *ethopoietic* function [which is] an agent of the transformation of truth into *ethos*” (1997: 209). That is to say that they move from theory to practice. But what is really important in this analysis of the relationship between writing and identity is the already mentioned distinction between the *hupomnemata* and the *correspondence*.

The relationship between writing and identity is explained by the philosopher by referring to the role that writing plays in a person’s life. It is compared to an act of liberation which helps the soul to fight back “...the darkness where the enemy plots are hatched” (208). Foucault does not obviously use the word soul, but, as we have seen, he starts his theorization by referring to a Christian text whose point of reference is with no doubt the spiritual welfare of the individual. Anyway, he goes to explain that the idea of the use of writing as a liberating force, as well as a way of normativization of one’s identity, is already present in classical authors such as Seneca, Plutarch or Marcus Aurelius. Now we see how all of these authors are not only present in the Shelley’s reading lists, but we know that Plutarch’s *Lives* is one of three texts, together with Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werther* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which form the Romantic cultural paradigm and Victor

Frankenstein’s Creature’s tragic and frustrated quest for (a normative) identity.

The *hupomnemata* is the use that the individual makes of all kinds of written material whose specific function is to be used as ‘memory aid’. The usefulness of the notebook is of special importance, and we could also add the journal, as it constitutes “... a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation” (209). All this bulk of written material can be used again and again by the individual who finally applies these discursive practices to forge his or her own subjectivity.

According to Michel Foucault, the final aim of the meditation carried out on the bulk of texts which are considered as the starting point of Western subjectification is not to discover a new set of discourses, but to structure the already said in order to forge the reading/writing individual’s subjectivity: “Such is the aim of the *hupomnemata*: to make one’s recollection of the fragmentary *logos*, transmitted through teaching, listening, or reading as a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself ...” (211). The heterogeneity of such sparse knowledge becomes one powerful discourse once it is structured into a text. That is to say that what we get is a theoretical body of knowledge which becomes, through the writing

process, the body of Discourse, the very same Discourse which is at the base of the Western normative identity:

The role of writing is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a ‘body’ ... And this body should be understood not as a body of doctrine but, rather-following and often-evoked metaphor of digestion-as the very body of the one who, by transcribing his readings, has appropriated them and made their truth his own: writing transforms the thing seen or heard ‘*into tissue and blood*’ ... It becomes a principles of rational action of the writer himself. (Foucault, 1997: 213. my emphasis).

Victor Frankenstein’s obsessive study of the old alchemists can be understood as a move from theory to practice of this process of subjectification:

In this house I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa ... When I returned home, my first care was to procure the whole works of this author, and afterwards of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus ... My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I

entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life” (F, 22–3)⁹.

The male scientific discourse¹⁰ which is at the base of Victor Frankenstein’s obsessive investigation into the origin of life and his restless quest to usurp the right to give life to a human being is summarised and transcribed into his laboratory journal and it is this writing that becomes “tissue and blood”, that is to say his rejected Creature:

I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed with profane fingers, the tremendous secret of the human frame ... The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of the materials ... It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils ... It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half extinguished light, I saw the dull eye of the creature open ... (F, 36–37 and 39).

The normative scientific text becomes a body which will be excluded by the same hegemonic discourse that has created it. The Creature does not conform to the norm because he repre-

sents, in Shelley's analysis of Romanticism, the questioning of the very same order that has created him. If we use a Foucauldian approach to the text, then, Victor embodies a (masculine) dominant discourse or, as Moira Gatens puts it: "It is still "anthropos" who is taken to be capable of representing the universal type, the universal body. Man is the model and it is his body which is taken for the human body; his reason which is taken for Reason; his morality which is formalized into a system of ethics" (1997: 84).

As Foucault goes on to explain in his essay, 'Correspondence' also plays an important role in the definition of one's identity. As we have already stressed, one of the most important elements in writing letters (apart from the writing process itself) is the presence of 'the gaze of the other'. Foucault stresses that: "To write is thus 'to show oneself', to project oneself into view, to make one's own face to appear in the other's presence. And by this it should be understood that the letter is both a gaze that one focuses on the addressee (through the missive he receives, he feels looked at) and a way of offering oneself to his gaze by what one tells him about oneself" (1997: 216).

In this sense, both the importance of Mrs. Saville, Walton's sister, and the use of the epistolary form in the novel must be stressed. Their function is instrumental in *Frankenstein*, as we

know the story because Walton writes to his sister what the other two narrators have told him. In Foucauldian terms, what Walton does is to write letters not only to communicate with his sister, but also in order to understand better his own subject position¹¹ and also the Creature's subjectification within the power/knowledge relation. At the same time, he manages to give the reader a perspective on the story which is not only and exclusively Victor's. As Frost, following a feminist critical perspective, points out: "The silent presence of Margaret Saville in the text serves as a muted criticism of Walton's plans. Because Margaret is a woman she is to be seen as a feminist critic ... not in a narrow doctrinaire sense, but in the sense that she represents a counter-world of humanist values" (1996: 76. My emphasis) In short, the use of correspondence in Shelley's *Frankenstein* debilitates Victor's (and Walton's) authority on a scientific discourse that Mary Shelley openly criticises, while the Creature's voice is instrumental in her critique of the male Romantic ontology of the self. The use of multiple narrators breaks up the centre of meaning of Victor's scientific as well as ontological quest for the truth. Jerrold Hogle recognises the importance that both the writing process and the use of multiple narrators have on the author's intention to break up the centre of signification of the text:

For even as the narrators try to find the origins of things, the 'birthplace' of what they do is always a locus of

writing that refers elsewhere ... Robert Walton's quest for the source of magnetism is spawned by 'a history of all the voyages made for the purpose of discovery' ... Frankenstein's lust for 'the causes of life' is engendered by the works of the best known alchemists ... the creature's drive to locate his own genesis is rooted in Plutarch's *Lives*, Goethe's *Werther*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and his maker's journal, all of which are themselves 'rooted' in other narratives. (1995: 207)

As we have stressed above, all this is not considered in Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and, as we watch the movie, we lose sight of Shelley's presence while the cinematic reality takes shape only through Victor's gaze and experience. Kenneth Branagh does not consider the use of these writing practices because he uses Mary W. Shelley's authorship only to frame his own discourse, which is embodied in Victor Frankenstein's main role as the only narrator. In this sense, Michael Laplace-Sinatra suggests that the elimination of Walton's and the Creature's voices implies the British director's decision to stress Victor Frankenstein's heterosexuality. In so doing, Branagh chooses not to transmit openly to the public the allusions to Victor's homosexuality, whose existence in the original text critics have underlined, especially in relation to his obsession for the Creature¹². The implication of

such choice is of great importance in our analysis as Victor defines himself as firmly male and he definitely expresses his hetero/sexuality more than once through the sexual tension that Branagh creates between Victor and Elizabeth. Once Victor's ambiguous sexual orientations have been clarified, we (as spectators) are not only ready to recognise his discourse (scientific as well as personal) as representative of a normative (male) representation of discursive practices, but are also ready to recognise his voice and point of view as the author/itative ones. Branagh relies on a gaze which is constructed from a masculine perspective, he seems to talk to a masculine viewer in order to push the spectator to identify with his Romantic and tragic hero: Victor Frankenstein. This focalization justifies Mary Ann Doane's words on the theoretical oblivion of film theory when it gets to the feminine gaze: "The woman, the enigma, the hieroglyphic, the picture, the image-the metonymic chain connects with another: the cinema, the theatre of pictures, a writing in images of the woman but not *for her*" (1997: 178).

In the introduction to the published script of the movie, "Frankenstein Reimagined", Kenneth Branagh says of the character of Victor:

This is a sane, cultured, civilized man, one whose ambition, as he sees it, is to be a benefactor of mankind.

Predominantly we wanted to depict a man who wanted to do the right thing. We hope audiences today may find parallels with Victor today in some amazing scientist who might be an inch away from curing AIDS or cancer, and needs to make some difficult decisions. Without this kind of investigative bravery, perhaps there wouldn't have been some of the advances we've had in the last hundred years—an argument Mary Shelley makes on Victor's behalf (Landau, 1994: 19).

Now what I ask is: is that really Mary W. Shelley's argument? And the answer is: I do not think so.

IV

In Branagh's reading of Shelley's text the reference to the author is present in the title of the movie and in the voiceover at the beginning of it, as it is a woman's voice we hear reading the unmistakable words from Mary W. Shelley's 'Preface' to the 1831 edition of the novel: "I busied myself *to think of a story* ... which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beating of the heart" (1994: 195)¹³. On the one hand, this beginning means

that the film director wants the public to know that he *does* recognise Shelley's authorship, but on the other hand, he silences the fact that the original novel reflects the author's experiences as a daughter and a wife, as contemporary feminist critics tend to underline¹⁴. Branagh, apart from the title and the use of the voiceover, does not take into consideration this critical stance.

Following Katherine Hill-Miller's argument (1995), in the construction of the characters which people her novels, Mary Shelley relies on the persons close to her and in so doing she shapes Victor Frankenstein as a kind of mixture of Godwin and Percy Shelley¹⁵, and not from a friendly disposition. According to Marilyn Butler: "Her thwarted but longed-for dialogue during the years with her father (which she afterwards described in a letter as 'an excessive & romantic attachment') was interrupted, to be replaced by a richer but almost equally problematic relationship with her lover Shelley" (1994: xiii). When we think of Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, it is difficult to see him as a 'benefactor of mankind'. He is obsessed with his studies and he wants to use science to be seen as the creator of a 'new species' and as the great scientists of the past whose "hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, [and that] have indeed performed miracles" (*F*, 30). Like them what Victor Frankenstein hopes to acquire is "new and almost unlimited

powers” (30) as “They can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows” (30–1). But, at the same time, his discovery of the power of electricity, an idea associated with the ‘birth’ of the Creature, is clearly not related with life and/or creation alone but with death and destruction, as we see in the following quotation:

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump ... *The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment*; and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature and origin of thunder and lightning. He replied, ‘Electricity’ (*F*, 24. My emphasis)

Victor’s scientific career separates him from both Elizabeth and his best friend Henry Clerval. In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, this separation marks two definite and clearly distinct territories: a feminine one, Elizabeth and Clerval’s, and a masculine one which is Victor’s:

I delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the ærial creations of the poets. The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own ... Henry Clerval ... was a boy of singular talent and fancy. I remember when he was nine years old, he wrote a fairy tale, which was the delight and amazement of all his companions. His favourite study consisted in books of chivalry and romance ... (*F*, 21).

Elizabeth Lavenza’s and Henry Clerval’s fields of interest are so similar to the ones Mary Shelley attributes to herself as a child in the introduction to the 1831 edition of the novel that it is difficult not to see on which side she stands and who inhabits the feminine sphere and who does not: “As a child I scribbled; and my favourite pastime during the hours given me for recreation was to ‘write stories’. Still I had a dearer pleasure than this, which was the formation of castles in the air—the indulging in waking dreams ...” (1994: 192). In Branagh’s adaptation, the communion of minds that exists between Elizabeth and Clerval is lost. Clerval is now a student of medicine that Victor meets at the University in Ingolstadt and whose higher ambition is “... get my degree-*if* I can stop failing anatomy—and settle down to relieve rich old ladies of their imaginary

ailments, and *then* relieve their real and beautiful daughters” (Landau, 1994: 59). Victor Frankenstein’s uncommunicative character is not opposed to a nurturing individual like the original Clerval, but to a student who is unable to resist the sight of a corpse during an anatomy class. Clerval has been transformed into a kind of simple and at times comical character who, more than once, dangerously reminds the spectator more of a laughing Amadeus Mozart than the sensitive childhood friend he is for Victor Frankenstein in the 1818 edition of the novel, which is the edition that Kenneth Branagh uses for his adaptation. Breaking and silencing the tie which exists between Elizabeth Lavenza and Henry Clerval is like lacerating an important part of the discursive construction of femininity that Shelley tries to carry on.

Elizabeth Lavenza is, in the 1818 edition, the orphaned daughter of an Italian nobleman who Alphonse Frankenstein, Victor’s father, decides to adopt and that Caroline Beaufort, Victor’s mother, chooses as his son’s bride to be. Elizabeth’s character is not really a deep or complicated one¹⁶. Apparently, she is a quiet and pretty passive character in the book and we cannot deny that, up to a point, she embodies a traditional idea of domesticity. Anyway, if we read between the lines, it is possible to see that Elizabeth can express herself powerfully as she does when visiting Justine who has been unjustly accused of William’s, Victor’s younger brother, assas-

sination. The words she utters are full of rage and condemn both the legal system and the death penalty:

Yet heaven bless thee, my dearest Justine, with resignation, and a confidence elevated beyond this world. Oh! how I hate its shews and mockeries! when one creature is murdered, another is immediately deprived of life in a slow torturing manner; then the executioners, their hands yet reeking with the blood of innocence, believe that they have done a great deed. They call it retribution. Hateful name! When that word is pronounced, I know greater and more horrid punishments are going to be inflicted than the gloomiest tyrant has ever invented to satiate his utmost revenge (*F*, 67).

This fragment, openly Godwinian, is taken literally from one of Mary Shelley’s letters and reproduced in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*. This is what Mary W. Shelley writes in 1817 to Percy Shelley against capital punishment:

“He (Cobbett) encourages in the multitude the worst possible human passion revenge or as he would probably

give it that abominable Christian name retribution” (1980: 49).

As we see, Elizabeth uses Mary’s words. She shares with Mary more than one characteristic: her mother died and she is a well educated person. Victor Frankenstein himself stresses this when talking of Elizabeth: “ Her imagination was luxuriant, yet her capability of application was great” (*F*, 20). Furthermore, Elizabeth is the eternal fiancé of a man who is more interested in his scientific project and in his ego than in communicating with her, Mary lives with a man who in the end was not able to fulfil her expectations. After the loss of her first child, the suicide of Percy Shelley’s first wife and the loss of Fanny Imlay, Wollstonecraft’s first daughter and Mary Shelley’s half sister, she was going through a deep crisis, but as Butler points out:

... he [Percy Shelley] resembled her father in offering support that was intellectually superb, emotionally inadequate ... after each bereavement, William Godwin wrote her letters which briskly recommended as little mourning as possible. To the extent that *Frankenstein* is a family drama, centred ... on the failure of communica-

tion and mutual support ... it reads like the imaginative reworking of experience” (1994: xiii).

Examples of Victor’s difficulties in communicating with his family and friends and the feeling of alienation he suffers from are present throughout the novel. He is representative of the Romantic seeker and, like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, he is metaphorically surrounded by ice. Mary Shelley suggests that his coldness, isolation and selfish quest bring to nothing as he is incapable of relating to the people who love him. He has not only abandoned his Creature, but also his own family and the impression that the reader gets is that he finally marries Elizabeth because he cannot postpone it anymore. Furthermore, Mary Shelley seems to point out that he is also guilty of Elizabeth’s death as Victor is incapable of telling her she is in danger:

Elizabeth observed my agitation for some time in timid and fearful silence; at length she said , ‘What is that agitates you, my dear Victor? What is your fear?’ ‘Oh! Peace, peace, my love,’ replied I , ‘this night, and all will be safe: but this night is dreadful, very dreadful’ ... and I earnestly entreated her to retire, *resolving not to join her*

until I had obtained some knowledge as to the situation of my enemy. (*F*, 165. My emphasis)

When Victor Frankenstein finally decides to tell his story to Walton, he is more similar to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner who is condemned to repeat endlessly his story in order to expiate than to the brother Walton seeks and thinks he has found in Victor. This is how he describes his grief to Mrs. Saville, his sister, on Victor's death: "Margaret, what comment can I make on the untimely extinction of this glorious spirit? What can I say, that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow? All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble. My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment" (*F*, 186). Shelley's Victor Frankenstein is a cold seeker who is unable to express affection to his beloved, he is not the passionate man that Branagh creates.

V

Following this line of thought and the development of the novel, we can see that Mary Shelley does not share Victor's intellectual choices. On the contrary, she wants to demonstrate how the result of Frankenstein's discourse is tragic and ethically a mistake. We do not have to forget that nineteenth-

century scientific discourse was instrumental in helping to build the patriarchal notion of womanhood. The normative identity (masculine) set the rules and the hierarchy within power relations, to differ from the established norms meant to be a monster. As Rosi Braidotti points out: "The monstrous or deviant is a figure of abjection in so far as it trespasses and transgresses the barriers between recognizable norms or definitions" (1997: 65). In her article "Mothers, Monsters and Machines", she underlines how since the seventeenth century science and pseudo-science have tried to control women's "generative power" and replace it. Braidotti stresses how the discourse of the alchemists and their obsession with discovering and controlling the 'spark of life' finds an echo in literary texts as, for example, *Tristram Shandy* or *Frankenstein*. Then she goes on to compare these first attempts at contemporary research and emphasis on new reproductive technologies that, in Braidotti's words, symbolises the definitive appropriation of the feminine: "Once reproduction becomes the pure result of mental efforts, the appropriation of the feminine is complete" (1997: 71).

If we consider Braidotti's point and get closer to Kenneth Branagh's reading of Shelley's novel, it is not difficult to realise that the scientific discourse which materialises in the movie leaves aside a gendered perspective. Rosi Braidotti argues that: "What is happening with the new reproductive technologies

today is the final chapter in a long history of fantasy of self-generation by and for the men themselves—men of science, but men of the male kind, capable of producing new monsters and fascinated by their power” (1997: 71). Through a conversation that takes place in Dr. Waldman’s lab between Frankenstein, Clerval and Waldman himself, the British film director brings his public to relate Victor Frankenstein’s research to contemporary genetic investigation on cloning: This is Victor’s point: “Sir, we can change things. We can make things better. You know that. We’re on the verge of undreamt-of discoveries. If only we had the courage to ask the right questions. Now you must help me, please” (Landau, 1994: 62) and then “No. It’s not impossible. We can do it. We’re steps away from it ... And if we can replace one part of a man, we can replace every part. And if we can do that, we can design a life, a being that will not grow old or sicken, one that will be stronger than us, better than us, one that will be more intelligent than us, more civilized than us ...” (Landau, 1994: 65).

Here Branagh is ready to lean on a scientific discourse that, as Braidotti points out, follows a tradition of exclusion, appropriation and/or control of the feminine, but at the same time, and in order to transform his Victor Frankenstein into a scientist committed with mankind’s welfare, he ambiguously needs to relate his stand to Moer’s feminist reading of *Frankenstein*¹⁷. In fact, Branagh’s Frankenstein decides to defy

nature after his mother’s tragic death in childbirth (in the novel she dies of scarlet fever). The gothic scene of Caroline Beaufort’s death is constructed in order to produce in the spectator a sense of horror and repulsion and to justify Victor’s behaviour and intellectual choice. This is how this moment is described on the script (words cannot unfortunately replace the images and most of the horror the spectator feels is lost):

Victor’s mother in labor, lying in a birthing chair. The labor is not going well. Pain, sweet, screams ... Father kneels between her legs, mopping the blood, as he tries desperately to save the baby ... Mrs. Moritz passes Father a scalpel. He lifts Mother’s nightgown and inserts the knife. We pan off to black ... Shift to bedroom. Victor runs to see his Mother hanging limply in the birthing chair, a lifeless heap (Landau, 1994: 43–44)

In the following scene, Victor Frankenstein declares in front of his mother’s grave: “You should never have died. No one need ever die. I will stop this, I will stop this. I promise”. Women’s bodies, or we’d better say their mutilation, are used by Branagh to give credibility to his Victor Frankenstein both as a scientist and as a human being. If Caroline Beaufort’s dismembered (by childbirth) body is what pushes Victor to become ‘a

benefactor of mankind' and try to defy death, Elizabeth's death attempts to stress his tragic life-story as a human being. She is killed, as in the novel, by the monster, but her expected death strikes the spectator as a punch when Frankenstein's Creature rips out Elizabeth's heart "on her wedding night" and shows it still beating and dripping with blood to Victor Frankenstein.

Nonetheless, there is a scene at the end of the movie which we do not find in the novel and that, in my opinion, could be interpreted as a way on the part of Branagh to recuperate *in extremis*, even though unsuccessfully, Shelley's voice and gendered critique of science. After Elizabeth's death, Branagh's Victor tries to reconstruct *his* bride. He chops off Elizabeth's head, assembles it on Justine's body and the result is "... a hideous amalgam of Elizabeth's head and face and Justine's torso" (Landau, 1994: 130). It is now that, for the first time in the movie, Elizabeth (now physically speechless) reacts against her 'creator' and commits suicide, the only, ultimate, extreme, but *silent*, act of resistance. If we focus our attention on this absolutely gothic scene (it is impossible not to think of Bertha Mason setting Thornfield Hall on fire and committing suicide) we realize that if Branagh wants to be faithful, at least in part, to Shelley's discourse, he needs a character who positively becomes Victor's victim. The horrible spectacle of Elizabeth's re-birth moves the spectator and, for the first time in the movie, Victor Frankenstein's obsession can be interpreted as

the obsession of a mad man. Branagh stresses, at least in the end, Victor's selfishness towards humanity and problematizes his commitment with science. But the objective result of all this is that women's bodies are transformed into fragments of a text (Branagh's creature?) which the British director uses to write Victor's character. Caroline's, Justine's and Elizabeth's bodies become, in the cinematic text, a function that the main narrator (Victor) uses in order to project to the public his own personality, obsessive quest and scientific discourse. Now, if the Creature's voice had been kept and included in the narration, I believe that the scenes that refer first to the dismembering of Elizabeth's body and then to her 'reconstruction' would not have been necessary. As James Hefferman puts it: "In Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) the creature rips out Elizabeth's heart and in so doing reenacts what filmmakers regularly do to Mary Shelley's text. They rip out its heart by making the creature speechless, as the Whale version did, or at the very last cutting out his narrative, as even Branagh's version does" (1997: 136).

As has been widely demonstrated, the Creature's learning process is indebted, in the original novel, to Mary Wollstonecraft's theories on education and her critique of Jean Jacques Rousseau (Cantor & Moses, 1990; Bennet, 1993; Kelly, 1994). The Creature learns to recognise himself as different through the acceptance of the Western (and Romantic)

cultural paradigm which is represented by the three fundamental books he finds and reads: Plutarch's *Lives*, Goethe's *Werther* and finally, and most important, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As Dean Franco points out in his intriguing lacanian reading of Shelley's novel, the monster identifies himself with Milton's Adam, but, throughout the novel, we realize that Mary Shelley constructs his life story in order to relate him ontologically also to Eve and not only to Adam. In this sense Franco underlines that: "As we will see, he appropriates characteristics of both Adam and Eve to form his self understanding" (1998: 84). We could add that in fact the Creature constructs his identity through the identification with cultural parameters that neither represent him nor, as he soon discovers, allow him to fit in any of the accepted ontological and social categories: "And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property ... I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me . What was I?" (*F*, 96–7). Frankenstein's Creature exists in-between categories (he is neither Adam, nor Eve), but the normative construction of identity does not accept a subject who exists 'in-between'. What he really represents is difference and otherness: that is to say the unacceptable.

According to Stephen Behrendt, the Creature is the materialization of the feminine as he represents the marginalization of

Romantic women writers. He says that: "... Frankenstein's Creature shares the situation of Romantic women, marginalized and spurned by a society to whose patriarchal schemata they fail to conform" (1995: 78) and "What is at issue, finally, is the ongoing radical marginalization of the unconventional, a phenomenon as much political as social and cultural" (1995: 83)¹⁸. Then, Shelley's critique is constructed around two main points: her mother's theories on education, which are applied to the creature's learning process, and the narration the monster carries out of his ontological tragedy. Both elements are strongly related one to the other as well as to the questioning of the hegemonic Romantic idea of womanhood. In Branagh's adaptation these elements are lost. The process of self-education the Creature goes through is severely simplified. There is no reference to the three fundamental books in his life and to Safie, whose character represents, in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, her mother's critical answer to Rousseau's theories.

In the original novel, the Creature's tragic life story represents Mary Shelley's resistance to the established discursive practices and her critique of the dominant order of things. To erase from the narration the Monster's narrative is like erasing the author's voice. In Branagh's movie, when Frankenstein and his Creature meet and the monster asks his creator "...Did you ever consider the consequences of your actions? ... Who am

I?” (Landau, 1994: 116), the spectator has not got any point of cultural reference as there is no mention of the books that have forged the monster’s cultural identity. It becomes difficult to understand the Creature’s ontological tragedy, deep suffering and relate it to Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideological inheritance and Mary Shelley’s gendered reading of Romanticism. Once more, Branagh’s adaptation of Mary W. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* seriously challenges the presence of the feminine voice in the text and in so doing it deprives the novel of one of its most powerful social implications¹⁹.

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- 1 The research leading to the publication of this essay was made possible by a Research Project (PB98–0181) financed by the *Comisión Interministerial de Ciencia y Tecnología* (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura).
- 2 When I refer to the original text what I mean is the edition published in 1818. I am aware of the difficulty in using the word ‘original’ when dealing with a text which went through several drafts between 1817 and 1831, not to talk of the corrections the novel suffered during the various editing processes it has gone through. On this topic see David Ketterer’s “The Corrected Frankenstein: Twelve Preferred Readings in the Last Draft”. *English Language Notes*, 1995, 33 (1): 23–35.
- 3 See Ann Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 4 For interpretations of the novel which refer to the gothic tradition or science-fiction see, for example: Rowen, N. “The Making of Frankenstein’s Monster: Post-Golem, Pre-Robot”, in Nicholas Ruddick, (ed.), *State of the Fantastic. Studies in the Theory and Practice of Fantastic Literature and Film* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990) pp. 169–177. Stableford, B. “Frankenstein and the Origins of Science Fiction”, in David Seed, (ed.), *Anticipations. Essays on Early Science Fiction and Its Precursors* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995) pp. 46–57.
- 5 An excellent introduction to the multiple critical perspectives used to approach Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is Ellen Cronan Rose’s essay “Custody Battles: Reproducing Knowledge about *Frankenstein*” (*New Literary History*, 26, 1995. pp. 809–832). As for the fundamental role that Feminist criticism has played on the re/interpretation of some issues in the novel see among others: Dickenson, Vanessa D. “The Ghost of a Self: Female Identity in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27 (Spring), 1993. Pp: 79–91. Elshtain, J. *Public Man, Private Woman*. Oxford, Robertson, 1981. Gilbert, S. Gubar, S. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979. Hill-Miller, K. ‘My Hideous Progeny’. *Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995. Johnson, B. “My Monster/My Self”. *Diacritics*, 12, 1982. pp. 2–20. Keller Fox, E. *Reflection on*

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- 6 She read Ovid in Latin, see *Journals* on p. 89.
- 7 Mary Shelley also wrote down Percy Shelley’s reading lists from 1814 to 1817 (which are full of Greek texts). See

Journals, pp. 84–102. As Mary Shelley was still learning Greek with the help of Percy Shelley, she did not dare to read directly from this language and relied heavily on her husband’s translations. Many more references can be found simply by going through Mary W. Shelley’s *Journals*. Anyway, this is not the aim of the essay as I only want to stress her interest in classical culture in order to proceed with my analysis of the text.

- 8 “...the meditation proceeds the notes which enable the rereading which in turn reinitiates the meditation” (Foucault, 1997: 209).
- 9 I quote from Shelley W., Mary. *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*. Marilyn Butler, (ed.) (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994).
- 10 “He [M. Waldman] began his lecture by a recapitulation of the history of chemistry and the various improvements made by different men of learning ... he then took a cursory view of the present state of the science ... he concluded with a panegyric upon modern chemistry, the terms of which I shall never forget” (*F*, 30).

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- 11 “The letter one sends in order to help one’s correspondent – advise him, exhort him, admonish him, console him – constitutes for the writer a kind of training ... the opinions that one gives to others in a pressing situation are a way of preparing oneself for a similar eventuality” (Foucault, 1997: 215).
- 12 See Laplace-Sinatra (1998), pp. 263–265.
- 13 This ‘Preface’ is considered of great importance because in it Mary Shelley not only explained the origin of her story, but publicly recognised her authorship. The 1818 edition had been published anonymously with an introduction written by P.B. Shelley which induced people to think that he was the author of the text.
- 14 This issue has been analysed in the text by Katherine Hill-Miller, ‘*My Hideous Progeny*’. *Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995. This is what she writes on the topic: “The pivotal relationship of Frankenstein – the interaction between a rejecting father and his rejected creature – certainly has biographical resonance in Mary Shelley’s life ... And the novel’s composition is in itself a remarkable family romance, since Mary Shelley read and revised the works of both her father and her mother to tell the tale of Frankenstein’s spurned, desolate offspring” (59–60). Mary Shelley herself writes in the introduction to the 1831 edition that: “It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing” (1994: 192).
- 15 At the time she was quite upset with Godwin. He had rejected her after discovering her affair with Percy Shelley and had not wanted to see her since, not even after Mary’s first baby’s death. As for her husband, she felt isolated while staying in Geneva and strongly suspected an affair between Percy Shelley and her stepsister Claire.
- 16 The similitude between Elizabeth Lavenza and the Creature has been analysed by Katherine Hill-Miller (1995).
- 17 In *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers understood the text as Shelley’s cry against her tragic experience of

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motherhood. She suggests that the author's argument in writing the novel was originated from a feeling of: "... revulsion against new born life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (p. 142). In the introduction to the script, Branagh declares that: "Literary scholars often look at Mary Shelley's own life for the sources of all this: the horror of her own birth with her mother dying as a result, and Mary's own children dying in infancy" (Landau, 1994: 20–21). According to Ellen Cronan Rose: "Moers's reading of *Frankenstein* occurred in the context of feminists' demands for women's rights to control their reproductive destiny, of Simone de Beauvoir's negative portrayal of maternity (it imprisons women 'in repetition and immanence', and Shulamith Firestone's blunter verdict that 'pregnancy is barbaric' and 'childbirth hurts'", "Custody Battles: Reproducing Knowledge about Frankenstein", en *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 809–832, p. 820.

- 18 See also Poovey, Mary. "My Hideous Progeny': Mary Shelley and the Feminisation of Romanticism". *PMLA*, 95 (1980). pp. 332–47; Johnson, Barbara. "My Monster/My Self". *Diacritics*, 12, 1982. pp. 2–20, and Mellor, Ann. *Mary*

Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters (London: Routledge, 1988).

- 19 The erasure of the feminine seems to be a recurrent feature in the adaptations of Mary Shelley's novel. This is what Caroline Picart has written on the issue in her analysis of James Whale's *Frankenstein*: "In place of the novel's complex characterisation of the monster, Whale's film substitutes a grotesque creation doomed to criminality and isolation ... in my analysis of Whale's *Frankenstein*, I show how the film magnifies the parthenogenetic dream, represses the "feminine" or "inferior" shadow, reduces the "monstrous" or "overdeveloped" shadow and excises a third type of shadow, which is a combination of the "feminine" and "monstrous". (1998: 383 and 384).

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This is Middleton Ward

Kate Betts (University College Chichester)

This is Middleton Ward

It was to be Wittering
but they tell me it's full.

Six beds, six heads,
doctor's rounds.

I watch *Countdown*.

The woman opposite
has appendicitis.

Then there's me
with my lumpy tit.

They look at it
during *Neighbours*

and draw a black arrow
pointing where
to
cut.

The news is on:
Northern Ireland, Iraq, Iran,
Diana's Trust,
Scotland team back
from the World Cup,
Tim's in, Greg's not,
Robert the Bruce's skull
re-buried,
fossils found
with feathers,

and I
reach for my pen
to write
on my other breast
"Not this one".