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Ecologies of Embodied Minds Embedded: Radical Romantic Perspectives on Architectures of Technology

Sharmaine Browne

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ECOLOGIES OF EMBODIED MINDS EMBEDDED: RADICAL ROMANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON ARCHITECTURES OF TECHNOLOGY

by

Sharmaine Eunice Browne

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2017
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Sharmaine Eunice Browne

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

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Radical Romantic Perspectives on Architectures of Technology

by

Sharmaine Eunice Browne

Advisor: Alan Vardy

This dissertation explores Romantic responses to the role of architectural technologies in the development of material being, consciousness, and culture by applying a critical approach in which I combine radical embodied cognitive theory, ecocritical perspectives, and a phenomenological lens to select Romantic texts written from 1789 to 1884 in response to industrial modernity. While scholarship has thoroughly explored technology as a cultural force which inevitably shapes consciousness, I propose that a slight shift of emphasis from technology’s external influence to the material internalization of its influence allows for new perspectives—particularly in light of recent proposals in cognitive philosophy which assert that the “self” may not be located within an individual but in the delicate reciprocity of mind, body, and environment. Romantic texts are particularly well-suited to the study of this reciprocity because, from William Blake onward, each author explored here insists upon a dynamic wholeness, an unpredictable, uncontainable movement, a reciprocity of minds, bodies, and worlds—embodied minds embedded in our environs.

In doing so, my project complicates long-standing readings of Romantic authors as nostalgic reactionaries to the effects of technology and argues that what has been taken for nostalgia in Romantic literature was very often an intervention in prevailing dominant ideologies. These Romantic interventions reflected a strong resistance to the splintering effects of an accelerating culture which refused the intermingling of mind, body, and environs while it overlooked the effects
of burgeoning technologies on individuals and environs. With this radical Romantic resistance in mind, this dissertation shifts the focus toward the ways Romantic authors locate themselves as witnesses to the effects of accelerating environmental changes on abject human figures and communities amidst industrialization. This dissertation also looks at the ways Romantic texts create new interpretive spaces by complicating the effects of architectural technologies on people and places, and on culture and society.

I argue for the pressing contemporary relevance of Romantic texts through a critical lens which facilitates an understanding that Romantic perspectives provide us with new ways to rethink our relationships with the technologies we create at a time when technologies have now become fully integrated throughout the earth and soaked into every aspect of life and the world. I propose that the Romantic generation parallels ours; Romantic authors lived amidst a transitional time of enormous technological change as well—as they watched their world transition from a pre-industrial world into an accelerating, fully industrialized one. Likewise, we are living amidst a transition from a pre-digital world into a fully digitalized one. Today, the omnipresence of technology is inescapable. Instead of seeing technology as separate from our “selves” and separate from nature, this dissertation argues that we need to acknowledge the ways technologies become part of the environs we inhabit and to the ways we become embedded within these technological architectures which shape our environs as our conscious and unconscious minds, as well as our visible and invisible bodies, intermingle in them. Through poetic language, and perspectives which embrace the intermingling of minds, bodies, and environs, the literature of Romantic authors provides us with new and contemporarily relevant ways to responsibly rethink our relationships with the technologies we create.
This One is for Ma

and Wenzl
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I am indebted to so many for their support, encouragement, and inspiration throughout this process. I am very grateful for the support, guidance, and many hours of my advisor, Alan Vardy, who supported the vision I had for this dissertation as a tangible project of contemporary relevance that I loved researching. I also wish to thank my committee members, Tanya Agathocleous and Alexander Schlutz, for the wonderful feedback and encouragement they offered, as well as Richard Kaye for his supportive mentorship and advice. Throughout this process, I have often remembered Michael Wenzl, Nancy Lucas, and Martin Luschei, and I will always be grateful for their support in encouraging me to pursue my intellectual passions.

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Chapter One

An Introduction

ECOLOGIES OF EMBODIED MINDS EMBEDDED: RADICAL ROMANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON ARCHITECTURES OF TECHNOLOGY

When you are along for the ride—as Einstein has told us—it is hard to detect the motion.

Ecology urges us to recognize the value of comprehending interrelationships among all forms of life—including humankind—to one another and to inanimate portions of their environment. Ecological thinking insists that we be steadily conscious of living in a real natural world with which we meaningfully interact and in which our actions have discernibly specific consequences. An ecological vision, then, is one that assumes that all human beings bear profound responsibilities toward others, not just other humans but other life forms—along with their and our habitat. That we exist not in elitist isolation but interdependently is a conviction that imposes concrete and difficult ethical burdens—a prime reason why ecologically oriented poetry must resonate with moral if not spiritual overtones.

What, finally, of the self? Does the extended mind imply an extended self? It seems so. …. If so, then these boundaries may also fall beyond the skin …. As with any reconception of ourselves, this view will have significant consequences. There are obvious consequences for philosophical views of the mind and for the methodology of research in cognitive science, but there will also be effects in the moral social domains. It may be, for example, that in some cases interfering with someone’s environment will have the same moral significance as interfering with their person. And if the view is taken seriously, certain forms of social activity might be reconceived as less akin to communication and action, and as more akin to thought. In any case, once the hegemony of skin and skull is usurped, we may be able to see ourselves more truly as creatures of the world.

The critical study of technology in British Romantic literature is rare. While nineteenth-century British literature has historically been afforded a great deal of literary critical attention in the study of technologies, the weight of critical attention has disproportionately fallen upon the literature of Victorian authors onward with their more advanced industrializing machine technologies. By contrast, I propose widening the lens to include early Romantic authors’ responses to technology, including those technologies which have been long forgotten in the dominant
narratives as technology—particularly in the ways technologies alter lived-in spaces or the ecology of experience. I argue that Romantic texts provide us with productive and contemporarily relevant perspectives because their generation parallels ours at another uniquely pivotal historical moment. Like us, Romantic authors straddled a transitional time of enormous change. They lived with one foot each in two different worlds, a slower, pre-industrial world and an accelerating, fully industrialized one. They lived amidst rapid and enormous changes while being still close enough to another time to remember the pre-industrialized world that was quickly fading into the past. Likewise, today we are also living in a rapidly changing world which continues to accelerate at an even more rapid pace as the days before digital fade from memory as we are being fully immersed in what I call the digitalverse, an enormously digitalized world. Yet, today, many of us clearly remember the days before digital and ways of life which were slower, more private, and perhaps more intimate. Romantic authors shared this phenomenological experience of change. While it is true that historical change is constant, there are times when cultural transitions happen more rapidly and massively than other times. Both the Romantic era and our own parallel each other in this sense. This generational parallel encompasses many ways of being, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on the architectural technologies in which we live, the kinds of technologies which provide the scaffoldings that constitute our daily lives. I argue that this parallel warrants examination because the experiences of the Romantics may provide us with lessons from which we may glean insights into our own experiences of our technologies and their many unforeseen effects. While it is equally true that our current cultural dynamics are farther along, particularly in terms of environmental damages and consequences, the slower pace of an earlier, parallel time may provide us with a much-needed context that narrates a story whose industrial beginnings engineered much of where we find ourselves today.
I am particularly interested in technologies we no longer look upon as technologies because they reveal our perpetually growing reliance on new technologies as they emerge. In this dissertation, I contend that technologies such as the chimney as a hidden space or the plate glass which has created more transparent urban spaces since the middle of the nineteenth century are as equally significant as those of later machine technologies, such as the train and railways which cut through the rural countryside and urban neighborhoods, at least in relation to phenomenological and bodily experience. This dissertation takes for its subject select Romantic texts written from 1793 to 1865, from William Blake to John Ruskin, in response to industrial modernity and its accompanying “enlightenment episteme of Cartesian dualism ([the] radical disassociation of self and nature: the watcher and the watch[ed]), which Bacon inaugurated and which Newton mechanized” (Lussier 394). It considers the radical Romantic departure from the Cartesian episteme as an effort to cultivate an understanding of the effects of cultural change on the embodied mind embedded in a material world. In doing so, this dissertation explores the role of architectural technologies in the development of consciousness and culture with attention to Romantic perspectives on and of individuals, abject figures in the margins and the landscapes they populate.

My project seeks to complicate long-standing readings of British Romantic authors as nostalgic or conservative reactionaries to the effects of technology, shifting the focus toward the ways these authors locate themselves as witnesses to the effects of accelerating technological and ensuing environmental changes on the abject human figures and landscapes which populate their texts and the margins of society amidst industrialization. I complicate readings of Romantic experiences of various environments while examining the cultural changes written upon the people and the landscapes themselves by technologies that leave their traces and architectures. What emerges is yet another and different layer of radical Romantic discourse—alongside other radical discourses which have been extricated and examined in depth by critics such as John Mee in
Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism of the 1790s (1994), Gary Harrison in Wordsworth’s Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty and Power (1995), and David Simpson’s Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity (2011). The radicalism of Romantic authors is by now well established in a number of different areas. Along intersecting cognitive, ecocritical, and phenomenological lines, I suggest that radical Romantic energies and perspectives also infuse topics of technology in texts which have been interpreted historically as awash in nostalgia, sometimes conservative, or often apolitical.

I propose the intermingling of interpretive spaces by combining cognitive, ecocritical, and phenomenological lenses as a new way of excavating meaning from Romantic texts in ways which illuminate their contemporary relevance. First, while recognizing the enormous influence Romantic authors have had on green studies, I propose that facilitating a critical relationship between ecocritical perspectives and more human-centered phenomenological and cognitive lenses allows for a more spacious exploration of Romantic literature by expanding boundaries of common interpretations. Doing so allows us to re-situate human individuals and surrounding environs more intimately within critical narratives. Specifically, intermingling ecocritical, phenomenological, and cognitive perspectives creates an approach which is of particular importance in recognizing that the centrality of the “self” in Romantic literature is less nostalgic than it is radical and more about the “other” than has often been acknowledged. Furthermore, I argue that individual narratives cannot be fully interpreted without due attention to individuals’ immediate environs. Secondly, with a related purpose in mind, I do not approach urban and rural environs as mutually exclusive but as mutually interdependent variations of each other and other environs—a point which I will take up again later; moreover, I emphasize the relationship of reciprocity that necessarily exists between them. For instance, there can be no urban development without changes to the countryside, and life in the countryside is necessarily affected by the constitution of urban spaces. Thirdly, I emphasize
that the prominence of the “self” in Romantic literature is not just “self” centered but often about other “selves” as well, the “I” of the “other,” and that acknowledging this is more in keeping with a Romantic endeavor which has commonly been described as nostalgic but in fact might be more aptly described as championing human agency and human presence amidst environmental spaces. This is not to say that the self of the author does not often play a central role in the kinds of ruminations represented across Romantic texts such as Wordsworth’s “emotion recollected in tranquility,” but that Romantic authors are concerned with the self at large – including the selves of others as well – as evidenced by the sheer number of abject figures followed and described throughout Romantic texts.

I draw upon these intersecting, intermingling perspectives put forth by cognitive scientists, ecocritical scholars, and phenomenological philosophers in an effort to account for a “sense of the nurturing ecosystemic wholeness” which a number of Romantic poets absorb and convey through poetic language, such as William Wordsworth with poems such as Home at Grasmere (Kroeber 55). I have chosen to approach Romantic texts with an intersecting, interdisciplinary perspective in the spirit of what Kate Rigby calls “[t]he urgent need for such a critical theory of social-natural relations” (140) in “Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere” (2011) while describing Böhme’s call for the “the rehabilitation of the German tradition of Naturphilosophie (natural philosophy)” (140): “The urgent need for such a critical theory of social-natural relations arises from the increasingly anthropogenic character of our earthly environs, or ‘the nature that we are not,’ coupled with the growing technologization of the human body, or ‘the nature that we ourselves are’” (Rigby 140). Explains Rigby,

This implies that at least on the scale that is most relevant for human life, the nature/culture binary that has for so long structured Western understanding, while perhaps always partially illusory and certainly culturally contingent, has now become highly problematic, and with it,
the modern division of the natural and human sciences must also be challenged. What is required is a new “socialnatural science” which acknowledges both the social production of other-than-human nature and the bodily dimension of human subjectivity. (140)

I contend that such an approach demands an intersecting, multi-faceted critical lens. As I will establish throughout, cognitive, ecocritical, and phenomenological concerns overlap when examining the radical Romantic departure from the enlightenment episteme. At a time when the scientific method was emerging, this Romantic departure subversively counters the Cartesian dualities which continue to divide the humanities and sciences from within and without even today. In the works of Romantic authors explored here, from William Blake onward, each author insists upon a dynamic wholeness, an unpredictable, uncontainable movement, a reciprocity of minds, bodies, and worlds—embodied minds embedded in our environs. My critical lens embraces this Romantic spirit.

By now, we do not know our world apart from its technological framing and scaffolding, but Romantic authors were among the first to address the effects of architectural technologies in relation to nature, the body, and the embodied mind. However, I argue that Romantic authors throughout the nineteenth century are not reacting away from technological change nostalgically, but are instead engaging these technological effects on environs radically—breaking with the emerging dominant ideology of the Cartesian enlightenment thought as early as Blake, who, as Mark Lussier points out in “Blake’s Deep Ecology” (1996), attempts to “unveil the insidious potential of the enlightenment episteme at its moment of inception and replace it with an episteme of wholeness” (407). This “wholeness” does not preclude any “ability” to rest in “uncertainties” as Lussier points out in “Blake, Deleuze, and the Emergence of Ecological Consciousness” (2011). Rather, it leads to an “ecological consciousness” (257). According to Lussier,
Blake strives to articulate the inherent dynamism of those principles of “interconnectedness,” “non-localizability” and “indeterminacy” promoted by Deleuze as the base for “transcendental empiricism.” Here already, as for Deleuze, “everyday use of expressions as a means of relating one’s self to others emerges . . . as a solution to the problem left by Descartes.” (259)

Such an “ecological consciousness” penetrates throughout the work of Romantic poets as disparate as William Blake, Mary Shelley, William Wordsworth, and John Clare, an interpenetrating consciousness.

This ecological consciousness, moreover, is not limited to the literature of the local or the rural. Rather, it weaves through the texts of urban cities and landscapes as well, penetrating the city and country division of environs, particularly throughout Blake, who was never a nature poet, but also in Wordsworth and Clare as well, be it directly as in Book Seven of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1850) or indirectly as in *Michael* (1800) or in Clare’s “The Moors” (1820-26/1935). Romantic work is well suited, then, to the kind of intermingling, intersecting critical theory which is needed today. Reading Romantic texts with an openness to the more porous than solid division between urban and rural settings is particularly relevant to understanding the effects of technology on life, then and today. As Peter Thorsheim observes in *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (2006), “the histories of country and city, of natural and built environments, are in fact deeply interwoven. Cities are concentrations not only of people and production, but also of consumption. Without outside supplies of air, water, food, and energy, urban life would be unsustainable” (Thorsheim 8). Thus, urban landscapes can never be separate, natural ones never untouched, and bodies never un-embedded from somewhat feeling the effects of both places at once. Lawrence Buell emphasizes this point in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005):
natural and built environments, revisionists point out, are long since all mixed up; the landscape of the American “West” is increasingly the landscape of metropolitan sprawl rather than the outback of Rocky Mountain “wilderness”; the two spheres are as intertwined, now and historically, as surely as Los Angeles and Las Vegas have siphoned water from the Colorado basin from the hinterlands for the past century (Comer 1999). Literature-and-environment studies must develop a “social ecocriticism” that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as “natural” landscapes (Bennett 2001: 32). (Buell 22)

Also, given “that environmental criticism’s working conception of ‘environment’ has broadened in recent years from ‘natural’ to include also the urban, the interweave of ‘built’ and ‘natural’ dimensions in every locale, and the interpenetration of the local by the global” (Buell 12) as Buell notes, the “wholeness” and the “ability to rest in uncertainties” that marks Romantic poetry and fiction may contribute to “knitting up” the “the Cartesian wound,” as Terrance Deacon has named it, “that severed mind from body at the birth of modern science” (Dennett 16).

The intermingling consciousness for which I argue, as well as relating one’s self to others, and the “wholeness” and “interconnectedness” which leads to the “ecological consciousness” Lussier observes in Blake’s pursuit is deeply present in other Romantic authors as well. In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein: A Modern Day Prometheus (1818), “[t]he close of Frankenstein offers an image of nature’s continuing power to resist the human quest for mastery. Enlightenment mastery is based on division” as Jonathan Bates observes in The Song of the Earth (2000) (54). James McKusick points out in Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology (2000) that John Clare’s “works convey a detailed knowledge of the local flora and fauna, an acute awareness of the interrelatedness of all lifeforms, and a sense of outrage at the destruction of the natural environment” (78). In Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of the Mind (1994), Karl Kroeber explains how
Wordsworth’s *Home at Grasmere* celebrates how all parts of human nature and physical nature interactively contribute to an inclusive vitality of being multiform but not hierarchized” (55). A critical awareness of the Romantics’ ecological consciousness is apparent in the work of a number of ecocritics; however, a greater critical emphasis is yet needed with respect to the cognitive and phenomenological elements of these relationships of reciprocity, the role of the embodied mind amidst this connectivity. At the base of this Romantic awareness of connectivity is a profound recognition of physicality, a biological materiality.

According to Kate Rigby in “Romanticism and Ecocriticism,” “[w]hat makes Romantic ecology distinctly modern, however, is the dawning recognition that such interrelationships were the product of an ongoing process of biological evolution” (Rigby 65). This Romantic awareness of bodily and physical being in humans, animals, and plants, strongly countered an emerging dominant ideology built upon an “English philosophical tradition of empiricism defined by ‘Bacon, Locke & Newton’” which, as Mark Lussier states in “Blake’s Deep Ecology” (1996), “… was instrumental in establishing the enlightenment episteme in Western thought. The empirical method operates on an illusory objectivity and reduces nature to inanimate matter, allowing it to function simply as grist for the mill of the industrial revolution” (394). Nature was essentially all that was not human. As a result, the theological spiritual privileging of human beings simply translated into the philosophical material privileging of human beings over absolutely all else. Thus, for instance, “animal cruelty presented no problem because it raised no conceivable objection” as Christopher D. Stone notes in *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism* (1987) (Stone qtd. in Lussier 395). “… Descartes ‘was persuaded that animal lacked even conscious awareness; they were, in his image, like the clock’” (Stone qtd. in Lussier 394-95). According to Lussier,

[t]hus, as William LaFleur indicates, “[a] kind of nadir was reached by Descartes and Malebranche who thought it ‘impossible … to be cruel to animals, since animals are
incapable of feeling.” As Jeremy Hayward has … argued, this “mistaken metaphysics has led to alienation between our thoughts and our bodies, between our bodies and the Earth, and between us and other species” (Dharma Gaia 64). (Lussier 395)

In the wake of this mistaken metaphysics, the physical material of nature and the body becomes commodified or expendable—only as valuable as its use value within dominant social and economic structures which, in turn, subsumes marginalized human individuals as well. Thus, the outlook applies to people, especially marginalized people, as well as animals and elemental nature. Such a view may well be held responsible for the ravaging of the environments, the depletion of natural reserves, the abuse of fossil fuels, and the degradation of a healthy planet and its inhabitants who have been relentlessly subjected to toxins, poisons, and abuses for the sake of profit and progress. Furthermore, this Cartesian view, according to Lussier in “Blake’s Deep Ecology” (1996), “gave way at the outset of romanticism to a deep-seated suspicion of mechanistic philosophy and its accompanying subordination of nature in the service of technology” (394). This suspicion was well-founded. I argue that each Romantic author explored here asks in his or her own way, Wordsworth’s question which punctuates the end of “Lines Written in Early Spring,” “what man has made of man?” (Wordsworth Major Works 81).

“From Descartes on, the guiding question in Western philosophy has been whether body and mind are one or two distinct substances (properties, levels of description, etc.) and what the ontological relation between them is” (28), as Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch note in The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience (1991). In From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds (2017), Daniel C. Dennett explains that Descartes “concluded that minds like his (and yours) were not material entities, like lungs and brains, but made of some second kind of stuff that didn’t have to obey the laws of physics,” what we know as Cartesian dualism (14). However, “[t]he problem with dualism,” as Dennett observes, “ever since Descartes, is that
nobody has ever been able to offer a convincing account of how these postulated interactive transactions between mind and body could occur without violating the laws of physics” (14).

Romantic authors specifically question this dualism.

In a myriad of ways, the texts of Romantic authors create sites of struggle in which competing ideological systems, arising from conflicting world views, collide. For this reason, serious ethical implications can be more fully explored and deeply understood in a manner that retains historical and contemporary relevance and resonance through the study of Romantic texts with a critical lens that incorporates intermingling perspectives. The value of these explorations is that they reveal humanity’s complex relationships to our varied and various environments which transform the world and our “selves,” at its core an issue of ethics. This is a material approach which addresses “a history of space becoming place” (64) as Buell describes it in The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination (2005). In terms of the effects of place on being or self-formation, the issue of phenomenological experience is then inescapable. As Buell observes: “[w]hatever one thinks of the total Martin Heidegger or the total Maurice Merleau-Ponty, it is hard to quarrel with the propositions that being means being-there, or that ‘to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 169)” (Buell 65). Aside from Heidegger’s troubling associations, an important distinction to be made between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, which emphasizes the value of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological outlook, has to do with how Heidegger “was horrified by the bodily resemblance of humans to other animals and argued that an abyss yawns between us and them” as Louise Westling points out in “Merleau-Ponty’s Ecophenomenology” (2011) (126). Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, “came to embrace the kinship of living organisms through coevolution and described language as an embodied force emerging in many dimensions and beings in the natural world. He argued that that each human—
like any other organism—exists in a chiasmic embrace with the surrounding world” (Westling 126). By drawing upon this mind-in/body-in the world premise, thus tapping phenomenological as well as environmental and cognitive perspectives, the moments where observer and observed meet and touch reveal themselves as relationships of reciprocity embedded in empathy.

With respect to individual experience, Romantic responses emerge as radical through both the experiences of disenfranchised individuals in various scenes as well as the experiences of the authors themselves. I argue that the “I” or perspective of the other is as integral as the “I” of the author to the meaning of works such as William Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” poems (1789-94) or William Wordsworth’s [The Discharged Soldier] (1798). Moreover, the perspective of what are “other-than-human-beings” (Rigby 64) is as important as well—as in Wordsworth’s “Lines Written in early Spring” (1798) or John Clare’s “The Lament of Swordy Well.” An important concept comes into play here, that of Bakhtin’s “transgressience.” As Patrick Murphy describes it in “Dialoguing with Bakhtin over Our Ethical Responsibility to Anothers” (2001), Bakhtin “adds ... [a] crucial

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1 In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty says the relationship between self and the world “is not one of immediate and or frontal contradiction” (76), as quoted in Carol Bigwood’s “Logos of our Eco in the Feminine: An Approach through Heidegger, Irigaray, and Merleau-Ponty” (2007). Merleau-Ponty states, “[t]he world neither surrounds, nor is surrounded by my body” but rather there is a “reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other” (VI 137). Bigwood summarizes Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic embrace as follows, drawing from the specifics of The Visible and the Invisible. “Between I and the things of the world, we can catch sight of a prior ‘complicity,’ an underlying ‘kinship,’ ‘pre-established harmony,’ or ‘secret’ and ‘natal bond’ that every sentient self has with the world (VI 32, 76, 138, 133, 220). When we perceive, ‘the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things’ as though I already knew them (VI 76, 133). My carnal situation is one of ‘flesh offered to flesh’ (VI 131, n.1). A chiasmic ‘embrace’ takes places between the flesh of my body and the flesh of the world, before reflection (VI 271). This embrace is a simultaneous integration and differentiation, for Flesh as Being is a divergence from itself” (103). According to Merleau-Ponty, these observations also retain an applicability that extends well beyond the relationship that obtains between touching and being touched. He contends that mind and body (VI 247, 259), the perceptual faith and its articulation (VI 93), subject and object, self and world (VI 123), as well as many other related dualisms, are all associated chiasmically, and he terms this interdependence of these various different notions the flesh (VI 248-51). The rather radical consequences of this intertwining become most obvious when Merleau-Ponty sets about describing the interactions of this embodied flesh. At one stage in The Visible and the Invisible he suggests that the realization that the world is not simply an object: “[t]his does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we may say that the things pass into us, as well as we into the things” (VI 125). “According to Merleau-Ponty then, this non-dualistic divergence between touching and being touched, which necessitates some form of encroachment between the two terms, also means that the world is capable of encroaching upon and altering us, just as we are capable of altering it. Such an ontology rejects any absolute antinomy between self and world, as well as any notion of subjectivity that prioritizes a rational, autonomous individual, who is capable of imposing their choice upon a situation that is entirely external to them” (Reynolds Internet Encyclopedia of Technology).
concept: (transgredience)” to the mix in “Art and Answerability” (156). According to Bakhtin, “for
the author to represent life, and for the critic to evaluate those representations, … [the author] ‘must
take up a position outside himself, must experience himself on a plane that is different from the one
on which we actually experience our own life. . . . He must become another in relation to himself’”
(Murphy 156). In this way, Romantic writers access the experiences of others and environs through
language. Language, in this sense, is a space of touching and transference, not only from writer to
the observed, but from the observed to the writer. As James C. McKusick in Green Writing:
“language [is our] medium for the conception and exchange of sensory information” (McKusick 16):

[A]brams describes how language, and especially pre-literate language (as spoken, for
eexample, by Wordsworth’s orally inventive Lakeland shepherds), is correlative with the
moment of experience, part and parcel of our active engagement with the natural world, not
simply an objective description. (McKusick 16)

Here, McKusick begins to settle the dispute between the largely ad hominem debates between the
New Historicists of the 1990s and early ecocritics, such as Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber2. As
McKusick maintains, “[t]here is more to ‘Nature’ than cold, hard objects, and there is more to
‘Literature’ than pure, isolated images of the natural world” (16). He dismantles the Nature/Culture
dichotomy as false and notes that “the disjunction between Nature and Culture rests upon an

2 The pioneering ecocritical work, green writing, of Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber, emerged in opposition to the New Historical
work of critics by rejecting the politically-oriented criticism of critics such as Jerome McGann, Alan Liu, Marjorie Levinson, and
Marilyn Butler. The debate ended up in a bit of a headlock, first broken by critics such as James McKusick who avoided “an overtly
polemical basis for the establishment of ecological literary criticism” as Kevin Hutchings notes in a review of McKusick’s Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology (2000). Ecological literary criticism has since continued emerging from this initial hotbed of dispute.

As Lawrence Buell notes in The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination (2005), “[i]n the book on
Wordsworth that inaugurated British ecocriticism, Jonathan Bate framed the problem with the pardonable zeal of the insurgent: Geoffrey Hartman threw out nature to bring us the transcendent imagination; [Jerome] McGann throws out the transcendent imagination to bring us history and society,’’ after which Alan Liu categorically denies that there is such a thing as nature in
Wordsworth except as ‘constituted by acts of political definition’” (Bate 1991: 8, 18). Those prior imbalances, notwithstanding the brillance with which they were argued, invited correction. Since then, indeed, British Romanticism has proven to be as fertile and varied ground for ecocritical revisionism as it was for previous critical revolutions from phenomenology through New Historicism (e.g., Kroeber 1994; McKusick 2000; Morton 1994, 2000; Oerlemans 2002; Fletcher 2004; Hess 2004)” (Buell 3).
unexamined premise that the social production of human behavior is entirely distinct from the means by which the “lower animals” learn to hunt, hide, play, and fight” (16). McKusick’s and Abrams’s observations are not limited to the humanities.

In *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (2011), Andy Clark, a leading scientist in mind extension\(^3\), expands on the special role of language in relation to consciousness and the world from a very different point of view as follows:

Coming to grips with our own special cognitive nature demands that we take very seriously the material reality of language: its existence as an additional, actively created, and effortfully maintained structure in our internal and external environment. From sounds in the air to inscriptions on the printed page, the material structures of language both reflect, and then systematically transform, our thinking and reasoning about the world. As a result, our cognitive relation to our own words and language (both as individuals and as a species) defies any simple logic of inner versus outer. Linguistic forms and structures are first encountered as simply objects (additional structure) in our world. But they then form a potent overlay that effectively, and iteratively, reconfigures the space for biological reason and self-control. (59)

In light of Clark’s observations, Jonathan Bate’s assertion in *The Song of the Earth* (2000) takes on new meaning: “The idea is that poetry – perhaps because of its rhythmic and mnemonic intensity – is an especially efficient system for recycling the richest thoughts and feelings of a community. Every time we read or discuss a poem, we are recycling its energy back into our cultural environment. This is how the process of survival and modification functions in the realm of art” (Bate 247). Our

\(^3\) The model of an extended mind is described by Andy Clark in *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (2011), as when “[c]ognition leaks out into body and world” (xxviii).
language then, and poetic language in a particular, infiltrates and informs and is infiltrated and informed by others and the world. Language both creates and is part of an ecosystem itself. Moreover, it is aesthetically and ethically transformative.

This knowledge very much informed the creation of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s project of *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798). As McKusick observes in *Green Writing* (2000),

In their collaborative composition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge shared a common perception of the natural world as a dynamic ecosystem and a passionate commitment to the preservation of wild creatures and scenic areas. Their 1798 volume was designed as a habitat that would provide a nurturing environment for the diversity of poems contained within it. Coleridge’s unique contribution to this collaborative endeavor was his conception of language as a living thing, an integral organic system that can be cultivated by the poet for maximum diversity, either through the coinage of new words or the recovery of archaic ones. (50)

Language was the means by which they created a reciprocal and dynamic ecosystem, supporting McKusick’s assertion that Romantic writers were in fact "the first full-fledged ecological writers in the Western literary tradition" (19) – taking Krober’s observation that Romantic authors were “proto-ecological thinkers” a step further. This returns us to Bakhtin’s transgressedence.

The concept of “transgressedence,” then, connects with the issue of anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism. It addresses the problem of trying to “speak for nature” or to let nature speak through oneself as an author. It also pertains to the task of evaluating artistic representations from a perspective that includes but transcends one’s own tastes and uses for a particular work in order to consider the impact of art on perceptions of human and rest-of-nature relationships. It encourages authors and critics to see themselves through another’s
perspective: those of the rest of the natural world at the general level, and of specific ecosystems, plants, or animals at the particular level.

Thus, through poetic language, Romantic authors create spaces in which to continually delve deeply into these intersecting, intermingling, and interpenetrating relationships among living creatures and our environs, aside Romantics’ personal investments. Largely, this is because they achieve, through poetic language and perspective, not only an articulation of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic embrace for themselves, but also, through the suggestion of such spaces, for others. In this way, Romantic writing may encourage the kinds of ethical evaluations transgression encourages, the kind of “critical autobiographical stance that requires a persistent ethical evaluation of one’s moral behavior” (Murphy 156). As Bakhtin asserts, “[a]fter looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, we always return— in life— into ourselves again, and the final, or, as it were, recapitulative event takes place within ourselves in the categories of our own life” (Bakhtin Art and Answerability 17 qtd. in Murphy 156). The dynamic ecosystems Romantic authors most often recreated in their texts encouraged such “persistent ethical evaluation[s]” of behavior by persistently drawing attention to the relationships of living through poetic language.

Architectural technologies structure our lived-in spaces as our environs mediate our experience of the world, and thus affect consciousness, or, self-formation. In the chapters that follow, while extricating a longer view from the textual work, I look at the ways Romantic authors both grapple with the effects of architectural technologies and also strive to account for the experiences of individuals marked or shaped by these architectures. This is where it is necessary to push past the well-trodden notion of generalized environmental influence to instead emphasize the material foundations of individual experience. With the understanding that scholarship has already thoroughly explored technology as a cultural force which inevitably shapes consciousness (from the hackneyed “nurture versus nature” to “the medium is the message” to “interpolation” for that
matter), I am proposing that a slight shift of emphasis from technology’s external social influence to the more material internalization of its influence—and the individual experience of that internalization—allows for new and relevant perspectives. This is particularly relevant in light of more recent proposals in cognitive philosophy and embodied cognitive science which assert that the ‘self’ may not be located within an individual but in the delicate reciprocity of mind, body and environment. John Haugeland encapsulates what is still a controversial view in the cognitive sciences in what is nonetheless now considered a “benchmark” assertion in the field (Clark xxviii) in “Mind Embodied and Embedded” (1998): Haugeland asserts that “[m]ind … is not incidentally but intimately embodied and intimately embedded in its world” (Haugeland 237). Andy Clark explains Haugeland’s view in *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (2011) through what Clark calls the “extended” as opposed to the “brainbound” model of the mind as follows: “[S]ome of the relevant goings-on … don’t stay neatly in the brain. They don’t even stay neatly within the biological body. On the contrary, they prove perfectly and productively able to span brain, body, and world” (xxviii). Consciousness then, is not at all contained within the brain, or as

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4 In *Mind, Body, World: Foundations of Cognitive Science* (2013), Michael Dawson addresses the increasingly fragmented discipline of cognitive science, which can now be organized into three distinct approaches which are classical cognitive science, connectionist cognitive science, and embodied cognitive science, the last of which this dissertation draws upon. Of note, as Dawson observes the following: “Cognitive science would seem likely to be even more fragmented than psychology, because it involves not only psychology but also many other disciplines. For instance, the website of the Cognitive Science Society states that the Society ‘brings together researchers from many fields that hold a common goal: understanding the nature of the human mind. The Society promotes scientific interchange among researchers in disciplines comprising the field of Cognitive Science, including Artificial Intelligence, Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Education’” (Cognitive Science Society, 2013) (Dawson 1-2).

Clark calls it, the “brainmeat,” (xxviii). Nor are we simply “organismic skin-bag[s]” (Clark xxviii). However, Clark is careful to emphasize that he is not decontextualizing the mind from materiality: “[i]n questioning BRAINBOUND, [he does] not in any way [question] the basic materialist vision of mind as emerging fully and without residue from physical goings-on” (xxviii). Rather, consciousness and its being and experience is very much a dynamic, vibrant, and changing process which is ever in dialogue with its environmental and biological factors and elements. In other words, embodied cognitive science, like Romantic poetry and prose, flatly refutes the separation of mind from brain, brain from body, and body from world.

Cognitive science, here, intersects with literary ecocriticism. The pioneering work of Karl Kroeber situates many of his perspectives materially in Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind (1994): “An ecological view of the world, even a proto-ecological one, must be fundamentally materialistic, since its basic premise is that human beings are appropriately situated here on earth” (Kroeber 9). This view, built upon a fundamental premise of material, biological life, challenges the Western mindset which resists the fusion of mind and body. Another example makes this point. In The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination (2005), Lawrence Buell emphasizes what being-in-a-world means:

…. the understanding of personhood is defined for better or for worse by environmental entanglement. Whether individual or social, being doesn’t stop at the border of the skin. [Take] … this declaration by a Native American writer quoted by an ecocritic/nature writer of more traditional persuasion. “You could cut off my hand, and I would still live. You could take out my eyes, and I would still live … Take away the sun, and I die. Take away the plants and animals, and I die. So why should I think my body is more a part of me than the sun and the earth?” (K.D. Moore 2004: 58-9). (Buell 23-4)
This metaphoric explanation of what it means to “be” a consciousness which extends beyond-the-brain and farther, beyond the body, does not come readily to the Western mind. But, we are not nowhere, we are never without our environs. Our lives and our ‘selves’—minds embodied and body embedded—are intricately entangled and bound up with what our environs are—and what our environs often make of us. By extension, our environs are not simply “grist for the mill” (Lussier 394) of our economies, institutions, and convenience, nor are our people.

The deeply entrenched roots of a disembodied, unconnected, alienated consciousness returns us again to the mistaken metaphysics of Descartes. What of René Descartes? The conversation turns back to him and his Cartesian dualities again and again in cognitive, literary, philosophical, and environmental studies. Descartes has long been “an emblem for a collection of ideas on body, brain, and mind that in one way or another remain influential in Western sciences and humanities” (247) as Antonio Damasio puts it in Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain (1994). No discussion about situating the mind/body in the world fails to make reference to Descartes and what is well known as the Cartesian duality. Perhaps this is because, as Lussier puts it, “[l]atent in ecocritical perspectives is the necessary deconstruction of what Michel Foucault terms the enlightenment episteme of Cartesian dualism” (393). Descartes’s influence was mighty.

Damasio addresses the scope of Descartes’ influence when he notes that “[t]he idea that mind derives from the entire organism as an ensemble may sound counterintuitive at first” (226). This may be attributed to what Daniel C. Dennett calls “Cartesian gravity” in From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds (2017):

The original distorting force, which I will call Cartesian gravity, actually gives birth to several other forces. Their most “visible” manifestations are already familiar to most everyone—too familiar, in fact, since we tend to think we have already taken their measure. We
underestimate them. We must look behind them, and beyond them, to see the way they
tend to sculpt our thinking. (Dennett 17)

Dennett emphasizes the Cartesian pull on our minds, an alienating force which shapes even the
most rigorous of scholarship. “Over the years,” Dennett asserts, “trudging back and forth over the
battleground, participating in many skirmishes, I’ve gradually come to be able to see that there are
powerful forces at work, distorting imagination—my own imagination included—pulling us one way
and then another” (17). Here, Dennett identifies a powerful, distorting ideological force at work.
He continues,

[j]If you learn to see these forces too, you will find that suddenly things begin falling into
place in a new way. You can identify the forces tugging at your thinking, and then set up
alarms to alert you and buffers to protect you, so that you can resist them effectively while
simultaneously exploiting them, because they are not just distorting; they can also be
imagination-enhancing, launching your thinking into new orbits. (17)

Here, Dennett advocates for what Lussier describes in “Blake’s Deep Ecology” (1996) as the need
for “the necessary deconstruction” of Cartesian dualism always “latent in ecocritical perspectives”
(393) or an openness to Merleau-Ponty’s “chiasmic embrace” that Westling describes in “Merleau-
Ponty’s Ecophenomenology” (2011) (126). I argue that an intersecting critical lens which
intermingles ecocriticism, cognitive science, and phenomenology helps to correct the distorting
force of what Dennett calls “Cartesian gravity” not only by opening multiple perspectives at once,
but also by creating a multiplicity of perspectives as well.

In “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy” (1978), early ecocritic Neil
Evernden approaches the problem of Cartesian divisions another way—while asserting the
subversive nature of ecology:
Since Descartes, westerners have been content to take the illustrated procedure a step further. Not only are we not a part of the environment, we are not even part of a body. We, the “real” us, is concentrated in some disputed recess of the body, a precious cocoon, separate from the world of matter. Far from extending our “self” into the environment as the territorial fish does, we hoard our ego as tightly as we can. (18)

“To the Western mind,” states Evernden, “inter-related implies a causal connectedness” when in fact “what is actually involved is a genuine intermingling of parts of the ecosystem” (16). This is what makes metaphoric language and poetry so subversive. As Evernden observes,

[metaphoric language is an indication of “place”— an indication that the speaker has a place, feels part of a place. Indeed, the motive for metaphor may be as [Northrup] Frye claims, “a desire to associate, and finally to identify, the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part … we are also a part of what we know ….” (Evernden 19)

Evernden’s emphasis on the role of “place” in metaphoric language helps ground our sense of poetic language in the physical, material world. Through metaphor, we may tangibly sense our connectivity between our minds and language with our body and environs.

Antonio Damasio comes at the issue of environs from another angle in Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain (1994):

… the mind arises from activity in neural circuits, to be sure, but many of those circuits were shaped in evolution by functional requisites of the organism, and that a normal mind will happen only if those circuits contain basic representations of the organism, and if they continue monitoring the states of the organism in action. In brief, neural circuits represent the organism continuously, as it is perturbed by stimuli from the physical and sociocultural
environments, and as it acts on those environments. If the basic topic of those representations were not an organism anchored in the body, we might have some form of mind, but I doubt it would be the mind we do have …. I am not saying that the mind is in the body. I am saying that the body contributes more than life support any modulatory effects to the brain. It contributes a content that is part and parcel of the workings of the normal mind. (226)

The body embedded in an environment forms the “content” of the mind. Thus, consciousness is simultaneously in-being in its environs. Damasio’s explanation further underscores the need for a critical lens which balances the intermingling aspects of experience in the world as well as experience’s life in texts.

In recent radical embodied cognitive theories as well as literary ecocriticism, the breach between the sciences and the humanities begins to mend along a useful perspective which reaches across the divide of the “two cultures” which has persisted for decades.6 Thus, while Onno Oerlemans asserts in Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature (2004) that “the physical sciences have not helped us much in thinking about how or why we should live as we do” (6), this is slowly changing although the dialogue between the sciences and the humanities still remains tenuous at best. Nonetheless, as Buell emphasizes, “[t]he discourses of science and literature must be read both with and against each other” (Buell 19). Mending the divide can have profoundly positive ethical implications for the planet and its inhabitants.

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6 When, in May of 1959, C.P. Snow delivered the prestigious Rede Lecture at Cambridge's Senate House, “he chose to deliver a harsh assessment of the British educational system, particularly with regard to what he saw as a marked preference for the humanities over science…. In 1956, Snow had published an article in the New Statesman entitled "The Two Cultures," and this formed the basis for his talk. The ‘two cultures’ of the title refers to what Snow called a ‘gulf of mutual incomprehension’ between the sciences and the humanities, making true communication between them very difficult. While Snow’s scientific readers may have cheered him on, the reaction to his lecture was swift and harshly negative from the humanities corner. Famed literary critic F. R. Leavis derided Snow as being ‘intellectually as undistinguished as it is possible to be.’ His colleague, Lionel Trilling, was more circumspect, but expressed concern that Snow’s tribal approach to two cultural camps further hampered ‘the possibility of rational discourse.’ (Decades later, biologist Stephen Jay Gould would write that Snow’s basic argument was damaging and short-sighted).” Gaal, Rachel. “May 7, 1959: Snow Gives His ‘Two Cultures’ Lecture.” APS Physics. www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/201705/physicshistory.cfm.
Despite the array of evidence, the controversy continues within disciplines as well. In an attempt to address these divisions in cognitive science, in Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again (1998), Andy Clark argues that (new and still controversial) “[e]mbodied, environmentally embedded approaches have a lot to offer cognitive science. It is increasingly clear that, in a wide variety of cases, the individual brain should not be the sole locus of cognitive scientific interest. Cognition is not a phenomenon that can be successfully studied while marginalizing the roles of body, world and action” (Clark 350). Clark’s views further substantiate the intermingling of mind and body, and body in world, as well as mind/body in world (as action). Along these lines, Clark, along with other neuroscientists and cognitive theorists are at the very least relevant to some of the major works of green critics and early ecocritics such as Jonathan Bate in Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (1991) and Song of the Earth (2000), Karl Kroeber in Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind (1994), Lawrence Buell in The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1996), and later ones such as James C. McKusick in Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology (2000), Onno Oerlemans in Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature (2000), Mark Lussier in Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality (2000), Greg Garrard in Ecocriticism (The New Critical Idiom) (2011), Timothy Morton in The Ecological Thought (2012), Rob Nixon in Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (2013), and Kate Rigby in “Romanticism and Ecocriticism” (2014).

In Self Comes to Mind (2012), Damasio asserts, “of the ideas advanced in [his] book, none is more central than the notion that the body is a foundation of the conscious mind” (21). The body and mind are inextricable from each other:
... the brain’s protoself⁷ structures are not merely about the body. They are literally and inextricably attached to the body. Specifically, they are attached to the parts of the body that bombard the brain with their signals, at all times, only to be bombarded back by the brain and, by so doing, creating a resonant loop. This resonant loop is perpetual, broken only by brain disease or death. Body and brain bond. (22)

While “[b]ody and brain bond,” embodied minds and environs bond as well. Thus, the perspectives offered by radical embodied cognitive perspectives can productively supplement ecocritical approaches and vice versa as well.

New perspectives in phenomenology contribute to mending the breach as well. As Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi explain in The Phenomenological Mind (2012), “[t]o take embodiment seriously is to contest a Cartesian view of the mind in more than one way. Embodiment entails birth and death. To be born is not to be one’s own foundation, but to be situated in both nature and culture. It is to possess a physiology that one did not choose. It is to find oneself in a historical and sociological context that one did not establish (see Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 347)” (167).

Phenomenological perspectives necessitate recognition of the other: “I know of my own mortality only through others” (167). “Intersubjectivity,” then, according to Gallagher and Zahavi, “is not found simply in the proximity of two or more passive subjects, but is primarily an encounter between agents” (167-8).

It is through phenomenological perspectives that we can see that the divisions which plague literary criticism, such as the ecocritical and New Historical debates, are present in the sciences as well. On the science side, it has been amidst emerging embodied cognitive theories that phenomenological approaches have new resonance:

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⁷ In The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness (2000), Damasio states that the proto-self consists of “the structures which both regulate and represent the body’s internal states” (100).
The second thing that happened to motivate a reconsideration of phenomenology as a philosophical-scientific approach was the advent of embodied approaches to cognition. In the cognitive sciences, the notion of embodied cognition took on strength in the 1990s, and it continues today. Scientists and philosophers such as Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991), Antonio Damasio (1994), and Andy Clark (1997) objected to the strong Cartesian mind-body dualism that, despite the best efforts of philosophers like Ryle, Dennett, and others, continued to plague the cognitive sciences. Functionalism led us to believe that cognition could be instantiated in a disembodied computer program, or ‘brain-in-a-vat’, and that embodiment added nothing to the mind. Varela et al., as well as Clark and others, pointed back to the insights of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) as a way to develop their objections to disembodied cognition. (Zahavi and Gallagher 5)

On the science side of the divide, we again see the emerging relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s perspectives as Louise Westling points out in “Merleau-Ponty’s Ecophenomenology” (2011). As Zahavi and Gallagher assert, “Merleau-Ponty offers one of the best examples of how phenomenology can play an important role in the cognitive sciences (5). Given the potential of phenomenological perspectives in literature, an examination of each approach reveals the productive possibilities of putting the three perspectives (ecocritical, cognitive, and phenomenological) together in order to excavate the contemporary relevance of historical texts.

Because the wholeness and the intermingling nature of environs is so crucial to a meaningful understanding of being-in-a-world, instead of only looking at our relationships to technology per se, I look at our relationships to physical spaces as they are altered by technology. While considering the potential ethical repercussions of environmental architectures given a definition of “self” which specifically includes brain, body and world, I argue for the value of looking at the ways the effects of
architectural technologies as part of the world are internalized both individually and culturally – be they accepted or rejected by individuals or culture at large. With particular emphasis on the ways architectural technologies 1) structure our environment, 2) mediate our experience of the world, and 3) affect consciousness, I argue the relevance of examining radical Romantic responses largely through the experiences of the disenfranchised as rendered in these texts in relationship to technological effects on space. Examining ways architectural technologies structure our environs reveals the ways technologies are ironed into the fabric of daily living—rendering them invisible—as in the case of the hidden spaces chimneys—or transformed as in the case of the impressionistic and distant vistas from moving trains. As these tendencies become more familiar, these technologies mediate our experiences of the world in unpredictable ways such as ceasing to think about the cost to human beings of the very technologies we rely upon. Thus, ethical implications escape us—from the cruelty of exploitation and human rights abuses, to health issues, to the experiences of everyday living. The result is that the individual is subsumed to the whole—not even to the community, but culture at large. Therefore, by focusing on the technologies which structure the spaces we occupy as individuals, we may discover that Romantic perspectives may reinvigorate what has otherwise become a stalemate or at least an unyielding dichotomous debate in contemporary critical debates about the role of technology in the development of consciousness and culture, then and now. As it stands, one side often takes up the negative effects and the other, the positive, when in fact a more nuanced critical approach becomes necessary when we acknowledge that we absorb these technological effects with our bodies and minds.

In doing so, I contend that the kind of “radical discourse” identified in William Blake, for example, by John Mee in Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s, as “operative in what may seem the most unlikely places [informing] Blake’s language at almost every level” (1) runs throughout the work of a number of British Romantic authors—engaging the
geographies of technological effects in the process—a topic which invites further investigation in the critical study of Romantic literature and its contributions to better understanding cultural ecology which, as Hubert Zapf points out in “Literary Ecology and the Ethics of Texts” (2008), invites a discussion in which “literature and literary studies can contribute in significant ways to [a] transdisciplinary dialogue” between “ecology and ethics” (847).

An intrinsic part of this effort involves viewing technologies not solely as objects but as architectural components or evolving methods of scaffolding for our spatial architectures, in shaping, structuring, organizing and utilizing the spaces we occupy as individuals as well as societies and cultures. Accordingly, I examine technologies specifically as structures of space rather than as a series of inventions or discoveries within space or solely as markers of industrial development. Such an approach would include, for example, static technologies, frequently overlooked as technologies, namely, the chimney and fireplace as mentioned at the onset of this chapter, as well as categorically recognized dynamic technologies of course—moving machine technologies such as the railways. In each case, I look at the way these technologies form architectural technologies—which may, in many cases, be considered networked technological architectures of the environs—deeply and firmly engrained networks of infrastructure—which open, contain, shape, and change the spaces they inhabit, occupy, and create—the technological scaffolding of modernity which produces space. We cannot simply look at the causal effects of technology. Instead, we need to the ways technology becomes our architectural environs and to the ways we become embedded in these environs as our conscious and unconscious minds, as well as our visible and invisible bodies, intermingle in them.

In this respect, I draw from Isabel Armstrong’s *Victorian Glass Worlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (2012) in “reading a culture’s physical world, particularly architecture” which, as Armstrong notes, “has a long tradition, from Ruskin to Walter Benjamin and before” (14). In this context, my approach is also influenced by Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s method of exploring the
gradual developments of cultural change as they affect and impact individuals in both *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (1983) and *The Railway Journey* (1979). I am interested in reading the ideological architectures contained within these material technological architectures, which, among other things, helped to create and transform urban and rural landscapes in a manner that both trained and inspired people and populations to different mindsets. And here, I have in mind Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974) in which he asks, “[i]s it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched? Could space be nothing more than the passive locus of social relations, the milieu in which their combination takes on body, or the aggregate of the procedures employed in their removal? The answer must be no” (11).

Within this framework, the chimney and William Blake’s chimney sweeper poems, for instance, exemplify my meaning: it is impossible to view the chimney sweeper without the chimney, the architecture which not only defines the individual, often a child,—but in this case as an architecture which contains, controls, and shapes the child’s life and defines the child’s existence. This is also an architecture which intermingles in the chimney sweeps’ aura. In fact, a direct correlation may be drawn between the material architecture of the chimney, its transformations in concert with scientific and technological progress, and accompanying ideologies—as chapter three will establish.

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789/1794), Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” poems invite readers to witness, intimately and from a short distance, the relationship of this abject figure not only to culture, society, or religion, but also within the material context of the technological architectures which frame the individual’s world and create the geography the individual occupies on paper as imagined in the world, as in *Songs of Experience* (1794):

> A little black thing among the snow,
> Crying “weep! ‘weep!’” in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father & mother? say?"

"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.”

Blake’s language is never neutral. By opening with “[a] little black thing among the snow:” the objectification of the child in the world is clear in the child’s appearance and the use of the word “thing.” Moreover, the poem immediately frames the chimney sweeper and focuses the reader’s gaze on the child black in soot, clearly juxtaposed against the whiteness of the snow, darkness surrounded by white, the narrator’s voice being established as witness by the insertion of a colon before shifting into the voice of the child “[c]rying weep, ‘weep,” as chimney sweepers would do announcing their services in the streets. An interconnected relationship is furthermore established between the child, the narrator, and the reader. These eerily vivid first lines firmly establish the smallness of the child within the largeness of the world, and they unfurl an image which unfolds and emerges within the town or city, amidst the community of structures – all of which depend upon the technological structures of fireplaces and chimneys for their warmth in their shelters and their food – and thus on the services of the little chimney sweeper outside, cold, sooty and discarded by a father
and mother who have “both gone up to the church to pray,” unfolding the geography of the scene while revealing the hypocrisies of a world of experience and the dramatic irony of the scene in true Blake form. The chimney sweeper’s appearance outside – black from soot – further suggests the child’s being inside – in two ways, the interior of the chimney and interior of the child’s body. Having just come from or waiting to go to the next job, abandoned by adults, and very small within the context of a large, adult world of experience, the child’s existence, being, and value is entirely created and defined by the technological architecture which contains him, drawing his cries into a void, lost in the church where “father & mother” … “are gone to praise God & his Priest & King.” Blake emphasizes the individuality of the child in the following lines: “And because I am happy & dance & sing, / They think they have done me no injury.” The intermingling of the present child’s and absent parents’ relationship is emphasized here. The innocence of the child, centered in the text and the world, is exploited by the material needs of the adult, here unseen. Blake further reveals the childlike demeanor which in part may account for why adults and the culture can overlook the material damage being done to the child in body and mind in the world. The emphasis in Blake’s poems often allows us to engage with the abject figure, the individual contained within or by technological and ideological architectures.

By way of juxtaposition and to call attention to the difference in focus between a distinctive early Romantic perspective and a later nineteenth-century one, let us imagine for a moment the panoramic landscape of Charles Dickens’s Coketown in *Hard Times* (1854) in the more advanced stages of industrialization during “a sunny midsummer day. There was such a thing sometimes, even in Coketown” (85):

Seen from a distance in such weather, Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun’s ray. You only knew the town was there, because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town. A blur of
soot and smoke, now confusedly tending this, way, now that way now aspiring to the vault of Heaven, now murkily creeping along the earth, as the wind rose and fell, or changed its quarter: a dense formless jumble, with sheets of cross light in it, that showed nothing but masses of darkness—Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen. (85-6)

Dickens’s powerful imagery renders a lasting impression of the imprint of industry on the landscape and in the skies, and the effects on the inhabitants of the town below. But in this instance, the descriptions of the workers, “the Hands” as they are called throughout the novel, remain mostly anonymous as distant “visages” of populations: “Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on step, and post, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere” (86). The anonymity of the effect is deliberate and effective, “not a brick of it could be seen.” The human individuals have receded and nearly disappeared behind the “darkness.” And throughout, Dickens invokes a monstrous and even apocalyptic quality in the descriptions of technology as in the closing line of the passage: “The steam-engines shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were soiled in it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it” (86). The effect is magnificent in its rendering of the horrors of alienation and industrial exploitation, but it remains a perspective of distance.

Blake, on the other hand, draws the reader into a more intimate perspective, looks beneath the smoke, traveling inward, toward the source of the smoke, toward the unseen bricks and in it finds the abject figure in the snow and brings forth the mind of the child—one, in relationship to the technology with which the actual child shares an intimate relation, and two, in dialogue with the ideology which holds the child figure firmly in place. The child’s mind is revealed embodied and embedded amidst an architectural technology which demands the service and presence of the child.
With Blake’s Romantic emphasis on the individual, an abject figure, a certain imaginative distance decreases or is bridged—largely through the play between the reader and the text. The child’s gaze, fixed firmly on the reader, touches the listener, bringing the reader into the “ecosystemic wholeness” of the poem. In turn, language opens up an ecological consciousness to the reader. As Michel de Certeau points out in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), through reading, “[w]ords become the outlet or product of silent histories. The readable transforms itself into the memorable: Barthes reads Proust in Stendhal’s text.” A text is no more a neutral space than an urban square. And in it, “the viewer reads the landscape of his childhood in the evening news. The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. *A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place*” [emphasis mine.] Thus, I would venture, the intimate proximity of Romantic texts engage a potentially inescapable empathy. Here, Blake achieves Bakhtin’s “transgression” by not only requiring an ethical reevaluation of a common cultural practice but by also requiring the reader to evaluate their own complicity in a cruel cultural practice. Furthermore, there is a secondary effect of the perspective which emerges; Blake’s poem encourages readers to imagine the one-to-one relationships that exist within the network of technologies, chimney-to-chimney, emphasizing the parts that make up the whole, or the individual rather than the population. Or to put it another way, the poem recuperates the anonymity of the individuals who make up a population as it transforms such anonymity into the experience of an individual.

In the comparison between Blake and Dickens I mean to point out the gradual if uneven distances which emerge within the literature in tandem with the acceleration of industry as well as the uneven developments between industrial culture and the individuals amidst it. I am not arguing for neatly compartmentalized differences between Romantic and Victorian perspectives. Instead, my aim is to trace a thread of literary consequences in response to technological progress, exploring
along the way the resonance of the Romantic voice embedded deep within the images and ideas of the individuals it renders amidst their environs.

Technologies and their effects are usually defined and understood by the most recent popular cultural understanding—and their relevance to contemporary experience. The past is colored by our current experience which, in turn, shapes cultural awareness or historical memory. In this case, we can mark the beginning of our comfort with and dependence on moving machine technologies at the juncture of the nineteenth century. We can trace the trajectory heading in the direction of our current experience amidst this period. Thus, our imaginative histories tend to frame our discussions of technology as advanced “industrialization” technologies alone, the steam engine and the ensuing railways being just the most obvious examples. While important, within this context, ‘technology’ or rather, our human relationships to technologies are perhaps too easily absorbed into the industrialization narrative as part and parcel of progress. In this way, technologies are compartmentalized as progress in the colloquial use of the word, or as Progress in the grander sense, as part of the trajectory which collides, parallels and intersects with Modernity as Charles Baudelaire defined it, or the Enlightenment in a longer and more traditional sense, and certainly with all phases of the Industrial Revolution.

As such lines and delineations, no matter how distinct, naturally blur, punctuated by large world events and formidable changes, the ephemeral essences of our relationships to technologies are lost amidst the larger concrete cultural markers of the technologies themselves, the steam engine, the railways, plate glass, or the camera to the later twentieth-century inventions such as the automobile, television, and even later, the computer or smart phone—all imprinting and still shaping our shared cultural images and narratives. And as our contemporary “doors of perception” are

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8 William Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790): “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.”
colored by modernity – and now post-modernity, sensibly, but also conveniently, it is convenience, with its comforts, or our comfort with convenience, which may blind us, necessarily, to both our distance from and proximity to the actual phenomenal experience of technological change in the present let alone from the experience of the turn of the nineteenth century, so similar to our own. In fact, the parallels which exist between the Romantic generation and Generation X are formidable.

In the same way that those born in the period known as Generation X are able to discern certain differences between life before and after the Digital Revolution, Romantic authors also lived the pace and shape of a lifestyle which was quickly disappearing along with a new one which was developing. In our contemporary world, there are recent changes, good and bad, whose differences are lost on Millennials who have never used a dial-up modem or licked a postage stamp — let alone remember a time when rotary phones were the norm, houses were limited to one phone line, or entertainment and news were limited to Channels 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13 on television sets which sometimes got poor reception. But these objects of invention which mark modernity and post-modernity are facets of a larger interplay of technologies at work — the way these tools of technology are part of a larger architecture which shapes our world and changes our relationships to space, time, ourselves, and others. Perhaps one of the best examples which captures the parallels between then and now is the comparison between the railways and the personal computer, traversing space, collapsing time, deeply changing our ideas of locale — and the very character of locale, locally and globally. This is a history of space becoming place as well as the history of changing the aura and nature of existing places. In each case, our relationship to time and space changes, — and thus our relationship to the world, others, and ourselves changes too. These dynamics are self-making. As we change the world, we are creating a world which is changing individuals, breaking into our own heads and tinkering with the way they work. It is at last an ethical issue and one of lasting import.
That these are long-standing, long-term dynamics which repeat themselves is evident in the parallel between then and now, and for that matter, throughout human history.

While the perspectives of Romantic authors may not be unique, they are timely—and helpful in redefining our relations with technology as a species for a number of reasons: 1) their shift toward a focus on the individual and away from the eighteenth-century focus on community provides us with a more intimate perspective to explore the effects of technologies on individuals. 2) The emphasis on the individual provides us with rich material from which to extract the internal bodily and psychological effects of an externally changing world. 3) The pace of observations in Romantic texts is slow and the observations, intricate. Thus, these texts lend themselves to phenomenological readings in concert with cognitive philosophy, and they provide readers with an additional avenue to deeply explore consciousness as rendered in these texts. 4) Their emphasis on the recuperative power of nature is far more than sentimental or nostalgic. It recognizes nature as a dynamic force in itself, and arguably, as a competing system interacting with technologically-driven systems to risk resounding a well-worn duality between the worlds of Dionysus and Apollo, nature and culture. 5) They are situated at the brink of the early days of Modernity, and by virtue of their temporal position, are able to call out the minute strands of the beginnings of industrializing technologies from their perspective on the frontlines, so to speak, of Modernity as we know it. 6) The pace of the observations, and the pace of life of characters within Romantic texts, unlike those of later in the century, highlight both the acceleration of culture marked by progress, as well as the effect of “slow violence,” to invoke a term explicated by Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) (7). Nixon insists that “we urgently need to rethink—politically, imaginatively, and theoretically—what [he] call[s] ‘slow violence’” (2). He describes slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). He
draws a strong contrast between slow violence and what is usually described as violence: “Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility (2).” Nixon believes “we need … to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). By describing violence in this way, he invites us to consider the physical and world effects of our cultural actions in fresh and less ideologically-based ways. Taking it a step further, we may draw out his observations to infer that the increasing distances we cultivate between ourselves and our environs disconnects us from the effects of our actions on the world and on others. What is key is that he draws attention to the uneven development of our perceptions and the effects of our actions, thereby providing us with a perceptual, contextual lens to rethink the state of the planet and its inhabitants. He discusses “slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes” such as “[c]limate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermath of wars, acidifying oceans” as “long dyings” often overlooked (2). He effectively argues that we “need to account for how the temporal dispersion of slow violence affects the way we perceive and respond to a variety of social afflictions” (3). “In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need,” Nixon asks, “how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?” (3). Crucially, he asks, “[h]ow can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention?” (3) Romantic authors often achieve just that, “stories dramatic enough” to call attention to the damaging effects of all kinds of slow violence by virtue of their attention to individuals and nature along with their attentiveness and slow pace of rumination
on their subjects and objects of their studies. Moreover, Romantic texts invite us to consider the possibility, within the context of technology, that what is often taken for nostalgia is in fact a craving for immediacy or attentiveness, or, what may be called mindfulness—being absolutely in touch through our senses with the world—an increasingly difficult possibility in an ever-accelerating world which demands that we move so fast that we overlook our environs and their inhabitants.

Part of our Romantic inheritance is undoubtedly our cult of personality, our emphasis on imagination, and our facility with the subjective self. The Romantic shift to the individual from the community is key. The Romantic emphasis on the individual, both the first-person “self” and the self of other individuals, provides us with material to glean a deeper sense of the ineffable effects of environmental changes on the shared community. Thus, this emphasis on the individual provides us with texts which enable us to stir the contents of individual consciousness around—in a way no social experimentation could. In other words, Romantic authors were engaged in a far less delineated project than articulating their own individual expressions or simply recording those of others. Instead, these authors were also engaged in rendering forgotten or overlooked worlds in the margins by sketching the facial expressions, drawing the bodily contours, and filling in the actions, suffering, and joys of the individuals which made up communities on large and small scales while philosophers, scientists and philanthropists of the time were increasingly rendering these communities as populations—faceless and en masse—largely understood only by virtue of their economic status and ability or inability to bend and adjust to the rules of social conformity by way of law, policies, economics, and customs. As Toby R. Benis points out in Romanticism on the Road: The Marginal Gains of Wordsworth’s Homeless (2000) “[d]rawing on the cultural marginality of the homeless, [for example,] Wordsworth’s early representations of vagrancy act as an index of the failings of any cultural agenda seeking to suppress people’s inevitable spectrum of feeling and belief” (4). By drawing our attention to the margins, and with their emphasis on the individual, nature, and
imagination⁹, it is as though Romantic authors took a slow deep breath – before the giant of culture exhaled with the mightiness of a hurricane which would sweep through the nineteenth century straight into our own.

Romantic perspectives on technologies may broaden our view in at least three ways: 1) Earlier perspectives may open up how we define technology to include, in addition to moving-machine technologies such as the railways, those immobile technologies which have long been forgotten as technology such as the chimney or the guillotine, or plate glass later in the century. In turn, 2) these more open perspectives help us examine technology aside capitalism, which, while integral as it happened, was not necessary to technological progress. Thus, I propose that 3) such a spaciousness of perspective enables us to locate our personal, more mundane, and very human relationships to technologies themselves by disallowing abdication of responsibility to the forces of industry.

These points merit emphasis. Loosening the constraints of defining nineteenth-century technologies as exclusively harnessed to capitalism and within industrialization-driven cultural contexts allows more space for interpretive play—while simultaneously recognizing industrializing capitalism’s powerful but non-exclusive role. And, while addressing technologies beyond the scope of capitalism may at first appear to be counter-intuitive to the contemporary relevance of this project, I argue that it is necessary to personalize our relations to technologies critically in order to recognize our intimate relationships with them. Those mundane events of every day, the daily interactions with technologies that individuals take for granted, are potentially rich sources of investigation and very much in the spirit of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s and William Wordsworth’s

⁹ What marks the departure of the Romantic era from the Age of Reason is the emphasis on individual, nature, and imagination – quite different from the preceding age’s emphasis on community, religion, and reason.
project in the creation of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Coleridge describes Wordsworth’s part in the creation of the *Lyrical Ballads* in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) as follows:

Mr. Wordsworth … was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (Coleridge *Biographia* Vol. II 5-6)

As our relationships with various technologies are ironed into the practices of everyday living, not only do they turn our attention away from “the loveliness and wonders of the world before us,” but as their novelty wears off and their newness fades to a dull pallor, the roles technologies play in our lives are subsumed by familiarity. Their roles in the conditions of living become invisible, either forgotten or set aside as part and parcel of necessity—technology’s progress becomes inexorable. Thus, as individuals, we easily become blind to our use of technologies, our dependence on them, and the ways we are used by them. We are further unaware of the changes that occur within our environs when the effects of technology begin at a distance, miles away. There is no going back—which is one of the more interesting aspects of technological progress, our human response to it almost as default. Wordsworth, like other Romantic authors, extracts individuals from the default narratives which spring from “the lethargy of custom,” and thus the essence of individual experience among them. As Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*, “[b]y means of poetic language, waves of newness flow over the surface of being. And language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through meaning it encloses, which through poetic expression, it opens up” (222).
The phenomenological thread woven throughout the cultural narratives contained in Romantic texts lends us insight into individuals’ experiences of various technologies. Thus, they open our view to different, even unfashionable definitions of technology. This is particularly true of those texts which immediately precede the height of what is considered the second Industrial Revolution. This allows for slower, more introspective glimpses of our very human relationships with technology. When seen as architectures of our environs, within the context of embodied minds embedded in the world, we begin to realize technology’s ecological role in the development of both experience and consciousness. Romantic literature invites more consideration of the internal emotional effects of technologies within their external cultural habitats. By focusing on architectural technologies, those which directly or indirectly play a pivotal role in shaping the environments we inhabit, my intention is to limit the scope of study, yes, but also to give the individual narratives investigated here some shape. Think infrastructure. So while the coffee mug or beer stein are both technologies, tools which assist us in drinking, in and of themselves they do not shape the room in which the coffee or beer is drunk. While the aesthetic and practical qualities of mugs or steins certainly play a role in creating the atmosphere of the room, as do individuals’ particular relationships or access to them, mugs and steins are objects within the room whose value is largely taken from their use value but also from the room itself. But it would be the structural components of the room, its purpose, shape, the building, the courtyard, and the surrounding environs and their inhabitants which I take for my objects of study in gradations which will be developed throughout each chapter.

In the following chapters, I specifically explore the role of technology in the development of consciousness by examining the ways evolving technologies 1) structure rural and urban

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10 ‘Emotional’ is a key term here – as opposed to feeling – within the context of current cognitive theory as emotions carry the direct response from the environment in the later formation of feeling which embodies more interpretive characteristics.
environments, thereby 2) shaping ensuing cultural ideologies, and thus 3) affecting human individuals both materially and psychologically. Beginning with the work of William Blake, I trace a radical Romantic strain of response to cultural changes which are generated by technology through the decades—ending with John Ruskin who I read as a disillusioned Romantic author. I examine these texts for evidence of both tangible and more obscured effects of technology—and by obscured, I mean often hidden by geographical or imaginative distances, degrees of separation between causes and effects, and by sheer novelty. With particular emphasis on the rendering of the human experience of abject figures in these texts, amidst material and ideological changes in the environs, I further argue that the perspectives of many of the authors of the period act as ideological filters by defamiliarizing what the culture is quick to assimilate. I maintain that the Romantic lens draws attention to the effects of rampant cultural changes on marginalized individuals and as such, illuminates the tremendous impact technology has on humanity, its influence, in effect, becoming part of consciousness. I propose that the collisions between places and individuals, individuals and ideologies, and ideologies and places manifest in phenomenological experiences to which Romantic writers respond and often illuminate as ideological shifts. However, I seek to complicate historical readings of Romantic authors as simply nostalgic reactionaries to the effects of technology.

In Chapter Two, I consider our shifting understanding of what technology is over the centuries while looking at the transformation of nature into various technologies and their unintended consequences—as in the case of deforestation resulting from using the wood of trees to build ships. In Chapter Three, I look at the role of the chimney sweeper in relationship to chimneys and their economy in William Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, as well as the sweeps’ symbolic and metaphoric value in culture and literature. Moreover, I examine the role of the chimney in relationship to the different stages of which its technological development is a part. I consider gradations of development from the transition from wood to the
mining of coal, the resulting changes and developments in its design, as well as the chimney’s role as part of a larger system, architecturally, culturally, and socially, to reveal the layers of the chimney’s central role as a household technology and as part of a system which extends through the local communities—giving rise to customs, traditions, and jobs. In Chapter Four, I examine Wordsworth’s reaction to the plans for the Kendal-Windermere Railway and his beliefs about its potential effects on the region and its inhabitants. Rather than viewing trains as objects within an environment, I look at the various ways railways, as architectural systems, reshape the countryside and cities. Briefly, from another perspective, I look at Thomas De Quincey’s experience of the railway as a passenger—through interiority of the mind and the method of travel itself—contained within a different sort of technological architecture. From yet another perspective, in Chapter Five, I consider the ways that John Clare describes different possibilities for embodied relationships within our environs in his poems—despite the ways society often alters our environs through our various technologies or deliberate acts of social or political control. I consider his reactions to various, more obscured technological effects such as enclosure laws which changed the land. Designed to deprive rural inhabitants of self-sustenance, enclosure laws forced people to the factories for work, factories which were rapidly being built, most often miles away, amidst the industrializing culture. In Chapter Six, I examine John Ruskin’s observations about climate change as well as his views on the alienation of workers in relationship to craftsmanship and architecture. In addition, I consider the work of twentieth-century cultural critic Lewis Mumford in light of his thoughts on “Progress” and where it takes us as well as his visions and hopes for a more sustainable future through more organic communities and green cities.

By exploring technology’s capacity to affect individuals, through affected and effecting environs, I hope to establish that Romantic authors remind readers of our intimate relationship with the technologies we use or by which we are used by exposing the deep tendrils of these connections.
I argue that in this way, we can better address these texts as sites of struggle and extricate precisely what disturbs or liberates us in relationship to developing architectural technologies as a species. Moreover, by loosening the focus to include those decades before advanced industrialization, it is easier to see technology as an architect of space with tremendous aesthetic and emotional import. I further consider the possibility that the texts of Romantic authors, by focusing as much on the individual as on the community, encourage society to take responsibility for our technological choices rather than abdicate responsibility as a community.

As I will continue to establish, writers of the period are situated at one of the key junctures in technological development—at the brink of an unprecedented full-scale industrial shift which ushered in “a multitude of causes, unknown to former times” as Wordsworth points out in his 1798 “Preface” (425). This is especially relevant when one considers how new, startling, and sometimes shocking industrializing changes were—disruptive not only to the landscape but also to the psyche. Of course, the novelty of the changes alone summons the attention of so many nineteenth-century authors. But the shock of phenomenal change is a significant factor as well—as evident in Thomas De Quincey’s observations in “The English Mail Coach” (1821): “…we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity…we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest among brutes, in his dilated nostrils, spasmodic muscles, and thunder-beating hoofs” (283). With railway travel, notes De Quincey, “iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man’s heart from the ministers of his locomotion” (284). The disruption of once-familiar experiences records the impact of such changes on the psyche as the new technology mediates a different relationship between the body in the environment and the mind’s experience. Such texts convey the effects of unprecedented cultural change, thus productively
defamiliarizing the impact of machine technology on the environment, culture and individual human experience.

What I will contend are radical positions taken up by many Romantic writers were not only timely but deliberate—as their work engages with the material conditions of a rapidly changing world, elucidating not only the changing landscapes and conditions, but also the phenomenal experiences of individuals who might otherwise be forgotten or set aside. Be it Blake’s “London” (1794) or Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* (1851-53), many nineteenth-century texts intervene in the ideologies being shaped by progress. In the case of Wordsworth for example, who is so often considered to be conservative and apolitical, David Simpson observes in *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (2009) that Wordsworth “had a profound poetic understanding of the condition of England around 1800, specifically of its evolution into a culture governed by industrial time, machine driven labor and commodity form: the culture whose profile would eventually be theorized much later by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*” (4). In the face of industrial progress, I suggest that many Romantic authors share this understanding.

There is a marked tendency in the work of a number of nineteenth-century authors to draw attention to the experiences of marginalized individuals overcome by larger cultural forces within urban and rural settings or amidst catastrophic situations from industrialization and urbanization to poor law reforms or war. As David Collings observes in *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny* (2009), this was a time when the “the cancellation of reciprocity” was gaining legitimacy as philosophical ideas about social discipline and scientific notions about nature and humanity were lending credence to eliminating traditional social obligations to the poor or disenfranchised as a group.

Such dramatic ideological shifts developed in dialogue with broader shifts in cultural assumptions which found their way into social policies and perspectives as exemplified in the social
“scientific” and philosophic works of thinkers such as Thomas Malthus and Jeremy Bentham. Such works tend toward strictly systematic analyses that increasingly rely upon numbers, systems, and supposedly objective standards of empirical evidence—in keeping with the scientific and Utilitarian models that mark the philosophical underpinnings of efficiency in an industrializing culture—which is where the more radical voices of the culture intervened marking a split in sensibility of the age. Romantic texts take up the personal and subjective nature of human experience which does not figure into the calculations of these thinkers, as William Hazlitt so aptly observes in numerous essays and published as a collection in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825).

I argue that the burgeoning dominant ideologies of the era, such as the scientific method to name just one, collided with the radical Romantic project of humanization—and that this collision illuminates precisely what the utilitarian branch of scientific inquiry sought to streamline, the disordered beauties, the incomprehensible injustices, and the catastrophic consequences of dominant social forces detached from ethical constraints, on the human individuals that make up populations—often left lost and wandering in the margins in the wake of extreme change. In this cultural context, Romantic voices are subversive, sometimes cloaked or private, but nonetheless self-aware, deliberate, and radical.

Moreover, Romantic texts are particularly adept at conveying our subjective experience of the world, and thus lend themselves to phenomenological readings in concert with ecocritical and embodied cognitive perspectives. Whether written from an awareness of the self and first-person experience, or an empathetic awareness and third-person narrative, both subjective approaches reveal the experiences of individuals amidst emotional, phenomenal, and cultural conditions. The phenomenological study of Romantic texts acquires fresh resonance when put into conversation with the recent studies in the combined field of cognitive sciences and ecocritical perspectives mentioned. Such an approach highlights the role of the environment in human consciousness, and
it opens our critical gaze to what Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* (1958) establishes so lyrically—that consciousness is deeply embedded in our experience of our environment—something to which Romantic authors were particularly sensitive. We can only begin to explain how consciousness, and thus phenomenological experience, arises “when we appreciate that what matters for consciousness is not the neural activity as such but neural activity as embedded in an animal's larger action and interaction with the world around it” as Noë so aptly puts it (47). Cartesian dualities of mind and body have long since been debunked for the most part; what remains as yet largely unexplored is to what extent consciousness is not contained within a self at all but may instead be not only dependent upon, but intrinsically part of, our environs, including the people in them, an extended mind. Brain, body and world are then all integral parts of a delicately balanced orchestration, a complex relationship of reciprocity which somehow creates and constitutes consciousness—something, it seems, literature always knew.

While origins of some of the technological traces explored here are often obscured by physical or imaginative distances, the effects of technology are more easily explored through the changes created in lived environments, beneficial or destructive, which are then rapidly normalized and then absorbed by prevailing hegemonic forces which, in turn, perpetuate new standards of living. These standards are most often measured by the tangible effects on populations and profits rather than by the experiences of individuals—especially along the margins of society—which is where radical Romantics most effectively intervene.

As it stands, culturally, we have historically viewed technology as a force as impersonal as “nature, red in tooth and claw,” and we have used technology to defend ourselves from nature, to work with or cultivate or protect it, or to fight, subdue, or destroy it. And in fact, it has been our use of technology which has torn the fabric of the systems of nature asunder—the ice sheets are

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11 “[N]ature, red in tooth and claw” is from *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1849) by Alfred Lord Tennyson.
melting, the levels of carbon are rising, the oceans are swelling, and the Great Barrier Reef is dying. Meanwhile, some species have gone entirely extinct while others are migrating to avoid starvation. In many ways, the damage is done. We are now on the other side of the changes which Romantic authors first saw, and there is no going back. And yet, if there is a way to stave off or correct even a small part of the damage we have done in such a short period of time, it will be technology which will now enable us to do so—to save or protect the planet and its inhabitants. And yet, as a planet, we have continued our failure to respond for decades despite the strong science and even the recent and local experiences of such calamitous change. Why? As a force, technology retains its anonymity and its allure as both an indispensable benefit and also as a reified force which shapes our world or the conveniences which improve it in the name of progress. In technology, one could argue, we have created a force as unwieldy and nearly as mighty as nature, and a faith in it akin to, one might even argue, the supernatural. There is a monstrous quality to the technologies which emerged during the nineteenth century—at once terrifying and exhilarating, enormous in its impact, powerful in its impact, in a word, sublime.

We need to rethink, urgently, our relationships to technology as personal, direct, and even intimate. The academic distance we have historically maintained between our “selves” and our environs, particularly our technology-affected environs, has led to what are now disastrous consequences for the planet: the destruction of land and atmosphere, the poisoning of oceans and food sources, the deterioration of social relations in some places and the standard of living in other places, and a decline in overall health around the world. The contemporary relevance and urgency of this topic is why this project, in part, specifically addresses the dismissive and defensive posturing critiques of technology often meet. It is not that we need to re-think technology, but that we need to re-think our relationships with our technologies, and the often-radical texts of British Romantic authors provide us with just such an opportunity. While the damage of the past cannot be undone,
we must try to salvage this planet, our home. Doing so demands that we remember who we are and of what we are a part. Romantic authors remind us of what we have forgotten and what we have left behind. *Ecologies of Embodied Minds Embedded* contributes to this conversation by considering radical Romantic interventions as aware, not nostalgic, as engaged, not reactionary, and as deeply involved in retuning our connections toward an ethical awareness of ecological wholeness which lives ever amidst precarious, changing, and infinite uncertainties—as literature which still holds open a hopeful space for magnificent possibilities.
Chapter Two

A World of Technology is More than Machines: An Unordinary History

For Francis Bacon, the “father” of modern science, the human vocation was defined as the use of reason to uncover Nature’s secrets through empirical investigation in order to expand the bounds of our God-given dominion over the rest of creation through technology: here, the pursuit of human freedom, as noted by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), is premised upon the enslavement of “outer,” or nonhuman, nature (along with the exploitation of those subordinate humans whose labour would be appropriated in the process). This dualizing tendency, which necessarily entails also an alienation from our own “inner” nature, was reinforced by the widespread acceptance of Descartes’s and Newton’s view of matter as composed of inert particles functioning mechanistically in accordance with immutable laws that could be rendered mathematically. The issue here is not the validity and value of the scientific method per se, but rather the social context of its emergence, in which the discursive framing of the scientific project, namely as a quest for human mastery over a de-animated Nature devoid of ethical considerability, served historically to justify the treatment of the earth and its “natural resources” as freely available to be appropriated, traded and made-over by merchants and manufacturers: here, the liberty of human property owners is to be enlarged at the expense of the colonization, commodification and exploitation of those (ever expanding) portions of nature they claimed as theirs.

—Kate Rigby “Romanticism and Ecocriticism” (2014)

… to understand consciousness—the fact that we think and feel and that a world shows up for us—we need to look at a larger system of which the brain is only one element. Consciousness is not something the brain achieves on its own. Consciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body, and world. Indeed, consciousness is an achievement of the whole animal in its environmental context.


Technology begins with fire, and our stories begin with Prometheus—though the oft overlooked part of the myth is the trade-off as Aeschylus describes it in Prometheus Bound. In exchange for fire, mortals were prevented from “foreseeing their own doom,” and were left, instead, with “blind hope,” in place of foresight. Thus, from early on, hope is coupled with fire—one of the earliest technologies—in our cultural imagination. Prometheus gives humans fire so that they might rise above their own nature. Moreover, technology is indirectly linked to consciousness in the

12 “Prometheus is best known as … the principal champion before the gods of the race of men, who he is said by some to have molded out of clay …. It is also indebted to him for the rudiments of civilization….Prometheus, to his own misfortune, found several ingenious ways to better the lot of his creatures …. [However], [m]en were still poorly off, for they were unable to keep warm or cook their food, fire being reserved for the gods. Prometheus determined on a dangerous course in order to benefit mankind. Stealing fire from heaven, he hid it in a stalk of fennel and carried it secretly down to earth. Zeus, enraged a the Titan’s temerity, ordered
myth—a myth that silently alludes to a parallel theory in science, that our ability to cook using fire may have enabled our brains to develop far more complexly and rapidly than without cooked food.  

Prometheus was punished terribly for stealing this gift from the gods—underscoring our longstanding anxieties around technology as well as the privileged space it occupies in our cultural imagination. While technology itself is as ancient as civilization and it encompasses the many ways and means our species has found to interact with and control our environment, its influence upon the shaping of the environment and events is so powerful and complete that its effects are easily absorbed by prevailing ideologies and habits of use faster than the effects can often be traced. These effects can range from daily cognitive habits to insidious bodily harm or disease to the transformation of landscapes. Its effects thus often remain resistant to comprehension in the present as their influences are at once celebrated as novelty and convenience, but simultaneously underestimated in their widespread impact. In retrospect, once the novelty has worn off, what has changed in the manner of living has often already been forgotten. While origins of some of the technological traces explored here are often obscured by physical or imaginative distances, the effects of technology are more easily explored through the changes created in lived environments, beneficial or destructive, which are then rapidly normalized and then absorbed by prevailing hegemonic forces which, in turn, perpetuate new standards of living. These standards are historically and currently most often measured by the effects on populations or profits rather than

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by the experiences of individuals—especially along the margins of society—which is where Romantic authors most effectively intervene. This chapter addresses technological change from the perspective of experience.

When we think of the word, “technology,” we tend to think of machine technology. In large part, this goes back of course to the Industrial Revolution and the space it occupies in our cultural imagination. From a historical perspective, there were a number of successive industrial revolutions. Here, I refer to the British Industrial Revolution during which time iron, steam, glass, and light all combined to transform cities and reinvent the most remote areas of the countryside. Early machine technologies take many shapes. These include various innovations: the textile industry that turned Manchester into a major industrial epicenter by the beginning of the nineteenth century; the railways which increased from “just under 100 miles” in 1832 to 6,600 miles by 1852 as Michael Freeman records in Railways and the Victorian Imagination (1999) (Freeman 1); and the “[t]he glassing of London [which was] was complete by the mid century” as Isabel Armstrong points out in Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880 (2008) when “[t]he physical basis of glass culture had established itself … [and] [a]n 'ideal' glass world appeared, grafted onto the noise and dirt of existing urban space” (133). These innovations were accompanied by large temporal and spatial shifts in sensibility, shifts which had enormous effects upon the mind and the body.

As historians Chris Freeman and Francisco Louçã emphasize in Time Goes By: From the Industrial Revolution to the Information Revolution (2001), shifts in temporal experience during the era, for example, are felt deeply into the most rural regions of the country side. Freeman and Louçã draw upon the work of E.P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class (1968) to make this point, noting that, “[t]he importance of time in the context of work discipline has been brilliantly illustrated by Edward Thompson” (171). They point to Thompson’s reference to Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891): “[Thompson] starts … with a quote from the nineteenth century
novel of Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: 'Tess … started on her way up the dark and crooked lane or street not made for hasty progress; a street laid out before inches of land had value and when one-handed clocks sufficiently sub-divided the day' (448)” (171). Hardy’s language reflects the slower movement of steps with the phrase “started on her way up the dark and crooked lane,” which parallel the human motion on foot without streetlights and along a “crooked lane” which presumably follows the lay of the land rather than the efficiency of the clock. This was a time when human motion had not yet been harnessed to timetables and days had not yet been systematized and yoked to the needs of the railway timetables or factory punch clocks. These historians’ utilization of literature to illuminate individual human experience of these larger shifts in experience underscores the crucial role literature and literary language plays in foregrounding the actual experience of these changes as they happened in real time and space around individuals. In their explication, Freeman and Louçã try to account for the relationship between the experience of time and the technologies which guided that experience:

The metaphor of 'one-handed clocks' (sun-dials) serves to introduce a beautiful account of the way in which notions of time changed over the centuries and how older concepts of time based on the seasons, the sun, the cockerel, and even the direction of the wind gave way to the tyrannical two-handed clock, the waker-up (knocker-up), and later the alarm clock, the second hand, the stop-watch, time and motion study, 'clocking on' (and later still the micro-seconds of contemporary computer technology). Thompson observes: 'the irregularity of the working day and week were framed, until the first decades of the nineteenth century within the larger irregularity of the working year, punctuated by its traditional holidays and fairs' (E. P. Thompson 1994: 468). (Freeman and Louçã 172)
The emphasis here is on the \textit{architecture} of days and how the demands of a new mechanical world, mechanized by technologies, standardized experience by mingling into the steps of individuals, their waking moments, and their experience of days.

The glassing of cities is another particularly evocative example and image. It exemplifies plate glass technology, so often overlooked as technology, as it embeds itself within the very infrastructure of the cityscapes. The early decades of industrialization mark some of the most rapid stages of change in human history until now, and those decades were marked by a collision of human toil and labor with the efficiency of industrial innovations, — a time when glass manufactured with new technologies still contained humanity from the breath of glassblowers in the bubbles trapped within glass panes or sheets, an eerie mix of humanity and technology. This was an interesting period of industrialization when the life of human workers was still evident in the mass-produced products which would eventually be more and more mechanized.

Nonetheless, while the rise of nineteenth-century industrialization and its machine technologies, accelerations and standardizations in the experience of space and time, and changing landscapes all inarguably compose an enormous and significant \textit{époque} in human history, to view industrialization per se as \textit{the} beginning of a modern technological world dissuades us from investigating fully enough our intimate human relationship with technology. Machine technologies emerge within the context of modernity and notions of progress as part of the Enlightenment. They emerge amidst the Cartesian dualities which mark the period. Amidst this divide, aspects of technology achieve an anonymity of effect which cloaks technology’s presence as it becomes deeply engrained in the very daily cognitive and bodily processes of life. While machine technologies were themselves very visible, and seen, their effects were more haunting, invisible, and absorbed by culture as part of daily life. As such, technology, then and now, becomes a force of its own which somehow both separates itself and bonds itself to our human consciousness and creation. These
ghostly effects of technology, such as the harnessing and restructuring of our experience of time, loosely translate into practices as a means of controlling individuals for the convenience of institutions, or, as a method of profit, improvement and/or control of corporate organizations, scientific methods, cultural systems, social institutions, or government. In fact, when the “the irregularity of the working day and week were framed,” during “the first decades of the nineteenth century,” replacing “the larger irregularity of the working year” (Thompson 468), a deep alienation occurred, dividing us in mind not only from our bodily rhythms, but from our embeddedness within “natural” environs. As Kate Rigby notes in “Romanticism and Ecocriticism” (2014), “… the pursuit of human freedom, as noted by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), is premised upon the enslavement of “outer,” or nonhuman, nature (along with the exploitation of those subordinate humans whose labour would be appropriated in the process)” (63). Technologies were harnessed to this process of enslavement, and in turn, we distanced ourselves from their ethical impact, when in fact, our technologies have become extensions of our “selves” as they are deeply and intimately embedded within the environs in which we are also embedded.

It is worth emphasizing that there is a tendency to view technology as an anonymous force, not of our making, at first novel and new, and once the novelty has worn off, as a reified and invisible part of everyday life. Every innovation becomes an overwhelming and powerful force which rises up in some unseen corner of the world before we experience it and then it levels out, absorbed by culture, absorbed by consciousness. Framing technologies and their effects as social forces is a tendency in literature which becomes more and more evident over the course of the century. This tendency culminates in later novels, in Realism, or more pronouncedly Naturalism, in which free will gives way to destiny and characters are caught and thrown beneath the wheels of misfortune. This is exemplified in the case of Tess in Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891) when, at the end,
“Justice,’ was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess” (Hardy 314). As powerful as these tragedies are, we tend to overshoot the closer, more intimate and introspective experiences of our relationships with technology as they first develop and are absorbed by consciousness and culture. Literature counteracts this cultural tendency.

With respect to time, for instance, the effects are deeply personal, impacting the very being of individuals as Thompson points out:

Mature industrial societies of all varieties are marked by time-thrift and by a clear demarcation between 'work' and 'life'. .. The point at issue is not that of the 'standard of living'. If the theorists of growth wish us to say so, then we may agree that the older popular culture was in many ways otiose, intellectually vacant, devoid of quickening and plain bloody poor. Without time-discipline we could not have the insistent energies of industrial man; and whether this discipline comes in the form of Methodism, or of Stalinism, or of nationalism, it will come to the developing world. What needs to be said is not that one way of life is better than the other, but that this is a place of the most far-reaching conflict; that the historical record is not a single one of neutral and inevitable technological change, but is also one of exploitation and of resistance to exploitation; and that values stand to be lost as well as gained. (93-4)

Here, Thompson develops a complex interpretation of progress, its mixed gains with losses, and by extension, any full interpretation of technology must cultivate an understanding of its complexities in the world.

And yet, technology is also arguably an extension of what makes us human, – what separates us from other intelligent species, – and more significantly, eventually one of the most significant environmental aspects of culture and the making of the self, however slowly at first, over the course

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14 “President of the Immortals” is a literal translation of two words in line 169 of Prometheus Bound.
of centuries. Technology, like nature, and humanity are inseparable. Our relationship with technology is rife with beauty and bitterness, ease and difficulty, benefits and losses. Romantic authors strike these sites of struggle with precision, patience, and an acute sensitivity to the effects of technology at a microcosmic level. The handling of the material is slower, more painstaking, not as accelerated at large—perhaps because their views pre-date the acceleration of culture.

Another reason we need the intermingling critical frameworks of ecocritical, cognitive, and phenomenological perspectives is that such intersecting lenses lend themselves to viewing technologies as integral parts of cultural infrastructures to which we consciously respond or in which we unconsciously participate. Such lenses help us decrease the imaginative distances we maintain from the technologies we use and become dependent upon. When we take into account mind-into-matter engaging in the world, it is easier to see how technologies infiltrate our consciousness with their essences,—their functions, aesthetics, and potentials. Overcoming such distances becomes important because otherwise we overlook our intimate and integral relationship with emerging technologies.

The ever-increasing acceleration of technological progress and resulting acceleration of culture and accompanying changes, addressed later, may account for the elusiveness of our varied and complex relationships with our technologies, but first, we may attribute it to our changing definitions of technology which are in fact affected by the acceleration of culture. What technology “is” and how we define it at any given time or place changes every few years. At one time, such definitions might have taken a century to change, then decades, but now these changes happen with accelerating frequency, definitions paralleling familiarity. Thus, loosely defined, “technology” very much remains an elusive term as our perception and experience of it changes over time and within different contexts of space and time.
Today, for instance, the word “technology” is more likely to readily invoke thoughts of digital media and social networking—rather than the television or landline—let alone the railways which have long since changed both rural and urban landscapes and forever affected movement and transportation, or the plate glass or lights that illuminate our buildings and homes—innovations which once dazzled the nineteenth century mind—because trains, mass-produced glass and lighting were long ago assimilated as a natural and expected part of our environment, absorbed into the background, their novelty or even our attention to their function, now lost in the mundaneness of days. But the novelty of the digital world is fast becoming the norm as well, and there was a time when large-scale coal production, factories and trains were new, machines were a wonder, plate glass was novel, and glass or gas, a luxury. Furthermore, we generally do not consider the amount of science and technology behind the food we eat, the pillows we use, the water we drink, or the bathrooms we decorate. From GMOS, to hormones and antibiotics in our meat, pesticides on our fruit and vegetables, synthetic fibers in our beddings and clothing, and various kinds of chemicals which may be harmful like BPA, a compound in plastics which mimics estrogen, or the heavy metals in our water and teeth, we are embedded within a myriad of unintended consequences that constitute the matrix of technological invention and scientific innovation. These examples underscore our tendency to overlook the tremendous environmental effects technology has on our lives, the ways our perceptions of them change, and these examples elucidate the point that as we use technology to change our world, technology changes us. We ourselves are embedded in technology’s effects. One could even argue that we ourselves are becoming biological architectures of technology. It is not just that the technological innovations in and of themselves affect us as much as 1) their unintended consequences, 2) their phenomenological effects and our individual experiences of them as we assimilate technologies and their effects as part of our conscious being in the world, and 3) the biological effects they have on our bodies and thus our beings. Technologies
have become an essential part of our embeddedness in the world. They have deeply infiltrated our bodies and our minds. Increasingly, they are reshaping the architectures of our consciousnesses.\(^\text{15}\)

The study of nineteenth-century machine technologies begins most famously with Thomas Carlyle’s *Signs of the Times* (1829) in which he calls the age, “above all others, the Mechanical Age”:

It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance. For the simplest operation, some helps and accompaniments, some cunning abbreviating process is in readiness. Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays down his oar; and bids a strong, unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters. Men have crossed oceans by steam; …. There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet firehorse yoked in his stead. Nay, we have an artist that hatches chickens by steam; the very brood-hen is to be superseded! For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils. (493)

Carlyle’s observations mark a crucial moment—one in which the perception of the age sees and addresses technology, or machinery, as objective, anonymous – a force outside of the living –

inorganic and mechanical—replacing people and animals alike, casting them aside in favor of machines which do not tire, suffer, or err. However, this perspective alludes to a chimerical sensibility regarding machines, and humans as machines, and fails to account for the forces of industry which previously demanded the expenditure of human labor as machine labor in relation to previously existing non-machine technologies. This matters in contextualizing the relevance of Romantic perspectives on technological effects, a point I shall develop here.

While it is true that Blake’s “satanic mills” and Wordsworth’s thoughts on cities and urban crowds are well known, it is equally true that Victorian literature has historically drawn more critical attention in terms of technologies than Romantic literature. There are numerous groundbreaking studies on the effects of technology in the Victorian era, such as Isabel Armstrong’s *Victorian Glass Worlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (2012), as mentioned earlier, or Lynda Nead’s *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (2005). Herbert Sussman has written two comprehensive books on the topic four decades apart, *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (1969) and *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (2009). There is Michael Freeman’s *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (1999) as well as Tamara Ketabgian’s *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2011) in which she argues for a changing, more mechanical, view of human nature through as a result of the Victorian “Age of Machinery” as Carlyle called it. These are just a few of the more recent critical studies on Victorian technology. Our critical attention, like our technological history, is most often absorbed into either the strongest or most thrilling cultural narratives of a particular time which then render the impressions that become shared cultural memories or critical interests.

In this case, in the Victorian era, the force with which accelerating machine technologies created seismic shifts mid-nineteenth century onward, and literary responses to them, even now retains its powerful and provocative pull on the imagination as the industrial era bore down upon
culture swiftly and massively, generating many of the ways of living we take for granted today. The view from this perspective is magnificent, and necessary, but incomplete. Our cultural memories are vast and the view, distant and large, within which technologies are often interpreted by their cultural use-value, and of course, the negative or positive consequences of that use. As such, smaller events, such as the minutia of individual experience, may be lost in these larger historical landscapes—minutia to which Romantic authors frequently attend in a manner which was often critically interpreted as nostalgic. And likewise, the glowing hallmarks of British Romantic literature, the individual, the imagination, and nature, the fantastic and revolutionary imagery of Blake, the long pulls on introspective thought in Wordsworth, the lonely moors of Clare, or the monstrous apparitions of Coleridge and Mary Shelley have long overshadowed any role technology may have played in relation to the radical, political or imaginative Romantic sensibility.

When William Wordsworth wrote the “Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads” (1800), the Industrial Revolution was still new, hardly underway. Yet, a particular fragment of the preface captures, and indeed, evokes the sheer force of cultural change which would only accelerate over the course of the nineteenth century. He states:

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves.

(“Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (1802) The Major Works 599)
In this passage, Wordsworth locates himself as a witness as he vividly renders some of the cultural effects of technological progress he observes—information overload, urbanization, overspecialization, and cravings for outrageous stimuli. Most striking, however, is how effectively he speaks to the powerful influence cultural forces exert over human individuals, and the impact of such forces on both lived experience and particularly, the transformative influence these forces have on the formation of the mind. Key terms in the passage, “[in]voluntary,” “uniformity,” and “conformed” point to increasingly common aspects of culture going into the nineteenth-century—the pressure to organize, systematize, and adhere to increasingly disciplined and specialized modes of social organization, all of which simply would not have been possible without our technological prowess and progress. However, it also would not have been possible without the malleability of consciousness to which Wordsworth draws our attention, our species’ ability to adapt, but also, our enormous capacity for adaptation—to our benefit or detriment and the Romantic eye for this tendency. Romantic literature’s emphasis on individual experience within environs provides us with an exceptional opportunity to explore this aspect of the individual in culture and the world amidst industrialization—the laying of an immense technological network across the globe.

To contemporary readers, critics and scholars, the connections between Romantic experiences of technology to our own might appear tenuous, but I propose that the parallel merits examination—particularly with respect to the experiences of marginalized individuals on the one hand and space and how technology is carved into place on the other. In fact, the individual experiences rendered in Romantic texts offer us an opportunity to understand not only the ‘then’ of technological experience but the now. Toby R. Benis makes an excellent case for such parallels in *Romanticism on the Road: The Marginal Gains of Wordsworth’s Homeless* (2000), which he opens as follows:

*To the contemporary reader, the 200 years separating us from the Romantic period may appear a formidable barrier; like the speaker of Wordsworth’s “Solitary Reaper,” perhaps we...*
only indistinctly perceive in its poetry and prose “old, unhappy, far-off things, /And battles long ago” (19-20). To scholars seeking a more profound understanding of the culture of the era, this gap may seem wider still. Typically recipients rather than providers of charity, the homeless nevertheless offer this gift to us: a particular and immediate opportunity to reduce this distance. (1)

A number of Romantic texts offer an “opportunity to reduce this distance.” Similarly, despite the temporal distance, we are joined across the centuries by our own elusive experiences of our technological innovations and their effects—which are better understood through the experiences of otherwise forgotten individuals rather than measured through the recorded historical experiences of anonymous populations.

Romantic authors have a temporal advantage, at least in the context of technologically-fueled industrial progress. As I asserted in Chapter One, they were uniquely situated with one foot in each world at an early enough time, before the second Industrial Revolution was in full swing, to engage with the material conditions of a changing era in a manner which elucidated shifts in cultural norms and the lived experience of human individuals amidst those changes. As such, these Romantic perspectives on technologies have pressing contemporary relevance.

Wordsworth’s observations in “The Preface to the Second Edition of The Lyrical Ballads,” calls to mind our contemporary time, as generations adjust to new standards of the digital revolution and a fully integrated world in which our experience of time, space, and long, deep draughts of introspective thought has been further compressed, multiplied, accelerated, distracted, and redistributed across global systems of digitized grids. Then, as now, our technologies, far from adapting to us, have forced an adaption, en masse, to them – and as Henry James once said, half-way between then and now in The American Scene (1905), “the monstrous phenomena themselves … strike me as having, with their immense momentum, got the start, got ahead of, in proper parlance,
any possibility of poetic, of dramatic capture” (80). So while Wordsworth observes that “the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves” to massive cultural changes fueled by progress, James observes a century later that these changes evade capture, and we, yet another century onward, find our evolving relationships to our technologies as well as their tangible, material effects on body and mind increasingly elusive, despite hindsight.

Whether we view technology as an extension of our human consciousness or as an integral part of the environment which we create, shifting our emphasis from technology as object to technology as playing an intrinsic role in human behavior and experience—world building—enables us to analyze more fully our relationship with the technologies we use and to what extent technologies essentially shape who we are—self-making. As philosopher Alva Noë observes in Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness (2009), "there is no such thing as complete detachment from the community of others and from the larger environmental structures and situations—lights, sounds, odors, the ground, the air, technology—up against which we first become ourselves” (52). But even more importantly, for emphasis, Noë notes philosopher Susan Hurley belief that “the skull is not a magical membrane.” And so Noë asks the pressing question, "why not take seriously the possibility that the causal processes that matter for consciousness are themselves boundary crossing, and, therefore, world involving?" (50). This perspective, along with that of Damasio, Clark, and Haugeland, adds another dimension to long-standing discussions about nature verses nurture or the dynamics of ideological interpellation. It collapses the boundaries between nature and nurture, and goes beyond saying that our minds are influenced by our environs. To some degree, our minds (and bodies) are also our environs. Our selves are not contained inside ourselves. When we shift our emphasis in this way, we invite ourselves to analyze technology’s effects as human effects. It is not enough to stop with Marshall McLuhan’s famous maxim, “[w]e shape our tools and they in turn shape us.” In fact, they make us.
Moreover, the issue is not simply one of adaptability and change, it is also deeply forged to one of responsibility to the bonding that happens between brain and body, and being and world, and to our experiences of a world being so deeply altered by technologies. Furthermore, such a perspective invites us to reopen our contemporary ideas about what technology really is—as inextricable from who we really are, not only culturally but on a deeply personal and species level. The technologies we use deeply affect our minds and thoroughly infiltrate our bodies. We overshoot the risk of overlooking what may be one of the most interesting facets of the Romantic relationship to technology—in nature and culture, in life and in our imaginations—its attentive intimacy to a moment of transition. This transition was marked by the evolution of the machine as a static object apart from humanity, such as the clock, into a moving, living machine whose directions we assimilated as part of our lives and who we became—as machines began to inscribe their directives on our minds and bodies.

An odd but powerful example of technological effect may be extricated from the widespread use of the guillotine during the French Revolution. A small mark in the margin of a book Wordsworth left behind is replete with imaginative possibilities. “I knew this man” penciled William Wordsworth next to a reference of Antoine-Joseph Gorsas in a volume from his set of *The Works of Edmund Burke* as Nicolas Roe points out in *The Politics of Nature* (1992). A member of the Gironde, Gorsas was declared a traitor as the Jacobins gained influence and was executed in October of 1793, “the first deputy,’ as [Thomas] Carlyle later recalled, ‘sent to the scaffold’” (Roe 104). Recollecting conversations with Wordsworth some thirty years after the fact, Carlyle remembered that Wordsworth “had witnessed the struggle of Girondins … in particular, the execution of Gorsas” (Roe 104) by guillotine. Although, as Roe notes, no other evidence exists to corroborate Wordsworth’s witnessing of Gorsas’s execution, it seems likely that Carlyle’s memory was accurate on this point. The friendship, however brief, was significant; Wordsworth and Gorsas
met and became acquainted in 1792—at a time when Wordsworth was still visibly committed to the radical cause—and they shared a sensibility which was opposed to violence and in favor of peaceful social change as Roe points out. The violent end his friend met would have had to have had some significant impact on the young Wordsworth, evidenced too, by later clues. The means by which Gorsas met his end, by guillotine, contrasts starkly with a different kind of emerging technology which had come to represent the spirit of revolution—electricity. As Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson point out in *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era* (2004), “American republicanism was the hope of the world, as Franklin’s ‘subjection’ of lightning proved. The harnessing of electricity, then, was evidence of the superiority of republican liberty to monarchical hierarchy, and of the independent to the colonial state” (182). Such imaginative underpinnings stirred the hopes of many Romantic writers of the period, and by contrast, the bloodbath that ensued in France, made possible by a very different type of technology, an efficient, accelerated, mechanical killing mechanism, left deep wounds—not only politically, but imaginatively.

It is well known that the young Wordsworth appeared far more radically minded than the older one—leaving only clues and rough sketches in his work that might have accounted for the change while cloaked behind the veil of secrecy Wordsworth maintained throughout his life about his experiences in France. Allusions to his connections to the Revolution and possibly his friendship with Gorsas leave traces throughout *The Prelude* (1850) and in the margins of at least one volume—a compelling smudge of evidence. A disillusioned and possibly traumatized Wordsworth turned away from his radical political proclivities in journalism and turned his energies with a more subdued or hidden radicalism into the margins—giving voice to marginalized and abject figures, particularly within environmental settings that call their status into stark relief in poems such as “The Ruined Cottage” (1797), “Resolution and Independence” (1807), “The Female Vagrant” (1815), and “Michael” (1800).
Exploring some of the material conditions in space and time that may have contributed to at least a part of that shift—particularly with respect to the influences of technological innovations and their material presence in the world may suggest some of the ways in which a technology could have touched individual imaginations, pushing them in one direction or another, a loose geography of lived experience. Here, I juxtapose the imaginative power in the context of revolution of the guillotine—violent, brutal and bloody, with the “discovery” or harnessing of electricity as symbolic of hope, light, and the torch of liberty. Considering the role that the guillotine and electricity played in revolution, lived and perceived, begs the question of what influence they might have had on radical thought and particularly on Wordsworth’s shift in sensibilities. I ask if it is possible to consider the competing imaginative influences of technology, to consider Wordsworth’s political shift as the awakening of a different subversive voice, cloaked, private, but self-aware, political, deliberate, and radical as he turns away from the blood bath of revolution and seeks, instead, the light of revolution by illuminating the abject figures wandering the margins of the era in the wake of social upheavals, war, and economic change fueled by revolution and industry?

Wordsworth met Gorsas, a journalist, in 1792 in France, and as Roe points out, the two shared an opposition to violence: Gorsas condemned the September massacres while attacking Marat, “joy! Joy! Blood flowing in the streets! Dismembered limbs! Twitching entrails! My dear Marat, it must be an exquisite pleasure for you to bathe in the warm blood of your enemies!” (111) and during the trial of Louis the XVI, Gorsas distanced himself from the Montagnards, advocating exile over execution. Gorsas was declared a traitor and executed in 1793 as the Jacobins gained power.16 To dwell for a moment on the method of Gorsas’s death by guillotine17, horrifying and

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16March 9, 1793 his printing presses, destroyed, declared a traitor and outlawed on July 28, and arrested and executed in October. (Roe 111)  
17The material nature of the guillotine:  
• Total weight of a guillotine is about 1278 lbs  
• The guillotine metal blade weighs about 88.2 lbs  
• The height of guillotine posts average about 14 feet
grisly, if swift, is to wonder what impact such an experience might have had on the young
Wordsworth—and not only its gruesome method, but its context and juxtaposition. How different it was than the unbound hope and optimism that accompanied the early years of revolution, the seemingly glorious possibilities of the enlightenment, the stunning wonders of equality and liberty that might accompany progress—a world that seemingly had the potential to open itself up upon new ways of being. Given the young Wordsworth’s far more radically-minded political stance than the older one’s—one must wonder at the wordless change. Wordsworth wrote but didn't publish political pamphlets, and he had plans for a publication, The Philanthropist, which Roe describes as having "promised a peaceful enlightenment in Britain, but that wish involved a knowledge of violence in France and of the poet's own will to power as a revolutionary" (Roe 115).

While a clear-cut case for any direct cause and effect relationship between Wordsworth’s experiences in France and his later distance from more obviously politically radical positions is impossible to establish, one can surmise that the violent end his friend met would have had to have had some significant impact on the young Wordsworth, evidenced too, by later clues, for instance, in The Prelude (1850):

I doubtless should have made common cause

With some who perished, haply perished too,

A poor mistaken and bewildered offering (X 194-196)

While implicating himself in the kinds of revolutionary sympathies he shared with Gorsas, the passage belies something more than compassion. The lines are infused with a sense of bewilderment, almost a pitiable senselessness and loss of innocence in the last moment —"a poor mistaken and bewildered offering," especially in the context of Gorsas's end.

- The falling blade has a rate of speed of about 21 feet/second
- Just the actual beheading takes 2/100 of a second
- The time for the guillotine blade to fall down to where it stops takes 70th of a second
By way of contrast, Franklin had drawn the magical 'fluid' down a kite string from the sky and revealed its positive/negative polarity ... “The fable of Prometheus is verify’d declared one commentator ... Franklin had captured fire from the heavens ... mastered lightning ... the very instrument of the gods' wrath .... To the accompaniment of thunder, he could pass streams of electric blue 'fluid' across space ..... a prototype of Romantic genius ... who, like Prometheus, rebelled against the tyranny of despotic authority .... After the American Revolution, Franklin became the idol of radical France ... “he snatched the lightning from the sky and their sceptre from the tyrants” ran a revolutionary motto.” (Fulford et al. 181)

It was Gorsas himself who drew a stunning juxtaposition between steel and light after the September Massacres. "Marat, my friend, your only resources are knives and daggers; but the people need beacons and lanterns too! don't forget enlightenment!” (Roe 111). The falling of the blade will never be forgotten in the context of the French Revolution though its significance as a technological innovation of mass destruction and efficiency behind a kind of psychic distance is often enough overlooked. Grimly, the guillotine was a technology that embodied the physical manifestation of a Cartesian separation of head and body.

Why are revolutions waged? For liberty, for freedom, for the people. But who are the people? Too often, they are individuals whose voices are often drowned out, or who are swept away by forces much bigger than themselves—like Gorsas, or like Louvet\(^\text{18}\)—as Wordsworth recounts in the Prelude:

When Robespierre, well knowing for what mark
Some words of indirect reproof had been

\(^{18}\) Louvet was one of “the seven Girondins who had found refuge in St. Emilion, the news of their friends' executions in Paris was devastating” (Oliver, Bette W. Surviving the French Revolution: A Bridge Across Time (2013)) (81).
Intended, rose in hardihood, and dared

The Man who had an ill surmise of him

To bring his charge in openness; whereat

When a dead pause ensued, and no one stirred,

In silence of all present, from his seat

Louvet walked singly through the avenue

And took his station in the Tribune, saying,

'I, Robespierre,' accuse thee! 'Tis well known

What was the issue of that charge, and how

Louvet was left alone without support

Of his irresolute Friends; but these are things

Of which I speak, only as they were storm

Or sunshine to my individual mind,

No further. .... (X 91-106)

“No further,” writes Wordsworth. He is unwilling to dwell, unwilling to delve into the depths of inhumane madness wearing the cloak of liberty, a killing machine bathed in light.

Also, as Stephen Gill notes in *The Prelude* (1991), Wordsworth attempts “to maintain a dual perspective on his material” (77):

Writing ten years after the event, he believes (a) that he was lured into a crisis in which he lost touch with his true self; (b) that the French have betrayed their cause and that there is no shame in being, now, an English patriot. But Wordsworth continues to believe, and fervently, (a) that his youthful zeal for the Revolution was generous and right; (b) that in many respects his faith in the ideas of the Revolution remains undimmed; (c) that British politicians have been guilty men throughout ten shameful years (X, 178). The result is that
throughout these books the focus constantly shifts between a vivid chronicle of events in the early 1790s and reflective, expository verse such as X, 380-439, in which the poet seeks to explain his frame of mind then from the vantage point of now. The passage beginning “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!” (X 692-735)
The dualities Wordsworth balances reflect a sensibility divided by time, feeling, and reflection. But throughout his work, be it in his own mind, his own existence, or that of marginalized others, the abject figures who wander the margins of so many of his poems, Wordsworth remains consistent in his attention to the individual in the world. Throughout his work, he draws attention to the fact that these abject figures, these single individuals, exist amidst these larger storms and forces. He gives voice to those left behind, makes them visible, illuminates them in the margins, and he draws readers into the margins with them in another kind of light.

To return to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), consider the following poems: "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," a swipe at enclosure laws, in which Harry Gill lies in waking for Goody Blake to hedge on his property though it would cost him little, "Simon Lee" in which the tragedy is inherent when labor is no longer enough to fulfill economic gain, or "The Last of the Flock," a severe indictment of poor law reforms, in which a man who worked hard was denied assistance from the Parish: "Six children, Sir! had I to feed, / Hard labour in a time of need! / My pride was tamed, and in our grief / I of the parish asked relief. / They said I was a wealthy man; My sheep upon the mountain fed, An

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19 Hedging: Trimming hedges for fuel. Hedges had great value dating back to ancient times. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “[w]riters begin to draw attention to the difference between fully-hedged counties and those still relatively unhedged.” In *Five hundred points of good Husbandrie, as well for the Champion or open countrie, as also for the Woodland* (1573), Thomas Tusser “notes that among the many disadvantages of living in open country is the lack of firewood and the trouble of fetching other fuels from a distance. Hence the term ‘woodland,’ used by writers at this time not for woodland in the normal sense, but for land possessing hedgerows which produced wood.” As the need for fuel increased, laws restricting hedging grew more stern. For instance, during the Elizabethan age there was “rising demand for fuel, some of which came from hedges. The 1590s and 1600s were terrible years of cold and poverty.” In turn, “[c]ourts took an increasingly severe attitude to hedge-stealing.” Rackham, Oliver. “Hedges and Hedgerow Trees in Britain: A Thousand Years of Agroforestry.” *Social Forestry Network*. Web. 1989 (6-7). Web. Accessed 8 July 2017. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/950.pdf
it was fit that thence I took / Whereof to buy us bread:' / 'Do this: how can we give to you,' / They cried, 'what to the poor is due?'' (88-91).

Elsewhere, in poems such as the [The Discharged Soldier] (1798) the narrator comments upon the plight of individuals affected by distant events and forces such as war which casts them out when they are no longer needed or too broken to be of use. Wordsworth accomplishes a brutal effect by foregrounding such figures against their surroundings, often by a chance meeting, in this case sudden: "I love to walk / Along the public way when for the night, / Deserted in its silence, it assumes / A character of deeper quietness / Than pathless solitudes. At such a time / I slowly mounted up a steep ascent / Where the road's watry surface to the ride / Of that sharp rising glittered in the moon ..." (1-8). It is on such a night that "a sudden turning of the road" (37) ... "presented" (38) to the narrator "an uncouth shape ..." (38).

His arms were long and lean; his hands were bare;

His visage, wasted though it seemed, was large

In feature; his cheeks sunken; and his mouth Shewed ghastly in the moonlight. From behind

A mile-stone propped him, and his figure seemed

Half-sitting and half-standing. I could mark

That he was clad in military garb,

Though faded yet entire. His face was turned

Towards the road, yet not as if he sought

For any living thing. He appeared

Forlorn and desolate, a man cut off

From all his kind, and more than half detached

From his own nature.
Wordsworth describes his body in detail to convey the physical circumstances of the discharged soldier’s recent past, “arms long and lean” (48). “His visage, wasted …/… and his visage, sunken” (49) tells a story of malnourishment and hunger “ghastly in the moonlight” (51). The soldier exists in between his own embeddedness in his environs: “A mile-stone propped him, and his figure seemed / Half-sitting and half-standing …” (52-3) not entirely there, and unable to stand alone. “Clad in military garb” (54) he symbolizes culture, government, and war – the castoff of culture there in the “deeper quietness” (4) of the night. The soldier is firmly placed in a scene, “propped” (52) up by it in fact, yet is completely disconnected from it. He lives amidst nature, and yet is not quite there. He is entrenched in a culture whose circumstances have discarded him. “From all his kind, and more than half detached / From his own nature… / He was alone …” (59-61). The soldier is alienated from even himself. War, the force of it, has no regard for the individuals it discards, and it grinds them up as grist for the war machine.

Not only during times of war, but also during times of change marked by growth and progress, culture often discards the individuals who populate the world, individuals upon whose labor culture is built. The well-being of the individuals who make up populations is rarely taken into account. As an example, the Enclosure Laws at the turn of the century finished off what was left of the commons or publicly shared spaces as E.P. Thompson points out in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Amidst the rapidly growing needs of a booming capitalistic machine; the factories and mills of the cities had more jobs, and the jobs needed more workers to fill them. It was enhanced, improved technological advancement which made the increased output of those factories and mills. This is not to say that technology was new, or that the changes to the lived environment were not gradual; indeed, they were. It is to say that technological progress or innovation was an integral and inseparable part of those changes. For millennia, technology has
played a pivotal role in shaping the environment in which revolution, scientific discovery, and industrial progress played out – in space as well as time – and in the process, technologies and their effects shape environs and play a crucial role in the production of ideology of any time. These ideologies touch by drawing or repelling individual minds with technological affect. These dynamics turn on themselves, not linear and causal, but circular. It is the human imagination that fuels technological innovation, and it is also the human imagination which has the freedom to slip out from the trappings of ideological frameworks to show us what social conditions have wrought. Amputating the discoveries of science from the musings of the humanities severs the intimate and ethical connections between our imaginative innovations and ethical ruminations. Dismissing Romantic contemplation as reactive nostalgia eliminates possibilities for ethical review. So far, I have spoken largely of forces, forces which impact and shape our lives environment. However, where art becomes most crucial is the manner in which it acts as an ideological filter and shows us the impact of these forces upon individuals, their lived experience in the world, and in the margins where Wordsworth and other Romantic authors answer their calls.

The turn the French Revolution took was bathed in disillusionment. It had been a time of hope. This hope was infused throughout the Enlightenment—paralleling the hopes for Revolution—the emancipation of human kind. Technology was a part of that hope. As decades passed, those hopes were not extinguished, and they continued throughout the century. As Timothy Fulford et al point out, “[a]ccording to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Shelley enthused about amazing discoveries that would give human kind a power it had never possessed before, a power to command the elements in even the remotest parts of the globe” (1), linking technological progress with imaginative speculations that touched upon closing the distance between the sublime and reaching beyond the local into the global.
With the powers of scientific and technological progress, Percy Bysshe Shelley prophesied, life on earth could be transformed for the better, in keeping with the project of the Enlightenment, if only Europe would project its new technologies into foreign lands: “The balloon,” he declared, will enable us to traverse vast tracts with ease and rapidity, and to explore unknown countries without difficulty. Why are we still so ignorant of the interior of Africa? – Why do we not dispatch intrepid aeronauts to cross it in every direction, and to survey the whole peninsula in a few weeks? The shadow of the first balloon, which a vertical sun would project precisely beneath it, as it glides silently over that hitherto unhappy country, would virtually emancipate every slave, and would annihilate slavery forever. (Fulford 1)

Shelley was an optimist, but he was naïve in his optimism. He envisioned unbounded potential which would emancipate, open, and free human beings instead of enslaving, containing, and harnessing them. His view went immediately to new landscapes, journeys, and hopes. Shelley’s view did not foresee exploitation, nor did it reflect a perception which translated unbounded nature as “grist for the mill” (Lussier 394). However, his vision is also contradictory because part of this error blindness related to class prejudice. As Michael Henry Scrivener observes in Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley (2016), Shelley, for instance, “missed the significance of the Luddite uprisings” (52). In fact, Shelley’s wonder at technology strikes at a conflicted relationship with his criticism of industrialization—very much a project of his aristocratic entitlement. As Scrivener writes, quoting a letter Shelley wrote to Elizabeth Hitchener from the Lake country, Shelley’s “class prejudice and the ambiguity of his radicalism are apparent” (53). Shelley wrote,

[a]t this Keswick tho the face of the country is lovely the people are detestable. The manufacturers with their contamination have crept into the peaceful vale and deformed the loveliness of Nature with human taint. The debauched servants of the great families who
resort contribute to the total extinction of morality. Keswick seems more like a suburb of London than a village of Cumberland. Children are frequently found in the River which the unfortunate women employed at the manufactory destroy. (53)

Scrivener observes that the letter “lacks imaginative sympathy, not to mention radical understanding” (53). However, most interesting in this context is the aesthetic nature of Shelley’s observation, “written from the narrow perspective of the aristocrat who assumes that a beautiful prospect is his birthright. The beauties of nature are, in this instance, objects of aristocratic consumption, and the laborers’ existence interferes with aristocratic pleasure” (53). In this example, Shelley fails to make the connection with technologically-driven progress and conditions of the workers through an aesthetic lens of privilege. Similarly, the Luddite uprisings which Shelley misunderstood and underestimated interfered with his aesthetic sense of wonder for the possibilities of technology. Shelley missed “the significance of the Luddite uprisings … [as] … attempts by labourers to resist the laissez-faire practices of maximum exploitation sanctioned by the state” (Scrivener 52). The contradictory nature of Shelley’s views is beautifully captured by an image of him “launch[ing] radical pamphlets in balloons and bottles, a method of propaganda which painfully bears witness to his isolation” (Scrivener 52).

Colliding perspectives on progress make sense through the lens of Alva Noë’s hypothesis which questions the “standard view, [that] our conscious lives—the fact that we think and feel and that a world shows up for us—is achieved in us by the action of our brain” (4). Instead, he proposes that “to understand consciousness in humans and animals, we must look not inward, into the recesses of our insides; rather, we need to look to the ways in which each of us, as a whole animal, carries on the processes of living in and with and in response to the world around us” (7). Who we are and how we see emerges out of what we become as we experience the world and what we see in it. In short, “[c]onsciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body, and world” (10).
What happens to us, the physical conditions amidst which we live, and our interactions with the world are not simply circumstance, nor are they as straightforward as nature verses nurture. We are not a result. We are in process. We are not contained inside our heads. Our minds are embodied minds, and environmental effects on our bodies have an impact on our core selves. We are also part of our environs which are always forming an essential and integral part of who we are as individuals. Together, these elements form an ecology of being in the world.

Environs are thus an integral part of the development of consciousness in relation to the subjective experiences of the human individuals explored in these Romantic texts. Karl Kroeber emphasizes the reciprocity of the individual self, body and mind, with his or her environs from another perspective, an ecocritical one which also emphasizes interconnectedness—paralleling recent developments in cognitive science in *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994):

Contemporary biological thinking … no longer identifies individuality with autonomy and separation. For leading contemporary biologists, the individuality of an organism is not definable except through its interactions with its environment, through its interdependencies. An organism’s uniqueness consists in “intersubjective” connections and is determined not by separation but by “attunement,” participation in “communities” (both inside itself and in the external environment) defined by historically individualized mutualities of need and desire.

(8)

If we accept that an organism or individual is “not definable except through its interactions with its environment,” then the circumstances of that environment take on a subtly potent ethical dimension which emphasizes the experiences of an individual, over the larger impersonal populations which are increasingly emphasized as subjects of nineteenth-century scientific studies and data-driven philosophies such as those proposed by Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Malthus. This applies to technological architectures, but it also applies to our ancient relationships to the natural world as
well. Our intersubjective connections are inescapable as individuals embedded in the world. These individual experiences are most effectively drawn out by art – particularly poetry and prose, and with them, experiences in nature, – a point emphasized by Martin Heidegger who, because of this emphasis, remains central in many critical discussions despite his notoriety for his associations with fascist Germany.

As Axel Goodbody notes in “Ecocritical Theory: Romantic Roots and Impulses from Twentieth-Century European Thinkers” (2014), a number of major ecocritical studies by scholars such as Robert Pogue Harrison, Jonathan Bate, and Kate Rigby have “engaged in detailed revisions and adaptations of Heidegger’s concepts and arguments” because “[Heidegger’s] philosophy remains particularly attractive to ecocritics because of the pivotal role he assigns to the work of art in “saving the Earth” (66). According to Goodbody,

Heidegger’s starting point is the difference between mere material existence and a mode of being in which things are disclosed, or reveal their thingness. This requires human consciousness, as the space in which disclosure takes place. Human “being” is conversely only fully realized through the act of disclosing things, that is, through the “letting be” of things in the space of our consciousness. Responsible human beings have a duty to let things disclose themselves in their own way, rather than forcing them into meanings and identities, that suit their own instrumental values, for instance by treating the forest as a mere “standing reservoir” of timber. (65)

This connects to “the articulation in texts of the experience of nature, and its reproduction in images” (Goodbody 66). Goodbody observes:

Poetry is for [Heidegger] a crucial mode of letting be. Its oblique and often archaic language, read meditatively, models for us the act of disclosure, and stands in contrast to everyday language, which “enframes” things, by treating them as resources on call for our use. Poetic
language is therefore a “house of Being,” which acknowledges the autonomy and resistance of things to our purposes …. (66)

In the case of the poetic language of William Blake, explored more extensively in chapter three, the poetic language moves us away from the universally understood purpose of chimneys for the benefit of faceless communities and technologically developing culture at large and into the tangible materials experiences of the children who are enslaved in order to complete and supplement the full functioning of those technologies.

In *Song of the Earth* (2000), Jonathan Bate’s observations bring together these intermingling perspectives of both cognitive and ecological criticism and philosophy in relation to the purpose of poetry in asking, and answering, what the purpose of poets may be:

What are poets for? They are not exactly philosophers, though they often try to explain the world and humankind’s place within it. They are not exactly moralists, for at least since the nineteenth century their primary concern has rarely been to tell us in homiletic fashion how to live. But they are often exceptionally lucid or provocative in their articulation of the relationship between internal and external worlds, between being and dwelling.

Romanticism and its afterlife, I have been arguing through this book, may be thought of as the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of the mind.

(251-2)

Here, Bate deftly weaves the threads of two critical cultures together in a manner which reinvigorates the critical exploration of the contemporary relevance of radical Romantic interventions and underscores Karl Kroeber’s position that “[w]e are now admirably (if dangerously) positioned to explore ways of making literary criticism more practically relevant to lives and environments of ordinary people” (41) in *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994).
However, while such interconnectedness is now more widely recognized in relation to ecology in contemporary ecocritical thinking, and is steadily becoming more recognized in terms of the relations between human beings and environment, it has been slow to catch on in terms of the damage being done to human beings themselves—mentally and physically. The amount of damage, and its depth, incurred by human beings, bodily and emotionally, is astonishing for its lack of widespread attention—the failure of culture to assimilate human bodily destruction as readily as environmental destruction—which has in itself been very slow to catch on. Part of this may be the uneven developments resulting from the many disconnections which plague cultures. As indicated in chapter one, “Gernot Böhme sees the problem at the basis of environmental destruction as one of alienation from the body and our feelings” (Goodbody 66), a common Cartesian error. Bate observes a disconnection stemming from our apartness from nature: “The paradox of man and the dilemma of environmentalism are here in a nutshell. The definition begins with ‘nature’ as the immediate cause of the entire material world, of all phenomena including humankind, but it ends with an opposition between ‘nature’ and ‘humans or human creations or civilization’. We are both a part of and apart from nature” (Bate 33). From another point of view, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon identifies the many ways that “scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which casualties are postposed” as “slow violence” which may go unnoticed for decades (2-3). He states, “[b]y slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2).

A note on my use of the word “environment” in all of these contexts: Historically, as Lawrence Buell notes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), there is an “implicit narrowness of the ‘eco,’ insofar as it connotes the ‘natural’ rather than the ‘built’ environment and, still more specifically, the field of ecology” (12). However, “[f]rom the start, and increasingly, the ‘eco’ of
practicing so-called ecocritics has been more aesthetic, ethical and sociopolitical than scientistic”

(12). This dissertation also uses a “looser rubric” to account for both rural and urban nature and city. Moreover, not only do I consider a vast area of geographical and cultural areas as environs, I consider human beings as intrinsically part and parcel of our environs. In sum, my perspective draws upon developments in cognitive science and philosophy as well as ecocriticism in exploring the phenomenological subjective perspectives of individuals as relayed by Romantic authors within the context of various ecological environs.

This chapter has tried to bring forth a perspective of technology which renders it more visible. Rather than demonizing or exulting its power, I argue that making its effects visible is of lasting importance. I do not ask us to look at technological consequences as negative consequences. Indeed, technologies have liberated us in many ways. However, we bring to our innovations many of the same deeply internalized assumptions which are born of ideologies of oppression. Thus, we often continue to imprison ourselves and others within our very means of liberating ourselves and escaping the now infamous chains of which Jean-Jacques Rousseau spoke. We iron oppressive practices into the most liberating of technologies, so it is no surprise that we build them into our basic cultural infrastructures. In tandem, we have often privileged our cultural needs outside of and above our relationship with nature. Consider the wide-ranging reach of the timber industry.

Whether we ascribe to the origins of technology as imitations of nature or ways of completing nature, most basically, as a species, we use our technê or technology to interact with our environs—often to tame and control it, but always to manage it—or rather, ourselves within or in relation to it. Technologies enable us to facilitate our relationship with our environs—but we have persistently failed to recognize our embeddedness within those environs and this embeddedness of those environs within us—long before the Industrial Revolution. Perhaps our massive cultural failures owe a great deal to the widespread and longstanding neglect of this mutual relationship born of
reciprocity. Our technologies are deeply dependent upon the nature humanity has always sought to dominate; this relentless domination in lieu of cultivating a sustainable relationship with our nature is a long-standing strategic error which continues with serious consequences to our well-being at large.

Pre-industrial tendencies toward such failures of recognition are exemplified historically, for instance, by deforestation, large-scale and wide-spread, and symptomatic of humanity’s embeddedness in the environment while simultaneously disregarding that intrinsic relation. According to John Perlin, author of *A Forest Journey: The Role of Wood in the Development of Civilization* (1989), “[a]ncient writers observed that forests always recede as civilizations develop and grow ….

This occurred for a simple reason: trees have been the principal fuel and building material of almost every society for over five thousand years, from the Bronze Age until the middle of the nineteenth century” (Perlin). “Wood,” asserts Perlin, “was the foundation upon which early societies were built” (28).

According to Perlin, while “[i]t may seem bold to assert wood’s crucial place in the evolution of civilization,” wood has played a central role in just about every human activity:

… trees have provided the material to make fire, the heat of which has allowed our species to reshape the earth for its use. With heat from wood fires, relatively cold climates became habitable; inedible grains were changed into a major source of food; clay could be converted into pottery, …; people could extract metal from stone, …; and builders could make durable construction materials such as brick, cement, lime, plaster, and tile for housing and storage facilities ….

Transportation would have been unthinkable without wood. Until the nineteenth century every ship, from the Bronze Age coaster to the frigate, was built with timber…. Every cart, chariot, and wagon was also made primarily of wood. Early steamboats and railroad locomotives in the United States used woods as their fuel. Wooden ships were tied
up to piers and wharves made from wood; carts, chariots, and wagons made of wood
crossed wooden bridges; and railroad ties, of course, were wooden. (Perlin 27)

Wood from trees provided the heat that made most aspects of civilization possible. In fact, nature is contained within every technology we use. Civilization developed through the process of converting objects of nature into our technologies. And yet, instead of cultivating practices which maintain and protect a resource for which we owe our very civilization, we have always taken from it and destroyed it in the process.

Michael Williams, author of *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis* (2002) offers a perspective from a somewhat different angle in “Dark Ages and Dark Areas: Global Deforestation in the Deep Past” (2000), drawing attention to the clearing that took place for agriculture:

> The detail of forest use becomes more plentiful, and suffice it to say that clearing either to grow food or for grazing was the primary cause of change, followed in some uncertain order by domestic fuel procurement, ship-building and metal-smelting.

> Tantalizingly, the detail of each process comes in roughly a reverse order to its importance. Thus, as ever, clearing for food growing gets little mention as it is subsumed into the larger practice of agriculture. On the other hand, metal-smelting looms disproportionately large because of the intense local impact …. (34-5)

Williams connects even early clearing with the technologies which made it possible: “Undoubtedly, large areas of forests were cleared with flint and stone axes which modern experiments show were capable of being used for forest felling. Burning and animal grazing, if intensive enough, would have thinned and ultimately eliminated forest in other areas. The process continued unabated during the late Neolithic to early Bronze ages (c. 3000 to 1000 b.c.)” (32).

Later, during the Middle Ages, according to Williams,
[w]hatever the true causes of deforestation during this era the elements interlocked neatly to produce what White has labelled “the agricultural revolution of the Middle Ages” which shifted the focus of Europe from the south to the north, from the restricted lowlands around the Mediterranean to the great forested plains drained by the Loire, Seine, Rhine, Elbe, Danube and Thames. Here the distinctive features of the Medieval world developed—a build-up of technological competence, self-confidence, and accelerated change—which, after 1500, enabled Europe ‘to invade the rest of the world, conquering, looting, trading and colonizing’. In that long process of global expansion the forest and the wealth released from it played a central part. (40)

Here, Williams neatly demonstrates the nature upon which technology is dependent. In a closed system such as the biosphere of the earth, transforming nature into technology without balances must lead to destruction or imbalance. The consequences were significant. According to historian, Norman F. Cantor in *The Civilization of the Middle Ages: A Completely Revised and Expanded Edition of Medieval History, the Life and Death of a Civilization* (1993),

> Europeans had lived in the midst of vast forests throughout the earlier medieval centuries. After 1250 they became so skilled at deforestation that by 1500 they were running short of wood for heating and cooking. They were faced with a nutritional decline because of the elimination of the generous supply of wild game that had inhabited the now-disappearing forests, which throughout medieval times had provided the staple of their carnivorous high-protein diet. By 1500 Europe was on the edge of a fuel and nutritional disaster [from] which it was saved in the sixteenth century only by the burning of soft coal and the cultivation of potatoes and maize. (564)

In this example, we turned from wood and forests to coal and new foods for farming. At large, our consumption of natural forest for technological progress depletes without replenishing.
Regarding this environmental embeddedness, writers such as James McKusick in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000) and Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth* (2000) emphasize questions regarding our lack of urgency when it comes to our ecocritical concerns, our environment and the well-being of the earth. As established throughout this dissertation, numerous critics and philosophers, historical and contemporary, have questioned what Goodbody calls the “hyperseparation” of Cartesian dualities, “Descartes’s exaggerated distinction … between … animals and … human beings” which “simultaneously polarizes mind and body, reason and emotion” (71). As mentioned previously, Goodbody emphasizes that “the problem at the basis of environmental destruction as one of alienation from the body and our feelings” (66). Abstracted, this may be translated into a baseline disconnection between our “selves” and our phenomenal experience of the world, body and mind. And James McKusick, in answer to his own question in *Green Writing* (2000), “[w]hy has the world community of nations failed to devise an effective solution to … urgent environmental problems?” states:

> Perhaps because there is something amiss in the deep matrix of modern industrial culture. Maybe what’s needed is not a clever technological fix, but a fundamental change in human consciousness. If so, then the study of poetry can contribute to the solution of these global problems, because (as Bate argues) [in *Song of the Earth* (2000)] “The business of literature is to work upon consciousness.” In other words, the study of literature can lead to the interrogation of our fundamental ethical values. (x)

Or, put yet another way, while the mechanisms of progress have been busy at work embedding the “deep matrix of modern industrial culture” deeper within the substance of human consciousness, to reiterate, literature has been positing alternative sites of rumination, contemplation, and self-reflective thought over centuries. Romantic authors in particular insist upon the centering of multiple individual narratives within their environmental contexts of actual phenomenological
experience. It is literature which, more than any other endeavor, has given, inspired and influenced resistance against the destructive effects of the greatest forces of what has been called “progress” for centuries. Literature has brought our attention to the use of natural resources such as coal; “[d]escribing London in the 1830s, one writer was struck by the ‘dense canopy of smoke that spread itself over her countless streets and squares, enveloping a million and a half human beings in murky vapour’” (Thorsheim 5). Literature has also brought to light “the massive use of DDT as agricultural pesticide” after World War II which Rachel Carson identified “as a particularly dangerous chemical moving through the ecosystem and human bodies” in Silent Spring (1962) (Roos and Hunt 185).

How we think about progress, technological advancement, architectural achievements, scientific discoveries, and social justice, is often at odds with some of the most destructive effects of progress. While coal as a “technological fix” (McKusick x) saved Europe from the depletion of forests, in turn it created pollution. In Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800 (2006), Peter Thorsheim points out that how we think about our relations with our environs is as important as those relations themselves. He notes that “[i]n … “Ideas of Nature,” Raymond Williams observed that the ways in which people think about the environment reveal a great deal about how they interact with each other and with the natural world” (Thorsheim 9), and Thorsheim reminds us that understanding, in this case pollution, but any environmental factors, involves knowing that “it is not enough to know what substances, in what quantities, entered the environment in the past. Equally important are the attitudes, ideologies, and perceptions that led to the creation of these pollutants and that structured people’s understanding of their effects” (9). Understanding takes place foremost in the mind—which is why literary inventions are so important, and why radical Romantic resistance to prevailing dominant ideologies became so crucial.
However, literary work does not always need to be deliberate to be radical and inspiring. As Bate elaborates in *Song of the Earth* (2000),

The practical consequences of that [literary] work [to work upon consciousness] – social, environmental, political in the broadest sense – cannot be controlled or predicted. They will be surprising, haphazard, indirect, long term. William Wordsworth could not have known that one effect of his writing on the consciousness of later readers would have been the establishment of a network of National Parks, first in the United States and then Britain.

(23)

What may seem to be an obvious observation on the surface, that human individuals experience, may in fact be a profound counter to dominant historical narratives which primarily focus on impersonal facts, figures, and tendencies through Cartesian perspectives—which examine eras and consequences divorced from both human experience and environmental effects. As Kate Rigby notes in *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (2004), “romanticism remains inspirational in its resistance to that severing of the natural from the human sciences, matter from spirit, reason from imagination, techne from poiesis, which has characterized the intervening era of industrialization—and with such calamitous consequences” (xii). Romantic endeavors are engaged in a process of cultivating perspectives which are able to see the connections that are otherwise separated and compartmentalized historically and culturally.

However, some ecocritical perspectives, especially first-wave, have historically tended to emphasize the impact humanity has on the planet to the extent of separating humanity from the planet. In other words, much like the separation between culture and nature, city and countryside, or civilization and wilderness, there is a tendency to separate humanity from earth – as though humanity were somehow separate from earth or nature. Goodbody observes that “[deep ecology’s] very understanding of ‘nature’ as essentially places unaffected by human activity … paradoxically
perpetuates a dualistic world view, in which humanity is condemned to denaturalize and destroy an exoticized natural ‘other’ (64). This tendency has a long and widespread history. Within the context of environmental and green studies, this may be interpreted as a well-meaning effort to avoid the kinds of anthropocentric perspectives and methods which have led to full-scale destruction of delicate, natural, ecological balances; the planet must be protected for its own sake. Human beings, indeed, are not the center of the earth’s existence even as we situate ourselves as the center of its narrative. However, at a foundational level, deep ecology’s approach fails to integrate our perception of humanity back into the ecological mix. Such an approach becomes counter-productive because it reinforces and even facilitates the abdication of responsibility for our own destructive behaviors—an “us” vs. “earth” approach. On the other hand, emphasizing our embeddedness within our environs eliminates some of the philosophical alienation with which we cocoon ourselves and abdicate responsibility for our actions.

By contrast, Romantic texts tend to integrate individuals and environs, both urban and rural, and call attention to the deeply embedded connections between living beings and their surroundings. Humans are not pitted against nature, and nature is not necessarily spectacle, has not yet been fetishized. As established as the premise of the contemporary relevance of this dissertation, Romantic writers were situated early enough in the transition to industrial modernity that it might have been easier for them to feel a part of their environs, in part because they were situated early enough before some of the industrial-fueled changes had taken hold, late enough to begin to feel the effects, and close enough to non-mechanized time and experiences to elucidate the transitions which mark the long nineteenth century and later. This may be, in part, what enabled them to create radical sites of resistance which continue to provide us with rich sources of alternative perspectives to our current and historical dominant ideological narratives which tell a story of capitalism as progress, expansion as development, and technology as advancement. These sites of resistance
create spaces of inquiry which contribute to a larger conversation for ongoing potentials of relevant, vibrant, and necessary change in our relationships to the environment, within industry, and between people. They are, therefore, situated early enough to celebrate the cause of the human individual as a part of rather than apart from nature, and not just, as commonly believed for the ‘self’ that is the poet – but also the “other,” particularly marginalized others.

What is so important about this critical framework is that we have a tendency to separate the person from the environs or in this case the body from the technology – at least when it comes to comprehending technology’s effects on an individual basis. The historical tendency has been to simultaneously take the cultural infrastructure for granted as part and parcel of necessity while measuring the larger effects of progress by populations. Marginal members of populations are often ignored—viewed with pity as victims or sometimes forgotten entirely until some turn of history stokes the collective conscience and imagination. Chimney sweepers have been forgotten but for their symbolic value for the most part. However, their experiences may remind us that countless consequences result from our uses of and dependence upon technologies which demand the supplementation and exploitation of human labor. There is a gap in ecocritical and green studies which, in avoiding anthropocentrism, also sidesteps the human lived experience as an integral part of the environment—an environment which has fully fused both nature and culture into a hybrid of environs which can no longer be ignored, a “hyperseparation” (Goodbody 71) that can no longer be sustained. As obvious as it sounds, human beings are a part of nature. In fact, one might argue that what is, of course, an anachronistic and gendered term, “manmade,” is in itself anthropocentric.

What is novel and still relevant about Romantic perspectives with their emphasis on Individuals, Nature and Imagination is the way Romantic authors situate Individuals in relation to Nature – sometimes mediated by Culture, sometimes not, but in each case through Imaginative means in literature. And while Romantic literature remains an inspirational starting point for much green
writing and criticism, the literature does not exclude the human individual in any way. Instead, the perspectives create a spaciousness for an expansive way of thinking and perceiving the organic unities and inorganic separations between humanity and environment, nature and culture, mind and body, reason and feeling, and feeling and emotion—divisions we insist upon to make sense of the world. Romantic literature offers an alternative perspective.

To return to the intermingling of interpretive spaces, I draw from both phenomenological and cognitive philosophical frameworks to explore the experience of individuals within the environmental contexts particular and peculiar to their situations as witnessed and retold by Romantic authors. But I do not intend to conflate phenomenological and cognitive perspectives—nor do I mean to validate phenomenological literary perspectives with scientific cognitive ones. Rather, I suggest that bridging a gap between the “two cultures” of the humanities and the sciences and supplementing aspects of one perspective with the other can yield more results. Phenomenological lenses are immersed in the kind of subjective perspectives which infuse Romantic literature—particularly in relation to the lived spaces of our environs. Cognitive ones, on the other hand, may enrich the contexts within which we organize and interpret the vast array of human experiences contained with the literature. Stephen Jay Gould’s employs a playful approach to bridging this gap in The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister’s Pox: Mending the Gap Between Science and the Humanities (2003): “I use the fox and hedgehog as my model for how the sciences and humanities should interact because I believe that neither pure strategy can work, but that a fruitful union of these seemingly polar opposites can, with goodwill and significant self-restraint on both sides, be conjoined into a diverse but common enterprise of unity and power” (5). In this case, cognitive philosophy’s perspectives help to situate the individual in the environment while emphasizing the incredible influence environments have on the development and sustenance of the “self.” Meanwhile, phenomenological perspectives allow for taking into account the kinds of internal
mechanisms of experience which encourage understanding through empathy in literature.

Phenomenological perspectives also establish Romantic authors as radical participants in a larger project of humanization amidst larger cultural (technological) forces that has less to do with nostalgia for a time past and more to do with the grounding of experience in the present moment amidst changing circumstances.

The question arises how one is to account for any reliable interiority of the self—aside first-person narration which remains auto-biographical. I propose that several texts written by Romantic authors explored in following chapters are engaged in projects which lend themselves to the task of revealing interior states of feeling within social and environmental contexts through sensitive readings of the emotional states of the body.

Here, Antonio Damasio’s observations in *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003) provide us with a framework which helps to parse out these literary dynamics. According to Damasio, “[c]emotion and related actions are aligned with the body,” and thus may be read to some extent, while “feelings [are aligned] with the mind” (7). If such is the case, then it becomes possible to infer the interiority of the phenomenological experiences of an individual, albeit it however approximately, through the external expressions as written on the body. As Damasio notes:

… emotions are actions or movements, *many of them public, visible to others* [emphasis added] as they occur in the face, in the voice, in specific behaviors. To be sure, some components of the emotion process are not visible to the naked eye but can [now] be made “visible” with current scientific probes such as hormonal assays and electrophysiological wave patterns. Feelings, on the other hand, are always hidden, like all mental images necessarily are, unseen to anyone other than their rightful owner, the most private part of the organism in whose brain they occur.
Emotions play out in the theater of the body. Feelings play out in the theater of the mind. (28)

It is the emotions as they are “visible to others as they occur in the face … [and] specific behaviors” which interest me as they are invoked by literary description. In literature, such a consideration is not new of course—but as we learn more about the mechanisms of emotion and feeling, and how they are written on the body, numerous opportunities for ethical implications abound. The degree to which we have access to such feelings is tenuous at best—but it is literature which provides us with the empathetic bridges needed to understand the experience of others. And experience, in very real terms, is largely dependent on the body.

Alva Noë adds another dimension to these contexts as they form a perceptive lens. Shifting for a moment from an emphasis on interiority to our access to it, I quote Noë: “[t]he organism’s life is not inside” (46). Rather, “[t]o study mind, as with life itself, we need to keep the whole organism in its natural environment” (45). In other words, we cannot accurately account for an individual’s experience, and by extension, an individual’s self, removed from the context of his or her environment— and the connection runs far deeper than what we mean by ‘psychological.’ Rather, the relationship is as integral to the ‘self’ as it was once believed the ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ was.

Our relationships to our environs are crucial. We cannot even think of our experiences as separate from our environs. With this understanding, I assert the importance of extracting and examining the influence of technological progress within nature and amidst cultural tendencies— seeking connections between, for example, the standardization of time to the needs of the railroads and factories, enclosure laws in the countryside to the demand for workers in the city as a result of the growth of factories, and the (literal) glassing of the cities to the demand for commodity spectacles as a result of mass production, all made possible by technology.
In the preface to The Romantic Machine (2012), John Tresch begins with the following statement: “The kinds of machines we use are bound up with the ways we think about nature and the ways we know it. When our machines and our understanding of them change, so does nature, and so does our view of knowledge” (xi). We cannot set aside the facts of our own embeddedness in our current technological, primarily digital, era as we look back over prior ones because, indeed, our tools do shape us. However, while this may be taken as an invitation to set aside the ways technology influences us, a priori, it is also an invitation to look back to the times where our recognition of technologies as technology slip away and recede into the past. The later years of the eighteenth century leading into the early and mid-nineteenth century are such a time and provide us with what is really a well-documented opportunity to escape the accelerated paces of our contemporary era, and explore the seminal and sensual beginnings of our contemporary daily lives.

Humanity has always used technology as a means of shaping or controlling the environment in an effort to make it safe, productive, convenient, or beneficial, and yet, our adaptability as a species and the rapidity of cultural change often prevents us from grasping technology’s cognitive and bodily impact. Speed of progress, development, and even body is a material and significant element in the process, one which De Quincey explores in depth. Due to their proximity to a pre-industrial world, both in time and imagination, Romantic writers address technology more intimately and with an urgency which encourages society to take responsibility for the effects technology has on people. Romantic writers 1) are less likely to overlook effects of technology which are overshadowed by progress; 2) their work foregrounds the “slow violence” which occurs amidst an accelerating culture; 3) many of their texts allow for meaningful explications of constructions of “self” or self-making; 4) their work and awareness gives us a number of useful insights in the philosophical divide which was emerging from modernity; 5) their work illuminates the role of
capitalism in its dependence on systems and systemization to make technology work in the service of developing ideologies; 6) much of their work is engaged in the process of creating empathy.

Part of any fundamental change requires understanding where we are now – ‘now’ being any given time and place, not only as cultures but as individuals contained or participant within culture. So while avoiding anthropocentric views is productive, attending to our lived experience of the worlds we create remains relevant as well—which is why both phenomenological and cognitive perspectives become useful with an eye toward our individual human relations with our environs. I suggest, in this context, we consider applying a renewed perspective of interconnectedness, of mutual interdependence and embeddedness within our environs—free of separations—, to the many contexts which slide and collide in the world and into literature, and consider that “[o]ur own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system” (Merleau-Ponty 203). Not only are we, as individuals and as a species, a part of nature, but I argue that it is important to practice the knowledge and awareness that what constitutes our “selves” is not only our consciousness, but our bodies – and our experiences of our bodies embedded in our environs as well. Who we are is as much body as mind and as much environs as being. Furthermore, as communities, our decisions and actions constitute the environs of others, and thus, we are participant in the wellbeing of others as well as that of ourselves. William Blake, among others, is adept at drawing attention to the “I” of experience, particularly the “I” of the “other.” In the next chapter, I explore Blake’s attention to the chimney sweepers’ experience of a technology created to manage the use of the fuel culled from nature, wood then coal, to benefit the communities who would exploit these soot-covered members of the communities who were sacrificed to manage the technologies on which communities came to depend.
Chapter Three

ABJECT FIGURES IN THE MARGINS
THE I OF THE OTHER IN WILLIAM BLAKE

“to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself”

—William Blake

We are now admirably (if dangerously) positioned to explore ways of making literary criticism more practically relevant to lives and environments of ordinary people. This is a moment in which we may discover feelings analogous to the romantics’ enthusiastic wonder at the multiple alternatives confronting societies in upheaval. We may now anticipate the excitement of trying to choose among different possibilities for making the earth a better place than a desolately crowded scene of alienated narcissists. To seize this opportunity, however, demands a willingness to recapture something of the romantic high value for ambivalent feelings and localized individuality of experience in preference to the promulgation of “universal” laws.

—Karl Kroeber, Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind (1994)

Natural and built environments, revisionists point out, are long since all mixed up; the landscape of the American “West” is increasingly the landscape of metropolitan sprawl rather than the outback of Rocky Mountain “wilderness”; the two spheres are as intertwined, now and historically, as surely as Los Angeles and Las Vegas have siphoned water from the Colorado basin from the hinterlands for the past century. Literature-and-environment studies must develop a “social ecocriticism” that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as “natural” landscapes. Its traditional commitment to the nature protection ethic must be revised to accommodate the claims of environmental justice—or (more broadly) “the environmentalism of the poor,” as one ecological economist has called it.


What distinguished many Romantic authors from those who preceded and arguably followed them was their attentiveness to the subjective and approximate experiences of individuals—experiences we may call phenomenological—the first person point of view which experiences his or her own consciousness. Attention to the individual, not populations then, is primary in Romantic literature, but not only through the first-person perspective of a nostalgic author as so commonly thought, and not from “the anthropocentrism and individualism inherent in romantic ecology’s aesthetic consumption of landscapes by solitary individuals” (Goodbody 64) as some deep ecology

20 “‘Deep Ecology’ Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term ‘deep ecology’ in a conference paper in 1972 in which he analyzed the principles underlying different currents within the nascent environmental movement. Inspired by the ecology of Rachel Carson, the nonviolence of Mahatma Gandhi, and the pantheist metaphysics of seventeenth-century Jewish-Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, Naess’s philosophy was a response on the one hand to the cornucopian conception of nature as inexhaustible, and on the other to reform environmentalism’s belief that prudent management of resources can suffice to avoid environmental disaster.
critics among others might maintain, but as an empathetic and radical intervention through the perspective of the other, the various, often marginalized, abject individual subjects of Romantic literature. Here, the tangible subjective experiences of children contained by the architecture of chimney technologies, the material experiences of children contained by them, and the responses of William Blake and Charles Lamb to these child sweeps are the focus. I consider the material conditions which produced the environs that would contain the children, and I ask and explore how Romantic authors bring out the subjectivity of these abject figures who live embedded within physical, social, and cultural environs shaped by architectural technologies to reveal the broader and more personal and material effects of technological progress on individual experience. I propose that the Romantic poetic practice of pulling readers into the margins as well as going into the margins to dislodge social stereotypes and destabilize the marginality of these abject figures reveals what is invisibly happening in the cultural center, and that this poetic practice remains relevant, crucial, and pressing as a tactic in a contemporary culture which arguably matches the Romantic moment of “multiple alternatives confronting societies in upheaval” (Kroeber 41). Now, we face “the problems of extreme weather events, pollution, drought and attendant food shortages, increasing changes in global climate, and the plight of the animal communities on every continent make it clear that our environmental concerns require ... profound reevaluations of our place in the world …” as Louise Westling points out in the introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment (2014) (11). In our current context, the poetic tactics employed by Romantic writers increase in contemporary importance.

and societal collapse. He argued that we should see ourselves not as atomistic individuals, treating the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as part of a greater living community. Human demands must therefore be weighed against the needs of other species and the integrity of place. Deep ecology thus distances itself from anthropocentrism and individualism inherent in romantic ecology’s aesthetic consumption of landscapes by solitary individuals. Its very understanding of ‘nature’ as essentially places unaffected by human activity, however, paradoxically perpetuates a dualistic world view, in which humanity is condemned to denaturalize and destroy an exoticized natural ‘other’” (Goodbody 66).
This chapter examines the self of the child in the world intermingling with the abject figure of the child symbol in literature in relationship to the chimney which, despite its centrality as a fixture around which life once evolved, is nonetheless a hidden space or part of a network of hidden spaces, and a perhaps surprising example of a historically reified technological system, reified because it has been largely overlooked as a technology despite cultures’ dependency on chimney technology for centuries\(^2^1\). Regarding the child, I address two linked aspects of the abject figure which emerges: 1) the child in the world as reflected in Romantic literature as 2) a recuperation and reinvention of the literary child figure which developed over prior centuries in response to a cultural outlook which saw children as no more than imperfect adults. The appearance of the literary Romantic child was the result of a gradual evolution—the beginning for which Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762) is usually credited. Prior to Rousseau’s publication, in which he argued against treating children simply as potential adults, children were looked upon as imperfect adults for centuries (Wiener 596) with few exceptions. This perspective reaches at least as far back as Aristotle. As Robert Pattison notes in *The Child Figure in English Literature* (1978), in Aristotle’s ethics, he maintains that "the child is to be regarded as a potential but not an actual human being because he is devoid of reason" (Pattison 2). According to this view, only with the onset of puberty and a graduation into the world of adulthood will the child become a fully realized human being, an adult. According to Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin in “The Philosophy of Childhood” (2015), this perspective lingers as “even today, the dominant view of children embodies what we might call a broadly ‘Aristotelian conception’ of childhood” (Matthews and Mullin). In Aristotle’s view,

\(^2^1\) As Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe it in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (reprinted 1991), "[t]he objectivity of the social world means that it confronts man as something outside of himself. The decisive question is whether he still retains the awareness that, however objectivated, the social world was made by men - and, therefore, can be remade by them. In other words, reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable, inert facticity" (80).
there are four sorts of causality, one of which is Final causality and another is Formal Causality. Aristotle thinks of the Final Cause of a living organism as the function that an organism normally performs when it reaches maturity. He thinks of the Formal Cause of the organism as the form or structure it normally has in maturity, where that form or structure is thought to enable the organism to perform its functions well. According to this conception, a human child is an immature specimen of the organism type, human, which, by nature, has the potentiality to develop into a mature specimen with the structure, form, and function of a normal or standard adult. (Matthews and Mullin)

This view lingers in the sense that children are still seen as beings in the process of becoming adults. The significant difference between our views on children now and then is in their value as children.

As a result, children rarely appear in pre-Romantic literature as fully developed characters as children. Instead, children appear as receptacles of nostalgia, as cathartic expressions of adult bitterness or regret, or as cultural symbols that have little to do with the actual experience of childhood. By re-situating childhood as a fully-formed autonomous emotional state outside the interests of the adult world, Romantics like Blake continue where Rousseau left off in effecting a shift from reason to feeling, populations to individuals, and abstractions to empathy, points I develop throughout this chapter. In doing so, the Romantic poets re-invented childhood in a way that contradicted the notion that children were merely imperfect adults in need of improvement which went a long way in humanizing the children who were being exploited and abused.

According to Peter Coveney in The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society—a Study of the Theme in English Literature (1967), “[Rousseau's] influence lies behind the whole progress of interest toward the child in the second half of the century. He more than any other created the climate in which Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Southey, and Coleridge wrote” (Coveney 41). In Rousseau's preface to Émile (1762) he states that "childhood is unknown" and that "starting from the false idea one has of
it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way” (Rousseau 34). Rousseau’s initial concern
with the tendency of adults to seek out the adult in the child without considering the nature of the
child prior to becoming an adult is cultivated and further developed in British Romantic poetry with
particular emphasis on the child as an individual experiencing his or her own circumstances and
environs.

Regarding the chimney, while the chimney was developed over centuries, in direct relation to
advances in engineering, the history of which will be discussed in this chapter, it has largely remained
unexamined as a technology with some notable exceptions such as Benita Cullingford’s historical
study, *British Chimney Sweeps: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (2000), and a chapter entitled “Britain’s
Little Black Boys and the Technologies of Benevolence” in *Literature, Science and Exploration in the
this is because technologies are most often forgotten as technologies once they are absorbed into the
patterns of everyday life. In the case of the chimney, it stands as an example of a technology which
pre-dates industrialization and moving machine technologies by several centuries, so it does not
seem like a technology to us. So its study helps open up new perspectives on technology outside the
more common critiques of industrial technologies which tend to overshadow non-machine
technologies. It is because the chimney is taken as a fact of life that the chimney’s material
architecture, its development, and its centrality to people’s dependence on it for heat and warmth,
has been, for the most part, overlooked as a technological invention—its technological aspects
effaced. However, the chimney’s mundanity, widespread use, and necessity all combine to make it
an exquisite example of the intimate role technologies come to play in our lives subtly and
necessarily.

In sum, this chapter explores Romantic perspectives in three contexts: the construct of the
chimney sweeper as a child figure in literature juxtaposed with the real-life abject child figure in pre-
industrializing and industrializing culture; the history of chimneys in relation to the technological and scientific discoveries and advances which shaped their use and created ideologies specific to upholding the efficiency and convenience of heat technologies; and the relationship between the two, the link between human individuals and their physical environs through the Romantic response writ large which reasserts the presence and experience of human individuals within their environs and specifically these burgeoning networks of technological environs which are continually shaping and re-shaping the environments we inhabit.

The Romantics’ attention to cultivating the first-person perspectives of marginalized others is why I have entitled this chapter “The I of the Other”—which begins with the subject of children, and in particular, the chimney sweeps who remain an interesting case not only because of the pathos of their emotional pull, but because of a peculiar feature of their imaginative pull in contemporary culture. While the chimney sweeps have been well remembered in cultural history outside of literary criticism, the historical circumstances of their material lives, like the history of chimneys, have been largely swept aside or forgotten within the dominant narratives which remember them in theater, film, and song. More importantly, the children’s painful narrative of abuse and exploitation has been displaced by a long-lasting narrative legacy awash in sentimental nostalgia of the adorable chimney sweep, the sweet climbing boy, the cheerful little laborer. An irony is embedded in this claim. It is not Romantic culture but contemporary culture which sanitizes the experiences of children nostalgically. Emphasizing the first-person (I) perspective of these marginalized abject figures (other), is also meant to facilitate the understanding that, in Romantic literature, individual experience, as opposed to more universal generalizations, surfaces as most vital. And in Romantic literature, the role of the individual is less anthropocentric than it is organic, relationships are of paramount importance, and the life of nature encompasses all that is living—from trees to land to animal and human individuals in direct opposition to a Cartesian world view. However, it is the role
of the human individual within this reciprocity which is addressed here with the belief that if we
cannot recognize the impact and effects of supposed progress on human individuals, it remains
unlikely that we, as a species, will ever recognize such effects on the planet and its other inhabitants
and natural environs in any long-lasting and wide-spread way. Despite the irreversible damage
which has already been done to our planet and its inhabitants, and as late in the game as it is, we still
have a moral obligation to control and correct the more destructive paths of progress. Blake's
emphasis on the suffering of children illuminates the urgency of such a task.

* * *

Figure 1 William Blake's The Chimney Sweeper

The Chimney Sweeper, Object 16 (Bentley 12, Erdman 12, Keynes 12), 11.2 x 7.3 cm. ©
When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

So begins one of William Blake’s most widely recognized poems, “The Chimney Sweeper” (1789) from Songs of Innocence, a chilling and dreadful indictment of child exploitation and labor. The poem immediately establishes the child’s voice as it unfolds from the precise moment of “when,” the first word of the poem, a momentary suspension punctuating both the end of a possibility, the child’s life had the mother lived, and the alternative flat line of fate which underscores the deathlike existence of the child, sold and abandoned by the father, helpless and without agency. The child’s state is emphasized not only by evoking the sounds of the chimney sweeps selling their services in the streets, ‘weep!, ‘weep! but also by an allusive reference to a baby bird in a nest, chirping with “weep weep weep weep,” the word “scarce” evoking the state of want while “cry” emphasizes a want of a different kind, the desire of the child, unmet and unfilled, and really, untold. This unmet, unfilled, and untold desire of the child is emphasized in the previous line with the use of the word “tongue” with which the child explicitly can scarcely speak and implicitly cannot eat.

The reader is carried into the internal world of the child with the use of the word “so” which directs the reader to the child’s quiet resignation, again underscored by the flatness of tone and lack of indignation, emphasizing the great lengths to which children will go to justify their own exploitation. The child’s gaze then turns outward toward the reader, bringing the reader into the narrative of the poem with the use of the word “your” which is directed at an audience participating

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22 Charles Lamb would also explicitly invoke the play on “weep.”
in this exploitation as this child and these children coldly sleep in soot after sweeping the chimneys which warm the homes of the adults who have abdicated, en masse, their ownership of, and complicity in, a technology upon which they depend for their comfort and sustenance, the chimney, a hidden space integral to their heat which also contains the labor and often the suffering of the child. By doing so, a narrative distance is bridged between speaker and audience—as two relationships are revealed—that between the dominated chimney sweepers and dominant adults and also, between our social selves and technologies we rely upon. As a result, at least three connections are created, that between the world of the exploited child and the adults who create but live aside it, the adult and the world of technology, and the child’s role without agency within a tangible material world shaped by a technology which requires the child’s labor, the chimney. The poem’s opening stanza, furthermore, firmly establishes chimneys as architectural technologies and reveals the invisible spaces fuel-related architectural technologies, chimneys and cellars of soot, and the children.

Later in this chapter, I discuss our Romantic inheritance of symbolic literary characters, specifically, the ‘romanticized version of the chimney sweepers who have survived in contemporary songs, musicals, stories, and movies. It is an important point because narratives which persist deep into culture reveal a story of the repressed memories of oppression. While writing this chapter, any mention of chimney sweepers has been met with delight and often some mention of Mary Poppins or the song which made chimney sweepers famous, “Chim Chim Cher-ee.” What may seem to be an aside is in fact an important cultural tendency to change the story, to recast the narrative, and to whitewash our history to make it more palatable for consumption. It is also possible that the popular culture’s ‘romanticizing of Romantic texts as nostalgic, dreamy, and given to sentimental reveries has contributed to the mishandling of a cultural memory which is stained with soot and suffering, and should be remembered couched in death and oppression. Far from ‘romanticizing
childhood in a wash of nostalgia, Blake, like other Romantics, contextualizes the human individual, the child sweep, while centering the narrative experience with a clear focus on that experience by emphasizing the child’s voice, perspective and gaze from within the networks of chimneys in which these sweeps spent their lives. As Axel Goodbody notes in "Ecocritical Theory: Romantic Roots and Impulses from Twentieth-Century European Thinkers" while explaining the views of Hubert Zapf in “Literary Ecology and the Ethics of Texts,” “[t]he internal landscapes produced by modern culture and consciousness are as important for human beings as their external environments” (Zapf qtd. in Goodbody 70). In this case, the external environment created an internal landscape which contained the child while Blake’s poems opened up the internal landscape of the child’s mind to the external world. In Blake’s texts, the child emerges as a powerful and persuasive voice—loud and clear from the margins of society and tradition—intervening in a system of oppression, a vast network of chimney technology embedded deep within the architectural structures of the country and the city. However, the literature has been recuperated by popular culture to contain the child in a narrative archetype, a literary symbol of a child figure which perpetuates a pre-Romantic tendency to reduce the child to a symbol which is convenient to adult culture. Such convenience opens up a view to two dynamics, one economic and the other symbolic. I will first address the child figure intersecting with economy and symbolism, and then return to the novelty of the strength of the child’s voice which emerges from the margins and into Blake’s poems.

Firstly, entire economies have been built upon child labor—reified and tucked away invisibly or else sentimentalized and idealized in story book fashion. And while we may believe that we believe in the emancipation of children from exploitation, as abject figures in the service of industrial labor, I propose that in some ways we have only shifted the exploitation from a space of labor to a space of play – not in order to free, but instead to profit in a manner more acceptable to prevailing ideological norms. As has historically been the case with most marginalized or dominated
individuals, the exploitation of children for profit is as common now as then in different guises. The overwhelming presence of the technology of the digitalverse in the twenty-first century cannot be overstated. It is furthermore no accident that ideologies around parenting in the twenty-first century tend toward helicopter parenting which limits the free range of children in unprofitable play outdoors as unmonitored and free agents. What these seemingly distant two spaces of now and then share is the way entire perceptual worlds are built around the child while fantasized ideal worlds cover up the economic scaffolding which in fact shapes these worlds. Children have often been our most vulnerable population as a species, and through their experience we may uncover the concealed mechanics of culture. From lead poisoning to child labor, the health (mind and body) of the self (including the embodied mind in the environs) is often a manifestation of corruption in some cultural system. Recognizing the profit motives built into cultural infrastructures is key to a critical practice of revealing reification – in whatever form it may take. In modernity, such economic scaffolding is intrinsically connected in a multiplicity of ways to the same technological progress which enlightenment hopes believed would emancipate humanity from systematic suffering and oppression.

The chimney may seem a surprising choice as part of an exploration of the role of technology in culture and its relationship to human experience, and by extension, consciousness, but the chimney and its fireplace occupied a central role in the home for centuries. The history of chimneys is long. Their architecture begins as little more than holes to allow for the escape of smoke while the first fireplaces begin as open spaces which, with technological progress, become closed spaces as chimneys are developed—creating increasingly hidden spaces for safety and convenience. Technological progress creates hidden spaces which create a need for chimney sweeps, children who are eventually swallowed by the technology they are required to maintain. Chimneys of course exist even today, and not only are they integral features of architectural
structures in both rural and urban settings, they are hidden spaces, materially and symbolically, which once contained labor which has also been historically hidden. The chasm between the reality of the chimney sweeper’s life and history’s image of the chimney sweeper is wide. The cultural and literary image of the chimney sweeper is one of the most interesting sites of struggle representing the marginalized other of dominant narratives and embodying so many of the traits of the abject figures which populate Romantic texts.

The chimney sweeper has been idealized for centuries while the role of the child laborer in the building of economies has even been overlooked and forgotten. In fact, overlooking the role of the child in the maintenance of culture for centuries was common, and as Jane Humphries points out in her book *Childhood and Child Labour in The British Industrial Revolution* (2010), industrial progress was largely built on the buckling backs and deformed skeletons of Britain’s poor and working-class children. William Blake and many of the age’s poets, writers, artists, and philanthropists were all deeply aware of this – and sometimes equally aware of the social hypocrisy which marred the efforts of even the most hard-working child advocates. The first strong objections which became widespread and more widely read came from “the tearful sentimentalism” (Fulford et al 242) of Jonas Hanway, the opponent of the slave trade, who in 1785 published *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers, in London and Westminster, Shewing the Necessity of Putting Them Under Regulations to Prevent the Grossest Inhumanity to the Climbing Boys*. Hanway wrote prolifically on the subject with strong language intended to increase sympathy for the sweeps’ suffering:

> It may be hopes that you, as magistrates and good citizens, will enter seriously into the consideration of the object, at least to mitigate the sufferings of these children. If a child is killed, or dies of wounds or bruises received in one of these narrow-chimnied operations, what can this compulsive act be deemed less than murder? If there is not room for him to go up properly drest, for his tender body to resist the friction necessary, what is it we subscribe
to? We may at least be accessories to a murder. If we rob a boy of his limbs or his fight, what compensation do we make him? We make him none: but sit down calmly, to the repast drest by the fire of the chimney, where the boy perhaps was offered as a victim to a cruel custom. We hang men for offences of a complexion less horrible. (Hanway 84-5)

As Fulford observes, “Hanway moved enough people for parliament to pass an act regulating the trade in 1788. But without means of enforcement, it failed to end the boys’ suffering” (Fulford et al 242). Hanway’s plea draws out the physicality of the child sweep’s body “his tender body” and his “limbs.”

When Hanway’s Christian rhetoric motivated the public but failed to change the circumstances of the chimney sweeps, a friend, David Porter, who had once been a sweep himself, began another movement which attracted the attention of “wealthy and powerful reformers” (Fulford et al 242) among them Thomas Bernard who “mobilized his connections among the clergy and nobility and organized a new Society for the Protection and Instruction of Chimney Sweepers’ Apprentices (1800) and later the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys (1803) (Fulford et al 242). The latter Society, what Charles Lamb would call the “‘Society with the affected name,’” would become “the driving engine of the campaign for the next seventy years. According to Fulford et al, from the start, it favoured technological solutions over the tearful sentimentalism of Hanway” (Fulford et al 242). Though it is worth noting that although Jonas Hanway is remembered for religious and sentimental criticism and rhetoric, he, too, advocated for the use of machine technology solutions as evidenced by the following excerpt from Improving the Lot of Chimney Sweeps: One Book and Nine Pamphlets 1785-1840:

We seem agreed in sentiment, that the present mode is disgraceful, as employing children to the danger of their limbs and lives; and we suppose, that in this “enlightened” age of mechanical skill, some simple “machine, on a plain construction, may be devised, “at little cost, to
supersede the continuance of such “a base employment” and so it may be, in some instance: at the same time, it is in vain to talk of the age being enlightened, while the chimneys are darkened by their narrowness, and their tops so covered with earthen pots. If anything can be done to abolish our present custom in sweeping, it will be well; but there seems to be no prospect of doing it, except in the degree that mercy, spreading her balmy wings, and soaring triumphant over all impediments, shall prevail. In the mean time, for the same cause, the more urgent are the reasons for a humane treatment of these poor children. (xviii)

So while Hanway relied on sentimental rhetoric, he does so in measured response to inaction he perceives in harnessing technologies to liberate the chimney sweeps from their dangerous labor.

In the case of the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys, while it encouraged the use of chimney sweeping machines at first, it later adopted a strong narrative stance which by “[l]earning from the campaign against the slave trade, they demonized the masters” (Fulford et al 245):

They scoured the newspapers for reports of injuries and death, and collected the most horrific stories. They made, in effect, a book of martyrs, calculated to provoke enough parliamentary pity to make MPs act. Where Hanway had been general in his sentimental appeal, the Society gave graphic details. Masters treated children worse than brutes, said the Observations on the Cruelty of Employing Climbing Boys in Sweeping Chimneys (1829). T. Young, the Society reported, had burnt straw and lit gunpowder underneath a climbing boy who had jammed in the flue that Young had forced him to climb. When the boy still couldn’t free himself, Young tied a rope to one leg and pulled with a crowbar. Eventually he freed the boy, by now a mangled corpse. (Fulford et al 245)

Discourses continued to develop to challenge the cruel conditions. One of the more effective series of discourses came from “poet, journalist and minister,” James Montgomery, who published The
Chimney Sweeper’s Friend and Climbing Boy’s Album (1824) to “win hearts and minds in parliament and beyond” (Fulford et al 246). In addition to including his own poems, Montgomery solicited work from a number of authors among them Charles Lamb who also “sent [Montgomery] a poem by the little known William Blake” (Fulford et al 246). According to Fulford, “The Chimney Sweeper’s Friend took advantage of the pity for black people produced by abolitionist verse. In turning boys into slaves, Montgomery hoped to repeat the trick of making readers feel so guilty that they would demand abolition” (249). Through the collection, the “boy’s sooty colour made him a rhetorical figure with which radicals could prise open the consciences of those who had blinded themselves to the exploitation of labourers” (247). So what did the lives of these children look like? The two key elements of the chimney sweeper are, of course, the child and the chimney. But the chimney sweeper was but one part of a much larger tendency.

In an essay version of “Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution” published in The Economic History Review (2012), Humphries asserts that her argument presses past standing historical accounts. As she states, “[t]he claim is that a more gradual industrial revolution, sanitized by the relegation of dark satanic mills to a lesser role, nonetheless retained at its heart and pulsing through its life-blood this shameful feature of its older heroic variant. Child labour was a major contributing factor in Britain’s industrialization” (6). In fact, culling evidence from over 600 autobiographies, Humphries asserts that “the autobiographies demonstrate that the classic era of industrialization, 1790–1850, saw an upsurge [emphasis mine] in child labour;” a point often overlooked by the dominant grand narrative (6). In her book, Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution (2010), she elaborates as follows:

Historians usually depict the first industrial revolution as heroic, masculine and progressive: Prometheus Unbound! The recent emphasis on the application of science to industry and the heroic role of inventors and inventions updates this classic portrayal (Mokyr, 2002; Allen,
Children rarely feature among the dramatis personae in such mainstream accounts, an omission challenged by this book’s demonstration of their widespread importance as workers in the early industrial economy. Yet a new emphasis on the consequence of child labour may not be entirely discordant with modern interpretations of industrialization, for another important theme in recent accounts has been the role of an increased labour input in kick-starting modern economic growth (Crafts, 1985; De Vries, 1994; Voth, 2001; De Vries, 2008). Pointing the spotlight on children as a neglected source of work, enterprise and industriousness may complement such an interpretation. It may also re-establish one of the costs of the first industrial revolution and who footed this particular bill. (11)

The crucial point here is the increase in child labor alongside industrial progress which mirrors a longer and less visible tendency—the symbiotic developmental relationship between what is more commonly thought of as technology (apart from humans) and human individual labor itself. Rhythms of life are comingled with our technologies throughout, which, as these chapters seek to establish, creates the selves we more often think of as separate or apart. Moreover, as Kate Rigby notes, freedom is most often achieved through subordinate labor, the enslavement of nature with humans, for freedom. Of the myriad technologies which have helped shape who we are and how we see, both crude and more sophisticated, the chimney and its accompanying fireplace have played a central role for centuries.

As L.A. Shuffrey points out in his preface to one of the first comprehensive histories of the chimney, *The English Fireplace: A History of the Development of the Chimney, Chimney-Piece and Firegrate* (1912), “the fireplace” remained “the spot around which family life has centered,” for centuries, and, while it was “[c]onstructed at first on line of the severest utility, it grew in importance during the Gothic period, and still more during the Elizabethan Renaissance, when the chimney-piece became the most important feature of the room and both thought and skill were lavished upon it” (v). Its
central role in life and custom situates the chimney as an important and lasting technology. But while its companion, the fireplace, became the central space, the chimney’s interior of course, became hidden—its value in its inconspicuousness marked largely by how well it did its job of bringing the smoke away from the structure of the living or working quarters.

Of course, our relationship with fire—and the ways in which we found to contain, cultivate, and harness fire through our technologies is much longer. In early history, as Benita Cullingford points out in *British Chimney Sweeps: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (2000), “When our ancestors left communal caves to build dwellings of their own, the fire was placed on a central hearth shared by all the family …. Each family lived in a circular interconnecting chamber. At the centre of each chamber was a square stone-lined hearth” (1). And, “[f]or many centuries, whether in castle, manor, or more humble dwellings, the central hearth remained the focus of family life (1).” In manors, “the hearth was raised a little above the ground” but in every case, “exposed fire caused the aggravation of a smoky atmosphere,” and though “[s]moke helped with hygiene when there was no sanitation,” ceilings and roofs were “blackened with smoke” (1-2). Before chimneys, “smoke had to be confined and then assisted to the air outside” (2). From “smoke chambers” to “funnel-shaped [flues,]” a number of ways were tried. “The earliest chimneys as we know them were made of stone” and date back to at around 1200 (3). The more familiar brick chimneys came into use during the fifteenth century, and became more common with the regulation of the size of bricks in 1571 (3). With the use of brick, chimney “stacks” became possible and often altered the design of structures. Eventually, as construction improved, hearths moved away from the center of dwellings as they continued to be central to life. As chimney stacks were built, “additional floors could be added above ground level, and areas either side of the stack made into rooms. Every room was given a fireplace each with its own flue” (4). As a result, as Cullingford observes, “[c]himneys thus became an important feature of a house and much attention was paid to their appearance. In large houses
they displayed fine brickwork in ornamental patterns and mouldings and were often set at angles.

The chimney had become a status symbol” (4).

As the technology progressed and improvements were made, the division between the fireplace and the means to extract smoke, the flue, necessarily widened. The goal became to provide as much heat as possible within, while minimizing the waste product of smoke—guiding it out of the structure with what was to become a necessary hidden space, the chimney. Depending upon the manner of burning, the entire arrangement of hearth which is visible and central evolves into fireplace and chimney—a division between visible and hidden, inside and outside, central and marginal. Metaphorically, this arrangement paralleled the situations of the inhabitants of households and the laborers who cleaned the chimneys. As Cullingford observes,

Although chimneys became essential to the home, they also presented householders with an inbuilt problem that was never-ending. Smoke could be directed – more or less successfully – but its very containment in a chimney caused a sooty residue to form throughout the entire length of the flue. Smoke from a well-lit fire travels up a hot flue until it reaches an outlet. But when the fire dies down, the flue cools; cold air rushes in and smoke fumes thicken and congeal, forming soot. (5)

Of course, because of the increasing narrowness of their construction over time, chimneys were notoriously difficult to clean. Aside the later use of chimney sweepers, particularly in England, a number of creative and innovative if cruel ways were employed to clean them.

Explains Cullingford, “[b]efore the extensive use of coal, there were many ways of sweeping chimneys”:

Methods differed because chimneys varied in shape and size and the assorted fuel that was burned produced different kinds of soot
Wide chimneys that were straight and single story in height – either from ground or first floor – could be cleaned by standing in the open fireplace with a long-handled broom. The broom, made of birch twigs tied together with thon, was inserted up the chimney. It loosened the soot which could be swept down the flue and collected. A household servant probably carried out the task.

If the flue was slightly longer, a bundle of rushed on the end of a pliable pole was used. It was pushed up from the fireplace, then down from the chimney top.

A country method for tall narrow chimneys was to place a bundle of straw or driftwood inside the chimney then raise and lower it by means of a rope. Depending on the flue’s width, a small holly bush or fir tree was adequate. The tree was taken to the chimney top attached to a rope. A stone was fastened to the other end of the rope and lowered down the flue until it reached the hearth. Then the rope was grasped from the fireplace and the tree slowly pulled down. A similar top-to-bottom technique was carried out with a long pole. This was rammed down the chimney to dislodge impacted lumps of tar. Lastly, a bundle of twigs tied to the end brushed the chimney clean. (5-6)

According to Cullingford, “[a]nother approach involved the use of birds,” geese, turkeys, and ducks (6). Specifically, this horrific approach transformed birds into tools which moved. Essentially, the birds were used as biological machines.

A report from Ireland reveals that geese were used in cleaning cottage chimneys. The large bird would be dropped down the flue from the roof, then pulled back up again by a rope attached to its neck. Its powerful wings would loosen the soot as it struggled (the blacker the bird, the cleaner the chimney). In large farmhouse chimneys in Cork and County Kerry, turkeys proved useful. Pushed down from the top, their wings scraped the sides as they descended and they emerged from the fireplace unharmed. Mr. E. E. Evans, on his journeys
through Ireland, remembers seeing a heron’s wing hanging up on the mantle. This would have been used to dust the hearth. Ducks were helpful chimney sweeps as well, and the practice was by no means confined to Ireland. (6)

In some cases, “[m]any flues had to be scraped” because “wood – due to is water content – produced soot, which clumped together and hardened into a tar-like crust” (6). Even today, an uncleaned chimney will result in creosote buildup—particularly after burning unseasoned wood with a high water content. The most common effect of creosote buildup is chimney fires, slow burning or explosive, shooting flames several feet above the top of the chimney, both dangerous to the structural safety of the structure. In some districts, “chimneys were deliberately set on fire to burn off the soot. Straw was lit in the hearth or the chimney was ‘fired’ by letting off a shotgun up the flue” (6).

Jonas Hanway would refer to the alternative solutions pointing to Scotland where “[n]o boys are employed” and instead the chimney sweeping practice is regulated by magistrates who employ only adults for a fixed income:

When any chimney is required to be swept, two of these sweepers attend, with a birch-besom, similar to that used by our ostlers, a short ladder, and a rope. One of them goes out the garret-window, and securing the ladder, mounts to the top of the chimney, whence the besom is let down; and with the assistance of his companion below, they regularly sweep clean every side of the chimney, in which they are very expert. (xvi-xvii)

And he points to Russia, where, he states, the task is accomplished “by brushwood tied to a cord with a weight affixed, which carries it down from the top of the chimney, from whence it is pulled up again, and in a short time, by this simple method, the chimney is swept” (83). Keeping smoke out of structures and chimneys clean was a widespread and ongoing challenge for centuries which communities sought to solve by cruel and creative means. Using children as chimney sweeps came
later. In England, according to Hanway, it eventually became so engrained a practice that it was
cultural tradition that held fast to it—which is why he argued for moral reform: “But I do not expect
any total change of custom: I reason upon a supposition that climbing to sweep our chimneys is so
much confirmed by long practice, at least in the metropolis, that the most difficult part of this
attempt, would be to abandon the mode” (84).

As Claire Lamont notes in “Blake, Lamb and the Chimney Sweeper” (1991), “it is thought
that the use of children to sweep chimneys did not become widespread until the eighteenth century,
because of the more complicated and narrow chimney systems of eighteenth-century houses” (111).
So, the need for smaller sweeps increased as the design and construction of chimneys became more
elaborate. The more advanced architectural technology increased, not decreased, the exploitation of
labor. By 1818, according to Cullingford, “kitchen chimneys where stoves had been installed
contained flues that were 7”, and in some cases, 6” square. Only very young children could sweep
these flues” (75).

Very little is known about the earliest chimney sweepers. As Cullingford notes, “[e]arly
reference to professional chimney sweeps is difficult to trace” (7). Scattered references are made in
obscure places such as the Household and Privy Purse Accounts of Hunstanton Manor which “show that
payment was made to a local sweep [d]uring the first week in December, 1519 [when]chimney sweep
John Scott was paid 2d for ‘sweeping of [ye] Kechyn chymnye” (7). Lamont, who references early
literary mentions, observes that the earliest known references to chimney sweepers make no
mention of childhood age. She states, “[t]he chimney sweeper enters literature as a black man” in
Shakespeare’s Love’s Labour’s Lost (1597), “[t]o look like her are chimney-sweepers black” (110).
However, she states, “[t]he most haunting reference to chimney-sweepers in Shakespeare is in
Cymbeline (1623).”

Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust (IV, ii, 263-4)

“The phrase ‘come to dust’ refers primarily to death, the dust of the grave, which comes to ‘Golden lads and girls’ as to black chimney-sweepers …. Does this passage imply,” she asks, “that the chimney-sweeper was a child, or at least a lad?” (110). While there is no way to know, what is certain is that as the technology advanced, the need for smaller children grew.

As Lamont notes, by the eighteenth century, child sweeps must have been a common sight as Jonathan Swift’s poem, “A Description of the Morning” (1709) belies: “The small-coal man was heard with cadence deep, / Till drown’d in shriller notes of chimney-sweep” (110). Paintings and engravings, such as Jacopo Amigoni’s The Chimney Sweeper’s Boy (1739) and William Marshall Craig’s Image of a Chimney Sweep Outside Foundling Hospital, Sweep Soot O (1804) speak to the familiarity and smallness of the chimney sweeps who were a familiar sight on the streets.

(Amigoni reproduced in Cullingford 64)
The contrast of light and dark in these images is unmistakable. In most images, there is an other-worldliness to the portraiture which speaks to a fascination with these small creatures covered in soot—fanciful, sometimes carnivalesque renderings being common in most of the images—a departure from the starker representations of adult sweeps such as the image of a German adult sweeper Jonas Hanway includes in his pamphlet, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers, in London and Westminster, Shewing the Necessity of Putting Them Under Regulations to Prevent the Grosest Inhumanity to the Climbing Boys* (1785).
By contrast, child sweeps became aestheticized and arguably, ‘r’omanticized.

As Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson state in Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge (2004), in stark contrast to the historical inheritance of the collective imagination, “[l]ike the coal whose soot they cleaned off chimney flues, the climbing boys were [in fact] kept in freezing cellars till their energy was needed and they were used up by their labor, their bodies fragmented. Broken by deformity and disease, few lived to adulthood. Climbing boys were victims of a technology” (231). Building on Fulford’s observation, one could go as far to say that climbing boys in fact completed the imperfect technologies developed in response to a social need, of course, demanded by culture in the adult world and the progress of chimney technology—and that these children were substituted as parts for a profit. The master sweeps
profited from the use of cheap labor while communities benefitted from the wide-spread use of such labor. The technology, in this case, was of course society’s means of creating and managing heat—from the coal that was mined, often also by children, to the chimneys which were intended to lead the smoke from the warm hearths and stoves of the homes they warmed. “The comfort of the rich, [as] Mr. Bennet told the House of Commons in 1818, depended on the labour of the poor” (Fulford 233).

Reform was slow, and difficult, and went on for a century. Reform met resistance for a number of complex and conflicting ideological reasons. Discourses overlapped, turned back on themselves, collided, and intersected—often resulting in stalemates which left chimney sweeps laboring under appalling conditions—their class “created by the sheer number of narrow, twisting, soot-covered chimneys in Britain’s mushrooming cities” (Fulford 228). Nonetheless, as Fulford et al observe,

The powerless and frozen climbing boy, ironically enough, became a rhetorical figure of great force. Lacking a public voice himself, he gave doctors, reformers, philanthropists and poets voices to articulate the deepest underlying fears of a nation that was exploiting people at home and abroad in its pursuit of wealth and comfort. He, like the black slaves to whom he was compared, also opened a route towards social reform. He acquired social agency—at least as a symbol—by bringing into focus the social evils of the manufacturing and commercial system that produced him. He highlighted the corruption of many of the Britons who benefited from that system—local officials, rentier aristocrats, slave traders, factory owners. On the image of London’s cold and stunted little black boys was founded a campaign to end child labour and poverty, a campaign which took many of its terms from a vision of science and technology developed by Rumford. (231)
Where moral, sentimental, sensational, and technological reform failed, imaginative pull prevailed. The child figure imagined and reconfigured through the Romantic lens altered the consciousness of culture in unexpected and complex ways.

In *The Chimney Sweeper's Friend* (1824), James Montgomery assembled a wide array of contributions which he organized around a central theme: “may these little oppressed ENGLISH SLAVES call upon George the Fourth to break their fetter” (Fulford et al 246). Referencing the slave trade became a frequently used reference – threading through the collection of poems and stories meant to persuade Parliament and the country that the practice of child sweeps must be abolished. “Britons, added writer after writer, were shamefully tolerating in their own country the slave trade they had abolished in their colonies” (Fulford et al 246).

The use of the child figure as rhetorical figure was an effective one in garnering support for abolishing child labor although efforts made slow progress and only over many decades. In the long term, it effected change that the sentimentalism of reformers like Jonas Hanway and the efforts of innovators like Count Rumford were unable to do. As Fulford, Lee and Kitson note,

> seeing children as slaves opened people’s eyes. It changed perceptions and a mass campaign against child labour grew steadily in power. But it was the little black boy who made that insight possible. It was on him that the slave analogy rested. On the back of the crippled chimney sweep, the successful rhetoric of a movement of social change was carried. Yet if that movement was major, it was also narrow. Child labour reform salved the consciences of the middle classes about the exploitation produced by the manufacturing system. (250)

And according to Fulford et al, “[t]he poems in the collection adapted the language of Romanticism. They borrowed the forms and styles that, in Coleridge’s, Wordworth’s and Blake’s hands, had registered so sensitively the anxieties of the age” (250).
Throughout, Romantic era writers intervened in prevailing dominant ideologies—sometimes subtly but always personally. By focusing on the particulars of peculiarities of individual lives, rather than the anonymity of crowds and populations, Romantic literature resonates with the experiences it liberates from encyclopedic knowledge—often driven by the visceral and the senses. What both Blake and Lamb successfully do in their work is paint vivid pictures of abject others and pull readers into relationships with those others. How Romantic writers accomplish this heightened awareness of the other varies, but in each case, the reader’s gaze is centered on the other while being simultaneously engaged by the experience of a sense which resituates the other in an environment as a body and a mind. One of the most effective means of doing so was dismantling ideologies which cloaked otherwise cruel practices in relation to individual experience.

Samuel Coleridge, for instance, although he would retreat, later in life, a long way from his earlier radical sentiments, employs a blood sugar “topos” in his 1796 lecture “On the Slave Trade” which, as Timothy Morton points out in *The Poetics of Spice: Consumerism and the Exotic* (2000), “reverses consumption into production, figurality in literality, and supplementary into essence” (175). Morton observes that

the topos is straightforward in its moral shock: imagine, gentle bred citizens, as you sit quaffing your sweet tea (or coffee, rum or chocolate), how its sweetness is derived from the blood of slaves. But the topos is remarkable in its underlying assumptions about figurative language, and complex in its ideological effects. It is not just that the topos reveals a ‘Real’ of slavery underlying the figure of sugar; the materiality of the figure itself is at stake. It is an apocalyptic rhetoric that decodes the slave trade, but its unveiling process draws attention to the materiality of the very veil that has been torn away. (175-76)

Coleridge, like Blake in “The Chimney Sweeper” and Lamb in “The Praise of Chimney Sweepers,” centers the reader’s gaze on the energy source from which the reader benefits, the bodily wreckage
of the abject figure, chimney sweeper or slave, uncloaked and demystified, de-reified, amidst the process. But what is striking is the manner in which these Romantic authors render the readers complicit in the process—by “rever[sing] consumption into production” and simultaneously revealing the reader’s presence, imaginatively but also bodily, in the exploitation.

Coleridge’s approach reveals the corruption of the system by dismantling the decorum which otherwise surrounds it. He specifically lays the groundwork, paints the target, before striking: “There is observable among the Many a false and bastard sensibility that prompts them to remove those evils and those evils alone, which by hideous spectacle or clamorous outcry are present to their senses, and disturb their selfish enjoyments” (Coleridge 139). In Blake’s work, we find a similar ideological disturbance.

In both Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, we find what is perhaps one of our most significant inheritances of the Romantic period, the invention of childhood—which really amounts to the recognition of the child as a fully complete and actual human being in his and her own right. What may now in contemporary culture may seem to be a self-evident state of childhood is in fact a fairly recent invention. Contemporary notions of childhood emerged through Romantic perspectives which recognized the “self” of the “other.” The significance of this perspective, of childhood reinvented in the Romantic era, becomes apparent when comparing it to perspectives on children in previous eras. Aristotle’s view of children as imperfect adults would hold sway for centuries. Plato, too, had similar ideas, although according to Robert Pattison, Plato thought a little differently about the subject. Plato’s theory of "innate ideas" implied that the infant is a "repository of Ideas in their purest form" (Pattison 3) and that children are therefore, in possession of the faculties that allow them to be perfectible.

The perfectibility of children plays out in the social and literary treatment of children for centuries, and is bolstered with the creation of St. Augustine's doctrine on original sin—posited
against perfectibility. Augustine's theory of Grace revolves largely around his objections to what is known as the "Pelagian heresy." Pelagius was a monk who lived in Rome around 400 AD. Described as "a dignified and retiring person of almost Hellenistic sensibility" (Pattison 11), he took little part in the heated debate in which his doctrines became dogma. Nonetheless, he was excommunicated from the church for his beliefs which were condemned as heretical: "Pelagius had asserted that man was endowed with sufficient grace from birth to lead a perfect life, if he could; that Adam's sin was not binding on his posterity" (Pattison 13). Pelagius, then, denies original sin as conceived by Augustine and adopted by the church. Therefore, in the Pelagian universe, the child is innocent until corrupted by life—which would become a Romantic notion.

Augustine constructs his arguments regarding Original Sin, to a significant degree, in opposition to Pelagian beliefs regarding the perfectibility of humankind. Augustine refutes Pelagius' following beliefs: 1) Adam was created mortal and thus would have died with or without committing sin; 2) Adam's sin only hurt himself, and not the rest of humanity; and 3) Infants are born in Adam's state before the Fall (Portalié 184). In Augustine's view, the first is a denial that the first man was created immortal and the second denies original sin and the two combined invalidate the significance of the fall in the Augustine's version of the universe. The third, in the meantime, denies both original immortality (which denies the original fall and therefore original justice) in addition to original sin.

Ideas surrounding original sin are relevant to the invention of childhood in that ideological perspectives on children throughout history reference this idea explicitly and implicitly. Accordingly, when belief in original sin begins to falter, or cease in some cases, over the course of the eighteenth-century, original innocence—a recycled Pelagian concept—gradually filled this ideological space. But it was the Romantic push that turned the ideology over. Prior to the Romantic era, children often languished as imperfect past-tense pre-adults in life and literature.
An eighteenth-century example serves to illustrate this point. As Pattison points out in *The Child Figure in English Literature* (1978), Thomas Gray uses the child figure to experiment with Locke's ideas regarding achieving understanding through a perspective of distance: “The understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance and make it its own subject” (Locke in Pattison 32). The interpretive framework is meant to foreground the experience of the adult with little to no interest in the experience of the child who exists long before adulthood ever happens. The child becomes a tool to achieve distance.

Grounded in the mimetically-oriented philosophy of eighteenth-century Reason, Gray explores Locke's concept of understanding through distance in "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1742). The first lines of the poem, "Ye distant spires, ye antique towers / That crown the watry glade" (1-2) immediately serve to distance the poet from the poem. In fact, as Pattison observes, the poem contains numerous "distances"—historical, social, ideological—under which exist "the distance of the writer from himself, which is the distance between childhood and maturity" (Pattison 31) as exemplified in the following lines:

Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below

Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,

Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among

Wanders the hoary Thames along

Ah happy hills, ah pleasing shade,

Ah fields belov'd in vain,

Where once my careless childhood stray'd,

A stranger yet to pain! (6-13)
Although childhood here is presented as an innocent state, it is framed as a prelude to the pain of adult experience. In other words, it draws a distance between the paradise of Eden (a childhood of innocence) and reality (the adult world of experience). In Gray, the child is perceived as a dream-like figure who precedes or exists outside of real life and who somehow diminishes in significance outside the world of adult experience and consequently, is thus diminished outside adulthood.

The following lines evoke an image of Gray cynically looking upon children playing from a distance much like the embittered "green" nurse from the “Nurses Song” in William Blake’s later Songs of Experience (1794) in which Blake implicitly criticizes the adult perspective of Experience:

\[
\text{Alas, regardless of their doom,} \\
\text{The little victims play!} \\
\text{No sense have they of ills to come,} \\
\text{Nor care beyond to-day:} \\
\text{Yet see how all around 'em wait} \\
\text{The ministers of human fate,} \\
\text{And black Misfortune's baleful train!} \\
\text{Ah, show them where in ambush stand} \\
\text{To seize their prey the murderous band!} \\
\text{Ah, tell them they are men! (51-60)}
\]

The Lockeian directed understanding that Gray seeks in these lines has nothing to do with the experience of children. Rather, the achieved understanding means realizing that the adult is somehow doomed and that the child lives in a state of suspended animation until reaching the mature level of adulthood. Hence, the child figure is used as a literary device that disregards the perspective of the child—a tendency which parallels the same anthropocentric views which gave rise to manifest destiny (in that the tendency disregards the perspectives of others’ lived experiences in
relation to their lives and lands, privileging one experience over another) – and other like perspectives on Progress which have subsumed the perspectives of the earth to those of society for centuries (as explored at length in chapter two) – with some notable exceptions such as many of the cultures of the indigenous natives of the North American continent. In western culture, there has always been an inherent tendency to privilege the dominant narrative, the first-person perspective, and to dominate the landscape, the less powerful, or the marginal figures. Romantic authors tend to cultivate a different perspective which elevates the varied experiences of the less powerful, the untamed, and the borderless – a tendency most profoundly evident in the work of John Clare explored in chapter five.

Gray is a fair example of a profoundly nostalgic yet bitter pre-Romantic poet because his poetry reflects an Aristotelian perspective on children as potential adults in conjunction with Locke's eighteenth-century notion that the child is a tabula rasa—to be filled with world experience through education and observation. States Pattison,

> the rational state of adulthood is not only the highest evolution of the human species, as Locke would have it, but a condition in which man must be painfully conscious of his fallen nature. The child is caught in a paradox: to be a man, he must accept this painful knowledge, while to try to remain a child is to fail to meet one's human potential. (Pattison 33)

This brings us to a crucial difference. The Romantic child is set free from this paradoxical trap by way of a new sensibility that ceases to view children as potential or imperfect adults to be “improved” upon—an attitude which has dominated western culture for centuries upheld by religious ideology and bolstered by technology and economy. Any perspective which relies upon or is influenced by the doctrine of original sin necessarily narrows and imprisons perspectives on those who do not share this faith, and one may look only as far as colonial attitudes to gather a wide array
of examples which embody a belief in improving, civilizing, and saving indigenous cultures. As early as 1816, Mary Shelley questions the hubris which infuses the pursuit of knowledge, improvement and perfection while writing *Frankenstein: Or, A Modern Day Prometheus* (1818): “If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caeser would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed” (34). What Shelley draws out so subtly throughout the novel is the personal investments, fueled by ideologically-driven ambitions, at the cost of the experience of another.

The child clearly emerges as a different kind of literary figure in the works of Blake who was influenced by Rousseau’s attempt to reestablish the child as a self-endowed being instead of as an imperfect adult in *Émile* (1762). Subsequently, Blake, like other Romantics, indeed does employ childhood as a theme, and arguably uses children as symbols to convey philosophical beliefs and intervene in prevailing ideologies from Blake’s views on the hypocrisy of religion to his commentary on the exploitation of child labor—but with a crucial difference. Blake intervenes on behalf of the child and he attempts throughout his work to recreate or account for the perspective or experience of the child. While it may not strike us with great force today, this was a tremendous shift at the time.

To begin with, Blake does not abandon the child in the world of Innocence until the child reaches a sufficiently mature understanding to make the suicidal plunge into the world of Experience. Instead, Blake uses the child as a bridge between the worlds of Innocence and Experience in his universe of opposing symbols. The difference between the two worlds is embodied in the *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and the *Songs of Experience* (1794). Although Blake intended the songs to be read together (Perkins 92), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), written after
Songs of Innocence and before Songs of Experience, is useful in juxtaposing the nature of the child in both of the Songs.

Reading the Songs of Innocence and Experience in conjunction with The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, emphasizes the point that Blake’s "attitude to children was in no way regretful, nostalgic, static, and deadening" (Coveney 56). Rather, Blake’s perspective on children is active, imaginative, radical, and energetic. Most importantly, Blake’s poems speak to childhood from the perspective of the child and to the child. The lack of nostalgia and regret in viewing childhood is a significant departure from Gray’s pre-romantic perspective and adds an additional dimension to Blake’s Romantic perception of children—all of which becomes important for us in understanding, revisiting, reconsidering notions of “nostalgia” in Romantic writers. Blake does not treat childhood as a nostalgic state. Rather, he breaks with centuries of belief that children are imperfect beings in need of improvement and therefore not yet fully endowed human beings. In Blake’s work, children are as important and as complete as adults—not precursors to the state of adulthood with no rights or perspectives of their own.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is a vehicle through which Blake overturns "stock associations" (Perkins 103). For instance, Angels come to represent stifled, institutional figures in the jaded world of Experience. Devils, on the other hand, represent creative energy—intrinsically positive in Blake’s universe. However, rather than replacing a dualistic system of negations with another such system, Blake establishes the necessity of the Contraries as a means to progression or growth:

Without Contraries, is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call
Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason.

Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (Plate 3)

In reversing established dualistic elements such as Good/Heaven as negative and Evil/Hell as positive, Blake establishes a new approach to historically long-held cultural beliefs—which include regarding children as the antithesis of adults. Importantly, the moral definition of Good and Evil change in definition as well as in usage. The reversals do not imply that hurtful behavior is good or that "moral" behavior is bad but rather the contrary. Blake's Contraries are meant to reverse the distorted symbols of Good and Evil as they are perceived in the world of Experience. Thus, an entire system of universal dualisms is stood on its head.

A brief sketch of the Contraries applied to children serves to exemplify how the realm of childhood is also established anew in Blake's universe—or at least reconsidered. For instance, if abstracted Reason is generally the purview of adults in the world of Experience, and "Good is the passive that obeys Reason," ideas of Good being morally and culturally constructed, and Good is negative—it then follows that the adult world of Experience with its moral and cultural laws, rules, and ideologies, cannot be right, perfect, or complete. While outside the world of Experience in the child's world of Innocence, progression cannot be toward a perfection that does not really exist in the world of Experience. Instead, the two worlds of Innocence and Experience achieve, in play, a tension if not a balance, or an energy toward Progression. This has two results. Firstly, as the Contraries produce a kind of tension or Energy necessary to Progression, the child's world of Innocence becomes important as it is necessary as part of a dynamic to grow. Secondly, the child in his/her necessary child-world therefore becomes a validated individual by virtue of his/her intrinsic participation in the process of Progression in the Universe Blake imagines, and perhaps more importantly, in the Universe of each child's imagination (and lived experience) before and outside of
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The world of adult Experience. This touches upon an idea Lussier draws out in “Blake’s Deep Ecology” (1996), that the “interplay of mind and matter” and also perspectives, “which appeared somewhat ‘mad’ in Blake’s day” gestures toward a “multi-verse (rather than a universe)” (399). In this view, “we all exist in slightly different parallel universes determined by our coalescing observations” (399).

In Blake then, the child figure in literature becomes an important symbol through which Blake communicates and expresses of the dynamics of a new perspective on individual universes of actual children in the world—a greater understanding of which is achieved through the use of Imagination which the innocent child uses freely—unfettered by the perception and ensuing ideologies of the adult Experience. Taken together, the contrary worlds of Innocence and Experience yield productive dialogue through which an understanding of the world may be achieved and moreover, the child’s world of Innocence, and more importantly, the child’s perspective, is upheld. In fact, in The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society (1967), Peter Coveney states that "[t]he force of [Blake's] Innocence is in fact charged with the intensity of his Experience" (56). Returning to “The Chimney Sweeper” (1789) of Songs of Innocence, the palpability of the child’s experience in the world of Innocence shadowed by the world of Experience is apparent in the demand for intervention by way of an accusation at the end of the first stanza of the poem:

> When my mother died I was very young,
> And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
> Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.
> So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep. (1-4)

In the next stanza, the parallel of Tom Dacre’s hair with a lambs back of course evokes a familiar symbol of innocence while also calling back to “The Lamb” and the simultaneously gullible and
innocent acceptance of the child—alluding, perhaps, to a feeling of sacrifice with “was shav’d” (6).

But it also draws upon the image of the soot, invoking the image of the daily and disturbing physical violence of these children’s lives.

Theres little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head 5

That curl’d like a lambs back, was shav’d, so I said.

Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head’s bare,

You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair. (5-8)

Furthermore, underlying social implications infuse the passage. The child’s “white hair” is “shav’d” so that “the soot cannot spoil” it. The entire process reveals an inherent cultural hypocrisy in addressing the state of the poor and the disenfranchised. On the one hand, the problem of exploitation is not addressed in society; rather, the evidence is eliminated. On the other hand, one may ask the question: Whose hair is shaved? Prisoners. Wards of the state. Orphans in schools. Heads are shaved in acts of renunciation or sacrifice. Sacrifices are shaved. Hair is shaved not only for practical reasons but deeply symbolic ones which resonate with religious and/or cultural connotations.

Moreover, the word “Hush,” when its traditional comforting meaning and poetic context is juxtaposed, leaks a disturbing sound into the stanza …a soothing word delivered to placate an imprisoned child. It fills the stanza with the atmosphere of a nightmare more than a dream. That the child is soothed by another child, the speaker in the poem, by way of their shared plight, into submission or at the very least quiet creates a deeper tension and should provoke the reader into an urgency to intervene. Seemingly soothed until sleep when he “had such a sight,” not unlike the phrase, “had such a fright” lurking beneath the slippage from ‘f’ to ‘s’ as the child is effectively soothed:

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight,
That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe Ned & Jack
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black, (9-12)

That the children are “lock’d up” and not resting “in coffins of black” provokes multiple layers of associations including the prisons of their laboring lives, locked into a trajectory with an impending soot-related death, living lives enclosed in the black soot of coal-fueled labour and in chimneys quite literally.23

The turn of the poem comes within the dream, a terrible dream in which release comes in death, followed by the knock-out lines of the end of the stanza which call to mind the spirit and rhythm of “The Ecchoing Green”:

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free.
Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun. (13-16)

Their bags of soot, brushes, and bags discarded, the chimney sweeps are cleansed of their worldly coils, shining in the Sun, or under God’s love, rising upon clouds like the Angel who sets them free.

The last two lines of the following stanza are inextricable from the stanza which follows, stating, in effect, that if Tom fulfills his duty, he will never again want for joy:

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy. (17-20)

---

23 Children who worked as chimney sweeps often died inside chimneys.
The shift into waking again summons the immediacy of the experience of the innocent child –
calling up the image of the cold dark morning in which the chimney sweepers woke, early morning
being the only time the chimneys were cool enough to clean—before the break of day in the dark.

And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm. (21-24)

As Tom awakes, the poem returns to the collective experience of the sweeps, bringing the poem
back into the world of experience. “Tom was happy & warm” (23) does not signal a break from the
earlier indictment of the poem. Rather, it indicates the ways religion uses promises of release to
engage the child in a task born of duty—with a heavenly promise attached. The last ironic line, “so
if all do their duty, they need not fear harm” (24), is bitter in its undertone, wryly delivered, a kind of
motto from the world of experience which contradicts itself as the sweeps are in fact being harmed.

In the “Chimney Sweeper” poems, we see the “portrayals of an ecosystem in dynamic,
discursive exchange with a discrete individual” in Blake’s world Lussier describes (402). The
physical condition and conditions of the climbing boys was significant. For one thing, “[r]oasted and
frozen by turn, the climbing boy was never warm. He was not wealthy enough to afford the heat
that he laboured to produce for others” (Fulford et al 233). As Fulford et al further describe,

The climbing boys were certainly poor. Master sweeps bought five-year-olds, the thinner the
better, from workhouses, orphanages and destitute widows. Having paid a few shillings to
apprentice them, they sent them round the streets by night, crying their trade. They forced
the boys up chimneys till their bleeding sores hardened into calluses. Soon, legs and pelvis
became deformed. Often, ingrained soot led to cancer of the scrotum or mouth. Some
boys fell to their deaths from damaged chimney pots. Others were suffocated or burnt alive.
It was, all too often, the roasted flesh of infants that kept the home fires burning. Callous indifference was part of the trade. The former sweep David Porter recorded that London climbing boys commonly lived in “a cellar, sometimes without a fire-place, but mostly without a fire, in the coldest weather.” (Fulford et al 233)

The children were exploited—having no say in whether or not they had to sweep chimneys—unpaid, difficult, and dangerous labor. Their bodies were starved, wounded, bruised, burnt, bent, and broken. The soot in which they worked soaked its way into their insides. They spent their young lives climbing into soot-covered “twists and turns of chimneys, some only nine inches square” (Fulford et al 233) to chimneys as narrow as seven inches and sometimes even six inches square (Cullingford 75) which made smaller children more desirable. The technology was created and shaped for the convenience of communities, and it was then supplemented by child labor. The material conditions, the specifics of the environs in which child sweeps existed, are central to understanding what these children suffered. The tools of their trade, their “bags & brushes” (22), are not forgotten in Blake’s poem specifically because the tools bridge the narrative between the children and the chimney.

The British Library holds an edition of the Report from the Committee of the Honourable the House of Commons on the Employment of Boys in Sweeping of Chimneys (1817). The report “was published by the Parliamentary Committee established to investigate the conditions of children apprenticed to chimney-sweeps. The Committee listened to evidence from chimney-sweeps, a surgeon and a social reformer” (“House of Commons Report”):

The report shows the conditions in which climbing boys worked between 1788 and 1817, and examines potential alternatives. The interview with the chimney sweep, an employer of child sweeps, states that he is keen to abide by the rules of the 1788 Act, but that he sometimes has to beat the boys to make them work properly. He says he would be willing to
use a machine instead of a boy, but the servants in his employers’ houses complain that
machines make more dirt than boys. He explains that, on occasion, fires were lit under
reluctant children; but perhaps the most shocking piece of evidence shows how older boys
were sent up chimneys after smaller boys to prick their feet with pins in an attempt to make
them go further. (“House of Commons Report”)

The main findings of this report as reproduced on the British Library’s “House of Commons Report
on Boy Chimney Sweeps” website reads as follows:

- that employers preferred smaller children because they could climb into smaller
  chimneys
- that girls as well as boys were used
- that physical punishment was used to force children to go up chimneys
- many boys developed testicular cancer from the soot in the chimneys, but many were
  unwilling to undergo an operation which would cure them by removing their testicles
- about a quarter of chimney-sweep employers did not provide washing facilities for their
  apprentices; washing would have made the cancer less prevalent
- poor parents effectively sold their children into the profession by demanding a payment
  from the chimney-sweeps
- parents lied about their children’s ages - smaller children were more desirable, since they
  could get into smaller spaces
- children were used as ‘climbing-boys’ from the age of four
- children were not paid
- a machine could do the job just as well. (“House of Commons Report”)

Evidence of the horrific conditions in which chimney sweepers lived is abundant.

According to Cullingford, “[p]arliamentary reports and court cases were fully documented and
misdemeanours and cruelties were read about avidly, just as they are today” (68). Examples of horrendous situations and cruel circumstances are many. The following instances are all taken from Cullingford’s *British Chimney Sweeps: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (2000):

1. He was frequently ill treated and was once sent up a chimney, which had been on fire for 48 hours. As a result, he had fallen, and his burns had crippled him for life. He was 10 years old at the time. Dunn claimed that boys were rented out to masters for 6d per day. Masters could have any number of boys, and although 4 or 5 boys were generally thought sufficient, he knew one master who had 24 boys.

2. Poverty-stricken parents could be accused of cruelty when, driven by family circumstances, they sold or gave away their children to chimney sweeps. The smaller the child the better: different sized heads to fit different sized flues. It was common practice for parents to 'Dispose of them to the best Bidder, as they could not put them apprentice to any other Trade, at so young an age.

3. On Tuesday 24th August 1809, Bow Street Magistrate Court heard that a Mr Miller had sold his five-year-old son to Master Sweep Henry Doe for the sum of three guineas. Miller, a plumber by trade, had sold the child while his wife was 'out of town'. The case ended happily, however, as the mother, helped by a kind solicitor, managed to get her child returned, and Henry Doe, for having purchased a child 'under age' was fined the sum of £5.

4. The following cases, selected at random throughout the country, detail instances of extreme cruelty. One of the most publicised cases was that of 10-year-old Valentine Gray, a destitute child from Alverstoke workhouse. There were 122 children at Alverstoke, and Valentine was one of 64 boys. Conditions in the workhouse were reasonable and children were provided with adequate food, clothes and schooling. In
1821, Valentine was apprenticed to a master sweep called Davis from Newport on the Isle of Wight. Shortly after Christmas, both Davis and his wife were brought to court. Their young apprentice had died. When surgeon Dr Bucknell examined Valentine's body, he found the boy filthy, emaciated and bruised. He also had a severe scalp wound. Davis and his wife were convicted of manslaughter and imprisoned for 12 months. The circumstances of Valentine's death were so distressing that the residents of Newport raised a '1d fund' and used the proceeds to erect a monument in Newport churchyard:

VALENTINE GRAY, THE LITTLE SWEEP
INTERRED JANUARY 5th A.D. 1822 ... a testimony to all innocent children who suffered.

5. On 7th July 1827, the Leeds Mercury reported the death of a sweep in a chimney at Thornton. At about 10 am on Tuesday morning the young boy had been cheerfully employed sweeping a chimney, when his brush became lodged in the flue. Fearful of his master's anger he remained in the chimney. His master, J. Holgate, sent another apprentice up to get him, but the boy climbed out of reach. The enraged Holgate swearing he would 'cut him to pieces', lit a fire in the grate – to no effect. The apprentice was sent up again with a rope, which he tied to the boy's leg. Holgate tugged the rope down a few feet and secured it to the grate. He then climbed up to the boy himself and stayed with him about five minutes. On returning, he declared that he had felt the boy's feet and thought he was dying. The chimney was dismantled around 3 pm but it was too late. The boy had stuck fast in a narrow section of the flue and died. Holgate was tried, found guilty of manslaughter and confined to York Castle. At the next Assizes, Holgate was acquitted. Medical opinion had decided that his apprentice had died of suffocation and not through any wounds or bruising found on his body.
6. Another fatality through ill treatment occurred on 11th July 1847. Readers of The Times learned that Thomas Price, aged seven years, had died of convulsions following a beating, after being taken out of a hot flue. His Master John Gordon had declared that the young devil was 'foxing', when the boy had become half-asphyxiated in the hot flue of Tennants' Chemical Works in Manchester. His master had twice forced Thomas up the flue. Gordon was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to transportation for 10 years. (Cullingford 68-70)

The conditions in which these children were forced to live were created by both cultural and technological architectures. Those who supported the custom of chimney sweeping took no notice whatsoever of the children's being or wellbeing. The disregard is conspicuous not only for its cruelty but especially amidst the widespread and visible exploitation—and communities’ tacit complicity.

Blake saw the corruption and cruelty inherent in his social environment, but his work also responds to the institutionalization of cruelty, the cultural traditions which sanction exploitation, the economic inequities which enslave some, often the most vulnerable members of society, and the hypocrisy of religion which is so easily used to harness the less fortunate members of society. Consequently, he invested his art with a strata of contending beliefs against the dominant ideologies which corrupt, oppress, and preach, and weaves them into the Contraries which form the foundation of his work. He believed that “[m]en lay enslaved beneath 'systems,' and their enfranchisement could only come through a renewed awareness of their original innocence, and their capacity for 'Vision' which through 'experience' they had lost” (Coveney 53). However, the systems to which he objected were the generalizations embodied by Newton and Locke in the "baleful influence of Reason, the power of the abstracted [emphasis mine] Intellect as a force against life" (Coveney 53) in stark contrast with the productive facility of the Imagination.
While Blake's child symbols act as devices within the poetical realm, the child figure is not simply a literary device to convey Blake's ideas; rather, his literary child embodies the lived experience of children of the world of Innocence colliding with the world of Experience, and these literary children remind readers that children have value on their own. Romantic authors such as Blake effectively convey the voice of the child—even that the child has a voice. As Fulford et al observes, the chimney sweep's “sooty colour made him a rhetorical figure with which radicals could prise open the consciences of those who had blinded themselves to the exploitation of labourers” (247). In this way, the artistic endeavors of the Romantics are intrinsically intertwined with the child figure and other abject figures outside the world of adult experience and dominant narratives. The reasons for this shift are many but perhaps most significantly amidst forces of division and alienation, a rapidly changing society was beginning to wrest cultural stability away from the artist. Increasingly industrial-driven values produced changes in outlook that served to diminish the role of the artist in society. The evolution of artistic alienation becomes evident in much of the Victorian era's poetry, such as in Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gypsy" (1853) and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) and central into the twentieth century. Romantic authors lived amidst the first waves of these changes as Coveney observes:

The society created by the industrial developments of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was increasingly unconcerned with and often inimical to art. The frequent fate of the later nineteenth-century artist was not only to find himself alienated and bewildered, but confronted by the rapid disintegration of his audience. (30)

Coveney concludes that children thus provide a symbol through which artists could express dissatisfaction with their environment—especially because the primary source of frustration of the
child is in adapting to his/her environment. Romantics could easily identify with what childhood might represent in adult culture.

For instance, Pattison notes that Gray uses "[c]hildhood . . . [as] a vehicle for investigating the original condition of society and ascertaining the fundamentals of man's role within civilization" (Pattison 33). Likewise, Blake re-situates the child in his universe in order get at an original condition and thus fulfill his own Romantic purpose. So, childhood re-invented is less self-styled than it appears. In this light, as Coveney interprets it, "[t]he importance is that for [the Romantics] the child developed became a symbol of the greatest significance for the subjective investigation of the Self, and an expression of their Romantic protest against the Experience of society" (Coveney 32).

The Romantic focus on the Self departs from nearly all previous literary movements which standardly employ an impersonal, objective, or mimetic approach. The very personal Romantic protest embraces Imagination in lieu of eighteenth-century Lockian Reason in Blake, defends domesticated Nature against impersonal and destruction Urbanization in Wordsworth, and champions individual experience over general, empirical, and populated abstractions in most. The childhood figure, among other abject figures, provided a means by which these Romantic poets could ground their artistic expressions in an increasingly fragmented and insecure world. Importantly, the “I” of the “Other” is as central as that of the “Self.”

Blake’s first chimney sweep poem, “The Chimney Sweeper” of Songs of Innocence, is dated at 1789, and it would not be until 1875, that chimney sweeping would finally, effectively be abolished, nearly a century after William Blake first wrote Songs of Innocence and Experience, although efforts were being made to abolish the practice throughout the nineteenth century. The U.K. Parliamentary database made available by the House of Commons and the House of Lords provides a comprehensive historical archive through the “Living Heritage” collection. According to the
records, the transformation of child labor laws was a long and arduous process marked by a number of setbacks: Hanway’s reform efforts began as early as the 1760s; the minimum age was set at eight-years-old in 1788 but “this and other regulations were never enforced”; the Chimney Sweeps Act of 1834 outlawed apprenticing any child under ten-years-old and declared that the minimum age for a child to actually clean chimneys would be fourteen-years-old; in 1840, the Chimney Sweeps Act was revised to raise the minimum age to apprentice as a chimney sweep to sixteen-years-old, but “[a]s with other legislation, this was largely ignored due to the absence of any means of enforcement”; in 1863 Charles Kingsley published the novel “Water Babies” which raised awareness of the conditions of child laborers to which Parliament responded by passing a new Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act the following year, but this, too, “was ineffective.” All of these efforts largely failed in their goals and limits. It was only in 1875 that real progress was made when “a successful solution was implemented by the Chimney Sweepers' Act which required sweeps to be licensed and made it the duty of the police to enforce all previous legislation”24 (“Reforming Society in the 19th Century”).

One of the most famous descriptions of chimney sweepers, in addition to Blake’s poems, comes from Charles Lamb’s Essays of Elia (1823) in “The Praise of Chimney Sweepers.” Lamb’s descriptions are some of the most poignant and sensitive, but they also capture the imaginative pull these small abject figures have maintained throughout history. Lamb says so himself, that he is drawn toward them, in the opening lines of the essay:

I like to meet a sweep—understand me—not a grown sweeper—old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive—but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek—such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the peep

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24 All data cited here comes of the United Kingdom Parliamentary Archives. “Reforming Society in the 19th Century: Children and Chimneys” is part of the Living Heritage collection of data.
peep of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise?

I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks—poor blots—innocent blacknesses— ...

(Lamb)

Like Blake, Lamb alludes to their sounds, “peep peep,” like baby birds. It creates an astonishing image sweeping upward with the comparison to the lark in their aerial ascents—particularly when one considers the intricate and zig zag lattice work of the hidden interiors of more advanced chimney constructions. Lamb’s description further emphasizes an overlooked aspect of these young children—their absolute invisibility amidst their visibility. His “kindly yearning” is “towards these dim specks,” specks, small asides, hardly discernable. The choice of “poor blots” is interesting—signaling their abject status but also, their marginal status, like ink blots accidentally spilled alongside the edges of a page of a more central narrative. Their “innocent blacknesses” echo throughout Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience as well as the politics and abolitionist sentiments of the day, made more explicit in the following lines: “I reverence these young Africans of our own growth—these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind.” Here, Lamb, too, calls upon the abolitionist feelings in referencing “these young Africans” while also using playful language to call out the hypocrisy of the church while imbuing the chimney sweeps with energy and personality, “almost clergy imps.”

Whereas “what became the longest and most obsessive philanthropic campaign in the nineteenth century – the campaign to abolish climbing boys” (Fulford et al 241) tended toward sentimentalism and sensationalism, depriving chimney sweeps of their individuality and complexity, thus disempowering them, Lamb reverses this tendency. Of note is Lamb’s alternative view of the chimney sweeper which expresses itself in radical Romantic fashion, frank, specific, and
penetrating—seeing and appraising value in abject figures who are otherwise and generally missed. While calling attention to the circumstances under which child sweeps labored, Lamb imbues the child symbol with an agency and playfulness which reformers and activists and indeed the culture at large seems to have often overlooked. Lamb resists the tendency to symbolize the child figure and thus avoids reducing him to a common stereotype, one of many faceless numbers. Moreover, he situates the child sweeps within their environs in a manner which allows us to see and hear them—to get to know them: “… Lamb actually reveals some things about the climbing boys that are to be found nowhere in the abolitionist literature. He reveals some of their tastes—their likes and dislikes, their humour” (Fulford et al 261). Lamb, like Blake and other Romantics, complicates a discourse and challenges generalizations which fail to find value in abject figures as individuals interacting within environs over which they may have no control, but within which they create and cultivate their own agency. Like Blake, Lamb does so by recognizing the actual conditions of their lives.

By contrast, history, and contemporary culture for that matter, tends to erase the experiences of abject figures by sanitizing their experiences. Despite the history of children as chimney sweeps, and in spite of their slave-like existence, the chimney sweeper is more likely to invoke a ‘r’omanticized figure rather than the Romantic child in our cultural imaginations. Examples abound—such as the child figures immortalized in countless illustrations and children’s stories or the adult sweeps in Hans Christian Anderson’s fairytale, “The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep” (1845) and in the song “Chim Chim Cheree,” – “chim chimney, chim chimney, chim chim cher-oo” written by the Sherman brothers and made famous by the Disney movie Mary Poppins (1964). Mary Poppins is still often performed on stage without reference to the true experiences of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century child laborer deprived of food, light, and the most basic human comforts and necessities. Yet another version of Mary Poppins was set to be released in 2016 at the time of this research. The original books were written by Lyndon Goff whose pen name was P.L. Travers, and
they were written and published from 1933-1988. Though chimney sweepers are cast as adults in the Disney hit, the cultural memory of sweepers is strongly child-like, and this is reflected in the characterizations of the sweep; moreover, the lyrics to the musical contrast starkly with the portrait painted in Blake’s poems and history, an odd juxtaposition:

Chim chiminey
Chim chiminey
Chim chim cher-ee!
A sweep is as lucky
As lucky can be
Chim chiminey
Chim chiminey
Chim chim chee!
Good luck will rub off when
I shake ’ands with you

Chimney sweepers, child sweeps or ‘climbing boys’ in any case, were in fact, for the most part, enslaved. The recuperation and idealization of these figures has developed along an ideological spectrum in a manner which has persisted for centuries. The lyrics themselves contain a nod to this dynamic in the following lines: “Now as the ladder of life / ’As been strung / You may think a sweep's / On the bottommost rung.” This dynamic is then denied by the popular culture as follows: “Though I spends me time / In the ashes and soot / In this ’ole wide world / There's no 'appier bloke.” Strikingly, these lyrics are swept by a cultural amnesia while the experiences of chimney sweeps have fallen into a kind of memory hole. “Chim Chim Cheree” has been covered by artists as varied as John Coltrane, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington to Esperanza Spalding and Turin Brakes. Deep into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, our conflicted relationships with our
more sinister past histories and the abject figures which populate those forgotten times linger amidst aesthetics which simultaneously deny and acknowledge our history. In some cases, as with Turin Brakes’s cover of a song which popular culture has sentimentalized, artists will again complicate the questions and the conditions in which people suffered and still do. Nonetheless, in spite of these exceptional instances, it seems clear that our ideological inheritance of expectations for a virtuous poor have continued.

As Olivia Smith addresses in *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (1984) and Gary Harrison describes *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty and Power* (1994), “a morality industry emerged in Britain that attempted to foster better social relations among the classes without disturbing ‘the subordination of the ranks.’ Under the cloak of a socially integrating benevolence and sympathy, many of these works enjoined the poor to become, in Burke’s words, ‘satisfied, laborious and obedient’ and to recognize ‘that happiness that is to be found by virtue in all conditions’” (Harrison 31). As Michel Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), “[i]n [the] first phase of the industrial world, labour did not seem linked to the problems it was to provoke; it was regarded, on the contrary, as a general solution, an infallible panacea, a remedy to all forms of poverty” (55). Industriousness, the happy poor, became the standard upon which morality was written. John Barrell explores this dynamic in depth in *The Dark Side of the Landscape, The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (1980) in relation to an emerging aesthetic which cultivated moral contexts for the “deserving” poor. And as Garrison states, “the moral and economic of the poor was thus constructed in terms of a relation to production. The constitutive features of the good or ‘deserving’ poor included preeminently their industriousness, followed by independence, honesty and deference to authority—religious, political and economic” (35). Amidst this dark and sanctimonious beginning, the imaginative image of the child figure as chimney sweeper was somehow forged in stark opposition to Blake’s child figure—a symbolic clash which, in a
nutshell, represents an emerging conflict between Romantic perspectives and those of their contemporaries, by turns Utilitarian and scientific, which mark the dividing sensibilities of the period. What is conspicuously absent from this archetypal narrative which departs from Blake’s illustration is the human relationship to the technology which shaped the actual lived experience of the chimney sweeps within their environs—a relationship to which Blake and other Romantic authors such as Charles Lamb, carefully attend.

Perhaps most significantly, through the work of Blake, and to an extent, Lamb, the tangible material effects of environs on abject individuals apart from ideological constructions in terms of health and well-being are united and made more visible. Too often, health is seen as only a bodily state while well-being is seen as an emotional or social one. Our views of body and mind must come together to comprehend the whole individual experience within the context of our environs—an ecology of being. We have an ethical responsibility to comprehend the human being as a whole being. Embodied cognitive science is now catching up with literature in this way: “… to understand consciousness,” states Alva Noë, “—the fact that we think and feel and that a world shows up for us—we need to look at a larger system of which the brain is only one element” (10). “Consciousness,” he contends, “is not something the brain achieves on its own. Consciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body, and world. Indeed, consciousness is an achievement of the whole animal in its environmental context” (10). In short, Blake establishes this fact in his poetry two centuries ago. Furthermore, Blake careful attendance to the voices, mannerisms, and feelings of the little chimney sweeps of his poetry demonstrates what Antonio Damasio asserts in Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain (2003):

… feelings are the expression of human flourishing or human distress, as they occur in mind and body. Feelings are not a mere decoration added on to the emotions, something one might keep or discard. Feelings can be and often are revelations of the state of life within the
entire organism—a lifting of the veil in the literal sense of the term. Life being a high-wire act, most feelings are expressions of the struggle for balance, ideas of the exquisite adjustments and corrections without which, one mistake too many, the whole act collapses. If anything in our existence can be revelatory of our simultaneous smallness and greatness, feelings are. (7)

Through the lens Damasio provides, Blake’s renderings of the material aspects of the child’s working and living conditions in intimate proximity with the feelings that Blake projects upon the child sweeps he creates bring together the conditions of living with its experience in a manner in which confrontation of those material conditions becomes unavoidable. In Blake, the child escapes the fetters of being simply a rhetorical figure and instead embodies the sooty figure of his or her own existence. In Blake, the “sooty colour” which Fulford et al explain did more than make “[the sweep] a rhetorical figure” (247). Instead, the soot itself embodied something more tangible, unavoidable, and material. As the children were embedded in their chimney environments, the soot embedded itself in their bodies and minds. An imagination shift was accomplished in shifting the reception of the children from one state to another. In revealing the soot-covered being of the children, Blake reveals the feelings of these chimney sweepers. In effect, he releases them by revealing them in the minds of readers who might then come to see these chimney sweeps as children imprisoned in chimneys and soot.

Within these contexts, the relationship of child sweeps to the material conditions of their existence, and the very development of their selves, from the physical and emotional circumstances of their suffering to their joys, became the shared responsibility of the local and global communities who created the environmental circumstances within which these children lived and worked—a fact to which both Blake and Lamb attend in their work.
Chapter Four

THE DISTANCES THAT HAUNT WORDSWORTH & DE QUINCEY

Once for all let me declare that it is not against Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending.
—William Wordsworth in Letters on the Kendal and Windermere Railway

What are poets for? They are not exactly philosophers, though they often try to explain the world and humankind’s place within it. They are not exactly moralists, for at least since the nineteenth century their primary concern has rarely been to tell us in homiletic fashion how to live. But they are often exceptionally lucid or provocative in their articulation of the relationship between internal and external worlds, between being and dwelling. Romanticism and its afterlife, I have been arguing through this book, may be thought of as the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of the mind
—Jonathan Bate in Song of the Earth

In their critiques of technology, Romantic authors are often looked upon as nostalgic harbingers of lost eras, mourning the loss of tranquil nature scenes while overlooking the presence of other individual experiences beyond the poets’ own.25 Or, they are seen as berating the forces of industry for polluting the skies and denuding or transgressing against the rural landscape from a position of aristocratic privilege and entitlement. This chapter focuses on Romantic responses to technology from a different perspective: it considers Romantic critiques of technology as a process of engagement with new, culturally-driven changes that were having a tremendous and unprecedented impact on the relationship between mind, body, and environs on a very fundamental level—between experience, being in the world, and the changing circumstances of that world.

Given that Romanticism, as Jonathan Bate points out in The Song of the Earth (2000) “may be thought of as the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of the mind”

(251-2), Romantic perspectives often reveal technologically affected environs in ways which escape quantitative use value and illuminate the intimate emotional responses that emerge when confronted with the effects of impersonal industrial forces. As such, the Romantic lens has the potential to reveal the more personal effects of technologies on the embodied mind embedded in its environs. Romantic perspectives, furthermore, lend themselves to Hubert Zapf's approach to ecocritical theory. In Zapf's “fusion of cultural ecology and textual criticism” he sees “literary texts as capable of revitalizing the cultural system” (Goodbody 553). Zapf asks “what function culture performs within society?” (Goodbody 553). In doing so, Zapf distinguishes “between three equally important discursive functions of literature in his model of literature as a medium of cultural ecology” (Goodbody 553). These discursive functions are a culture-critical, an imaginative, and a reintegrative function (Zapf 2002 33-9) (Goodbody 553). In “German Ecocriticism” (2014), Axel Goodbody outlines the three functions Zapf identifies as follows:

First, literature draws attention to oppressive structures of the cultural system. Second, it gives voice to what these structures suppress, and provides a testing-ground for alternative forms of cultural organization. And finally, it has a unique capacity to address the whole person and cross boundaries between otherwise divided social systems and discourses. The cultural impact of literary texts derives above all from their symbolic and metaphorical condensation of information. (Goodbody 553-554)

Here, Goodbody specifically explains how the discursive functions of literary texts that Zapf identifies work to achieve cultural impact. Alongside these perspectives, Romantic poetry also “draws attention to oppressive structures of the cultural system.” Moreover, Romantic poetry recognizes not only the agency of human individuals but also the various forms of other-than-human life and nature; in doing so, it “gives voice to what [and who] these structures suppress.” Finally, Romantic poetry “address[es] the whole person” and it “cross[es] boundaries between
otherwise divided social systems and discourses” regularly. In other words, the poetry of the era often addresses a nature that has a purpose and a place in the world that transcends its use value for cultural progress and industry. It most often does so through the “symbolic and metaphorical condensation of information.” With these possibilities in mind, this chapter develops a perspective which strives to complicate the Romantic relationship with technology by looking at what may be learned from the perspectives of William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey as they reveal aspects of internal/external intermingled relations as well as interiorities of consciousness (in relation to the land). It considers the ways these interiorities are affected by external technological mechanisms of progress which alter environs and thus our “selves,” which in turn further alters various relations with our environs and other creatures, and yet again ourselves, and so on. I belabor the point to emphasize the continually dynamic nature of such reciprocity. These changes do not end with the transformation of culture, nature, or beings; rather, they are continually transforming, always changing in a constant state of impermanence. I propose that Romantic work is less nostalgic than introspective, less patrician than iconoclastic, and less anti-technological than actively engaged in creating spaces of rumination to explore the consequences of progressing technologies on dynamic nature, body, and mind. I consider the ways Romantic texts complicate the dominant utilitarian and Cartesian ideologies of their time as “literary texts” which are “capable of revitalizing the cultural system, by condensing and transforming elements of public discourse in nodal constructs such as symbols and metaphors” as Hubert Zapf contends (Goodbody “German Ecocriticism” 553). Throughout, I propose that the Romantic perspectives of authors such as Wordsworth and De Quincey offer us give us a wealth of unexpected and complex critiques of the effects of technologies on the environment and its inhabitants when the more common lenses of nostalgia, entitlement, and conservatism are removed. Our contemporary culture benefits from their
perspectives as these Romantic authors reveal unexpected relations between individuals and the worlds we self-engineer as a species.

Technologies, as well as their positive and negative outputs and outcomes, are becoming more deeply and invisibly embedded across the globe as they continue to frame our lived environs, shape our thinking minds, and infiltrate our physical bodies. In “Digital Romanticism in the Age of Neo-Luddism: the Romantic Circles Experiment” (2006), Steven E. Jones describes contemporary technology as liquid: “In our own time technology is more elusive, more “liquid,” as opposed to what “in Victorian parlance,” came to be called “the machinery question’…. Increasingly invisible yet everywhere at once, it is a metamachine pervading every aspect of life, leaving us no place of refuge” (13-15). Whether one describes technologies as invisible networks which have become embedded throughout the world, or as liquid, infiltrating every aspect of the world, technologies are now inarguably deeply pervasive and are therefore inescapable as part of our lived environs, our dwelling spaces. Given how integral technologies have become, the need for new ways to think about and discuss technology is now more pressing than ever. And now, newer, even fresher language is needed because as technologies continue to develop, we can no longer think of them only as the distinct machines, the “clear-cut target: machines at which one could swing a hammer” as they were for the early Luddites (Jones 15). Technologies and their effects have infiltrated every aspect of life. The pervasiveness of technology requires us to consider it in a new and different light, as an integral element in the building of our being as individuals—which is very much what many Romantic authors presciently did.

As I have established throughout this dissertation, by “being,” I do not refer simply to our minds or our bodies or even just the embodied mind. Instead, what I take to mean “being” is our embodied mind embedded within our environs. As explained in my introduction, alongside recent and alternative views in cognitive science advanced by embodied cognitive scientists and
philosophers, our consciousness is not contained only by our “brain-meat” (Clark xxviii).

Furthermore, “[t]he subject of experience is not a bit of your body. You are not your brain. The brain, rather, is part of what you are” (Noë 7). Both Clark and Noë, along with other theorists of embodied cognitive science, offer models of mind quite aside from the conventional Cartesian mold; these theories move us far beyond the nature versus nurture question which so often comes up reflexively. With these observations in mind, we may look upon consciousness as part of a process that includes the world not only as an object of perception but also as part of an effecting part of the subject who is perceiving. What surrounds us becomes part of who we are and thus affects what we see, what we feel, and often how we behave. This is very much a Romantic notion. This perspective cuts through or dismantles the nature versus nurture duality by collapsing the division between who we are born to be, internally, through our DNA and how we are cultivated, externally, through our environs. Instead, we have an opportunity to cultivate a model of reciprocity that penetrates the divisions between mind, body, and environs by conceptualizing such separations as more porous than generally considered historically.

A productive dialogue would also mediate between the divisions created by all-too-common dualities such as nature versus civilization, technology versus nature, nature versus humanity, or humanity versus technology. Aside from being unproductive false dichotomies, these bifurcations are problematic when discussing technology because such polarizing divisions oversimplify the issues at hand by creating either/or perspectives and/or by refusing the give and take relations between positions as though there were only two options. These extreme, polarizing positions do not allow for any real synthesis or solution. A simple example of this would be that when one questions or even examines the effects of a particular technology, one is often accused of being against technology. This is an all-too-common and unproductive rhetorical dynamic. This is a point to which Wordsworth attends in his *Letters on the Kendal Windermere Railway* when he declares, “[o]nce
for all let me declare that it is not against Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending” (Letters 21). Furthermore, when investigating the effects of technology on the world, it is also common to be accused of indulgence in sentimentality, nostalgia or even less-productively, the hackneyed, clichéd, (and inaccurate) accusation of thinking like a Luddite. Such criticism has a long and unproductive history—eliminating critical spaces of discussion and exploration while oversimplifying complex and increasingly integral aspects of life across the globe.

Long credited, inaccurately, for being the first Luddites, Romantic authors’ observations are among those which have all too often been reduced to personal longing, nostalgic ruminations, and reactionary wishes for days gone by. In other criticism, the views of Romantic authors such as Wordsworth are characterized as entitled or elitist – or, as in the case of Scott Hess’s Under the Sign of Nature: William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture (2012) as protecting a “poetic identity” and the cultural capital of the Lake District with respect to Wordsworth’s objection to the railway “breaching the Lake District” (119). Hess goes so far to argue that Wordsworth needs to be understood within Victorian contexts given that “by 1844, England was in the grip of a ‘Railway Mania,’ a frenzy of speculation and modernization that led to the rapid expansion of rail lines throughout most of the country, creating the backbone of the current national rail system” (117). While Hess’s observation about the railway frenzy is certainly true, I argue that Wordsworth must be understood within the very Romantic contexts which contextualize his objections to the railways as “the abuse of them” (Wordsworth Kendal 21). This is an important point given how successfully Hess has recently argued that what he calls Wordsworth’s “defense of landscape amenities against modern progress” has “helped to establish the cultural politics and rhetoric of [today’s] environmentalism” (116). By reducing Wordsworth’s “opposition to the railways” as a matter of “landscape aesthetics” which would lay the foundation for an environmental movement, Hess overlooks Wordsworth’s deep emotional investment in
nature’s well being. Moreover, Hess’s analysis fails to acknowledge Wordsworth’s obvious interest in the intermingling of place and its inhabitants. Hess’s overall argument oversimplifies not only Wordsworth’s argument, but that of green studies at large. Hess asserts the following:

[Wordsworth’s] construction of nature as a sphere of high culture, which would be violated by the infusion of “low” or popular culture; his appropriation of the voice of nature in order to support his own cultural position; and his demonization not only of modern work and the city but also of the working-class people associated with them, all set significant precedents for later environmental campaigns. (Hess 116)

From a Marxist perspective, Wordsworth’s objections to the impending tourism do demand analysis from a class perspective, but to reduce Wordsworth’s concern with nature and the rural identity of the region as a “sphere of high culture” at risk of being “violated by the infusion of ‘low’ or popular culture” condenses and compartmentalizes Wordsworth’s attempts to draw “attention to [another] oppressive structure of the cultural system” (Goodbody 553). Such views are reminiscent of criticism which asserts that ecocritical perspectives are not concerned enough with social justice.

Kevin Hutchings points this out in his review of James C. McKusick’s wonderful contribution to the ecological understanding of Romantic writing, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000). Hutchings asserts that Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber, in rejecting the New Historical readings of “Alan Liu, Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, and other socially minded Romantic scholars,” have “have arguably done as much to impede the cause of Romantic ecocriticism” (Hutchings). Moreover, he asserts, “they have helped to perpetuate the stereotype that environmental studies scholars are reactionary anti-intellectuals whose work is idealistically naive and dangerously misanthropic (because somehow disengaged from fundamental issues of social justice)” (Hutchings). However, what Bate and Kroeber both established was a context for perceiving the ways Romantic texts spanned mind, body, and world. Criticism which
addresses the way Romantic texts broke down Cartesian separations is very much concerned with social justice—but through a different approach and lens. Likewise, Wordsworth’s view may be recuperated for progressive politics as well—politics which perceive the well-being of individuals as imperative and primary, especially in the face of larger, monied, and more powerful forces and interests—be they corporate or government interests. Frankly, Wordsworth’s view may be inscribed as radical in the many ways he advocates for individuals and natural environs amidst an increasingly commodified world. Namely, Wordsworth’s attempt may be described as push-back against an enormous force of capitalism harnessing technology for profit at the expense of individuals, communities, and certainly, nature. In his second letter protesting the Kendal and Windermere Railways, Wordsworth in fact identifies what he sees as hypocrisy: “I have been endeavoring to support moral sentiments and intellectual pleasures of a high order against an enmity which seems growing more and more formidable every day; I mean ‘Utilitarianism,’ serving as a mask for cupidity and gambling speculations” (Wordsworth Kendal 19). Here, Wordsworth specifically identifies the rhetoric employed to justify the expansion of the railway into the district as hypocritical—utilitarianism “serving as a mask” with philanthropic intent and hiding the goals of venture capitalism.

Moreover, that Wordsworth constructed nature as a “sphere of high culture” or that he “demonized” working-class people is certainly suspect given Wordsworth’s propensity for “exercising imaginative sympathy” throughout his work or as in “The Old Cumberland Beggar” as Matthew Brennan points out in “Wordsworth’s Characters” (2015). Or that “Wordsworth wants laws that give value to the lives of people who need relief, a political goal he consistently held to during his evolution from young radical to middle-aged Tory” (Brennan 256). Wordsworth’s sympathy for marginalized figures is therefore at odds with assessments which categorically identify him as conservative later in life, unconcerned with the wellbeing of the poor or even the working
class. Wordsworth’s sympathies are explored at length in the work of critics such as Toby R. Benis in *Romanticism on the Road: The Marginal Gains of Wordsworth’s Homeless* (2000) and Gary Harrison in *Wordsworth’s Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty and Power* (1994). Other writers take a hard line against Wordsworth by drawing on ideas of cultural capital. In the case of John Frow in “Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia” (1997), he quotes at length from Wordsworth’s *Letters on the Kendal and Windermere Railway* to argue that Wordsworth “cloaks” class snobbery within a cultural capital argument of “taste” which is coded for aesthetics and in turn, privilege (96-98). Frow states, “[t]here can be little doubt that Wordsworth’s concern is indeed not for these aesthetically deprived workers but for those who enjoy a privileged and protected access to a scarce resource” (98). By fully contextualizing Wordsworth’s concerns within aesthetics and privilege, Frow firmly commodifies the region – precisely what Wordsworth seeks to resist. Such critiques overlook Wordsworth’s reverence for nature itself and fail to acknowledge the intermingling relationships Wordsworth strives to preserve and articulate throughout his poetic language and sensibility.

Moreover, through an embodied, embedded lens, Wordsworth’s call upon nature appears to be less of an “appropriation of the voice of nature” and more of a recognition of humanity’s deep embeddedness within it. Views which relegate Wordsworth to an apolitical or elitist position are difficult to unseat even in ecocritical perspectives, perhaps in part due to the ways we see ourselves as separate and apart from our environs, rather than as a part of our environs. We may choose to interpret this tendency as inherent in what Dennett calls “Cartesian gravity.”26 A descriptive passage from Hess’s work exemplifies a persistent disconnect in our investment in nature:

Others, however, saw in them the darker sides of modern capitalism, threatening the general invasion and corruption of the countryside by the city and its commercial values. The

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weblike spread of the rail lines through the traditional English countryside became a symbol for the overall infiltration of modernity throughout English life and values. Railway construction often required massive engineering, erecting magnificent bridges, tunnels, and viaducts and carving ugly, denuded scars through mountains and hills, leaving raw wounds on the landscape. These wounds healed quickly, revegetating in a matter of a few decades, and in time railways became comfortably integrated within the fabric of rural life, as their environmental impact proved to be relatively benign (especially compared to the twentieth-century automobile). But in the 1840s, the railways’ damage to traditional landscapes was starkly visible, a clear sign of the aesthetic and cultural costs of modernity. (Hess 121)

From one perspective, the “wounds” Hess describes do heal quickly – to both the natural landscapes and the communities of which those landscapes are a part. However, it is not simply tradition that is at stake – nor are the costs simply “aesthetic and cultural costs of modernity.” Rather, ways of living and being are changed and often lost. Landscapes are irreversibly altered, species are eliminated, and geographies are transformed. In some scenarios, waters are polluted, air is contaminated, and food is poisoned. In other scenarios, individuals are compelled to discard means of living—and in some cases, as with enclosure laws, individuals lose their choice of livelihoods and environs as well. Dismissing what amounts to violent destruction because of an ability to heal has profoundly disturbing consequences at best. Such perspectives certainly do not encourage responsible, active, long-term policy making with regard to the land, communities, or individuals. Simply put, such perspectives do not encourage us to care about the damage we do to the environs in the name of progress—nor the feelings or health of the inhabitants often displaced and affected by such changes on their environs. What is at stake in objecting to Hess’s passage in particular, but also this perspective in general, is a view of a changing culture of technologies that in fact changes the environs and inhabitants of their world.

… understanding what feelings are, how they work, and what they mean is indispensable to the future construction of a view of human beings more accurate than the one currently available, a view that would take into account advances in the social sciences, cognitive science, and biology. Why is such a construction of any practical use? Because the success or failure of humanity depends in large measure on how the public and the institutions charged with the governance of public life incorporate that revised view of human beings in principles and policies. An understanding of the neurobiology of emotion and feelings is a key to the formulation of principles and policies capable of reducing human distress and enhancing human flourishing. (Damasio *Looking for Spinoza* 7-8)

Damasio’s iteration of the practical consequences of “understanding the neurobiology of emotion and feelings” directly addresses the relationship between “the governance of public life” and “human distress” and “human flourishing.” The connection is direct although the relationships are complex. Wordsworth’s and De Quincey’s observations about the railways tap into these intersections between mind, body, and the environs in which the embodied mind finds itself.

In fact, many Romantic observations were complex, nuanced, and penetrating insights into the early days of industrialization and its technological effects on environs and people in them. While I argue that many of these observations were not anti-technology per se, alternative interpretations such as those offered by many of the New Historicist critics, or that offered by Hess, do not give enough weight to the impact of technologies as part of the environs in their critiques of Romantic authors. Nor do such interpretations give enough attention to Romantic authors’
engagement with their natural environs as those environs are altered by progress. In part, this may be because we are still living amidst the changes that began then, and we have not yet achieved minimum distance for maximum perspective. What may be needed is a more material perspective.

In “A Language that is Ever Green” (2006), Jonathan Bate compares the responses of Thomas De Quincey and John Stuart Mill to Wordsworth’s work. Bate describes De Quincey’s critique as “materialistic and realistic, skeptical and interrogative, ultimately political” (380). Bate describes Mill’s response as “spiritual and emotive, sympathetic and engaged, ultimately medicinal” (380). However, Bate’s perspective may be altered slightly—and quite productively—by engaging nature as material, its emotional affect as realistic, and our relationship with nature as integral. In doing so, we arrive at a different reading of Wordsworth—one which underscores the urgency with which we should protect our relationship with nature. This becomes clearer when we refuse the Cartesian bifurcation of body from mind, and thus being from environs. In fact, when we recognize the intimate function of nature in the well-being of all creatures, humanity included, Wordsworth’s visions in fact do become arguably political and certainly radical. The passage that Mill wrote in *Autobiography* (1873), quoted at some length by Bate, makes this point:

> In the first place, these poems addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my [pleasurable] susceptibilities, the love of rural objects and natural scenery; to which I had been indebted not only for much of the pleasure of my life, but quite recently for relief from one of my longest relapses into depression …. But Wordsworth would never have had any great effect on me, if he had merely placed before me beautiful pictures of natural scenery. Scott does this still better than Wordsworth, and a very second-rate landscape does it more effectually than any poet. What made Wordsworth’s poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. [Emphasis mine.] (Mill *Autobiography* (1873) qtd. in Bate 379-80)
Most striking here is Mill’s observation that it is the relationship between the natural environs and the internal atmosphere of the self that Wordsworth is particularly adept at establishing and describing. Wordsworth understood and was able to poetically articulate something that cognitive and social scientists and psychologists have established only recently—that nature has a direct, immediate, and healing impact on the embodied mind. What is more striking is the effect that the descriptive language has on Mill who claimed that the words healed his depression. The language Wordsworth uses has nearly the effect of being in nature itself. In language, Wordsworth replicates our sense of being in the world. What Mill describes is a profound experience of empathy:

They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings … I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings. . . . The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it. (Mill qtd. in Bate 379-80)

These are material findings of a tangible material state: our physical environments have an immediate effect on the well-being of an organism and in fact, on the development and being of the self. In the case of Mill, the poetics of Wordsworth helped to heal Mill’s mind; moreover, Wordsworth’s poetry was what Mill needed to heal.

27 See “To Fight the Winter Blues, Try a Dose of Nature” (2017) in which Florence Williams reports a number of scientific studies which have established the mental and physical benefits of nature.
28 In Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain (2003), Antonio Damasio addresses the reasons for caring about a cognitive perspective in relation to the interplay of feelings and emotions. Feelings are “revelations” of “human flourishing or human distress” (6-7).
29 In Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness (2009), Alva Noé explains that “[t]he organism’s life is not inside” (46). Rather, “[t]o study mind, as with life itself, we need to keep the whole organism in its natural environment” (45).
Bate draws attention to an important tendency in criticism. When we expect a writer to attend to the particulars of politics in a particular way, we may in fact overlook what the writer, in fact, accomplishes. Bate notes that many “influential readings of Wordsworth are in the tradition of De Quincey’s … They seem to demand of poetry that it should attempt to solve political and social problems; they forget Chekhov’s advice that it is the business of art to pose questions in interesting ways, not to provide answers” (380). Posing questions, in fact, is a far more radical act than posing answers. Amidst any ideology, it will be questions that pierce the ideological veils of oppression, marginalization, or exploitation. Questioning the status quo, the dominant ideologies, is exactly what Romantic writers immerse themselves in doing. In this spirit, Bate takes issue with a number of New Historicist readings rather passionately:

Jerome McGann is annoyed with Wordsworth for finding consolation in nature when he ought to be attending to economic conditions. … Marjorie Levinson is annoyed that Wordsworth doesn’t talk about coal-barges on the river Wye and vagrants in the ruins of Tintern Abbey …. Alan Liu feels a need to do away with … transcendent Nature: ‘there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government.’ (380-81)

Here, Bate makes a point about the dangers of approaching and appropriating poetry with an agenda, by failing to maintain Matthew Arnold’s disinterestedness. However, in pointing out Wordsworth’s lack of political intervention, New Historicist critiques actually draw attention to

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30 “Disinterestedness” was the responsibility of the critic in the view of Matthew Arnold as he defines disinterestedness in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”: “It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word,—disinterestedness. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from ‘the practical view of things’, by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with ….” See Arnold, Matthew. “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864-65) (224).
Chapter 4—The Distances that Haunt Wordsworth and De Quincey

Wordsworth’s other priorities in relation to various relationships—between individuals and the land, abject figures and war, the mind and literature, and so on. In each case, Wordsworth draws attention to effects, and if one approaches emotional effects as also bodily effects, and bodily effects as also emotional effects, we are left with a poetics of materiality which takes into account the material effects of progress intersectionally in multiple areas of life, interpersonally, socially, geographically, politically, intellectually, and artistically.

Many Romantic authors, including William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey, offer complex and subtle insights into theirs and others’ experiences of times of transition now lost to us as immediate objects of study. Yet, those insights are too often relegated to a realm of preindustrial nostalgia and personal sentimentality. Jones remarks, “[by] now the association of Romanticism with the Luddites and, in turn, with the Luddites’ presumed anti-technology philosophy is widespread in popular culture. It also persists among some literary academics” (2). Jones provides two quotes which “could have been multiplied indefinitely,” one written by William Safire and the other by Kirkpatrick Sale, both of which exemplify how the “neo-Luddite” movement of the 1990s, “this conflict between technology and its discontents depended on established clichés about Romanticism” (Jones 2). In fact, the anti-technological link often made between the Luddites and Romantics is largely fictional.31 As David Collings points out in Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny at the End of Early Modern England (2009), “[d]espite the received image of the technology-hating Luddite, … workers protested not against machines but against their ill-advised adoption in the face of worker distress”32 (223). Likewise, Romantic authors’ stances on

31 Luddites: “A group of early 19th-century English textile workers who believed that the introduction of new machinery was threatening their jobs. They responded by breaking up the machines. The name derives from a workman called Ned Ludd, nicknamed King Ludd, who is thought to have destroyed two stocking frames.” Delahunty, Andrew, and Sheila Dignen. “Luddites.” The Oxford Dictionary of Reference and Allusion. (2010).

32 As David Collings points out in Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny at the End of Early Modern England (2009), “[b]etween 1790 and 1834, the British state undermined the traditional status of plebians on several fronts at once” (222). They “saw a dramatic decrease in the purchasing power of their income” (222). They “lost their rights to common land, whether by pasturing a cow on the common or by gathering fuel from local woods and forest [and] were often stripped of much of their
technology were far more complex than being simply “technology-hating.” According to Jones, “[m]any self-described neo-Luddites unwittingly participate in what E. P. Thompson (who was writing about the Luddites among other groups) famously called the “enormous condescension of posterity,” by confusing the Luddites with clichés associated with Romanticism, but also by giving the Luddites too little credit for making their own myths, creating their own labor subculture” (13). Perhaps what makes Luddites so appealing to neo-Luddites “is what is perceived as their closer connection to and control over material reality, their apparently clear-cut target: machines at which one could swing a hammer” (15). Moreover, neo-Luddites, according to Jones, “over-emphasize the Romantic idea of nature and the problem of individual consciousness and transcendence (and “ideas” and philosophical “problems” in general) when Luddism was all about anonymous, collective actions—though these included discursive actions, acts of writing” (12). Romantic efforts, on the other hand, were highly individualized, subjective, and largely distinctive. In sum, Luddites did not hate machines per se, and Romantics were not Luddites. However, Romantic texts did celebrate nature and question some of the negative impacts of technologies and therefore touched upon a contemporary notion of technology which makes the conflation of Luddites and Romantics so appealing—and misleading.

As Jones observes, “[m]ore generally, neo-Luddites often begin with a very modern, highly abstract concept of ‘technology’ itself” (13), one which is quite different than the “clear-cut target: machines at which one could swing a hammer” (15). According to Jones, this contemporary understanding of technology has more to do with livelihood during the last great wave of enclosures that swept over the home counties in those decades” (222). Protections for labor disappeared, among them, the apprenticeship clauses in 1814 (223). Additionally, “the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 and the repeal of the power of justices of the peace to fix wages in 1813 left workers with very few of their traditional resources to counteract the downward pressure on wages. Moreover, workers who were already enduring a significant loss of their after-tax income or labor status frequently encountered the further challenge of new labor-saving machines; although the introduction of such devices may have been acceptable in years when work was plentiful, imposing them during periods of distress threatened to deprive laborers of an already insufficient support, provoking them to resist more notoriously in the Luddite disturbances and the Swing riots” (223).
nanotech and biotech and genetic engineering, genetically modified crops (“Frankenfood”) and micro-organisms and micro-machines (the distinction is increasingly blurred) [which] threaten to give technology dominion over our bodies, our very interiors. A side effect of this perceived increase in the autonomy and ubiquity of technology is a general anxiety and suspicion of anything technological, an anxiety that borders on a collective form of apophenia (the tendency to see patterns everywhere). (Jones 15)

Jones’s observations highlight important points: 1) while Luddites are rhetorically attractive because they are easily associated with machines, a machine then, and technology now, mean very different things – not only in terms of the technology itself but also as it is embedded in our world; 2) Luddites and Romantics had little if anything in common; however, 3) our attraction to Romantics critiques may have some intuitive merit. Romantic writers addressed the liquidity of technological affect before the technologies themselves were deeply embedded in our daily lives. They were writing through this process of transition from a world in which machine technologies were not embedded into a world in which machine technologies began to reshape the world entirely. It is the Romantics’ very pre-Victorian awareness that makes their insights so special. A better view of the Luddites also recasts the utilitarian argument in favor of progress which presumably benefits the working class, at least in the arguments of venture capitalists. What the Romantic poets did was offer an alternative view outside the dominant hegemony—which indeed aligns them with some of the labor protests of the Luddites. As artists, Romantics act as ideological filters—extracting the essence of experience from the belief systems which the dominant ideologies of the time put into play. Their literature was able to draw “attention to oppressive structures of the cultural system” while giving “voice to what these structures suppress[ed]” (Zapf qtd. in Goodbody 553).

Rather than offering us over-simplified critiques of technology, what Wordsworth and De Quincey contribute to the centuries-long discussion are well-considered, complex considerations of
the environmental, economic, social, material, and psychological effects of industrializing technologies’ effects on individuals—thereby addressing the more “liquid” or “embedded” qualities of what technology would become today, “[i]ncreasingly invisible yet everywhere at once” (Jones 13-15). They offer us a Romantic view of a changing world. They consider the world in relationship to developing technological architectures throughout the world which, in turn, offers us perspectives which cultivate more holistic views of the world that recognize human beings as not only part of the world, but also the world as part of who we are. By extension, Romantic authors draw our attention to the fact that whatever changes we make to the world, in turn, change us.

In the previous chapter, I looked at the tangible material effects of the technological architecture of the chimney as a kind of networked environment which created hidden spaces that contained the labor of children, the chimney sweeps. My focus was on our built environs, one of our technological architectures—our chimneys, and their material effects on the children who inhabited them. I explored some ways William Blake, in revealing the human interiors of chimneys, linked bodily and emotional human experience with the environs in which the abject chimney sweepers found themselves, environs created by technology and perpetuated by necessity. The living conditions themselves were upheld by a necessity for chimneys. In revealing these hidden spaces and their human interiors, Blake created sites of dialogue which revealed that these spaces, the chimneys, were not neutral as high rooftops, urban landscapes or as interior hearths. As integral and often invisible as chimneys were to the daily business of living, so integral and invisible was the cost in human labor, bodies, and minds. It is the attention Blake draws to the human experience of technologically-created aspects of physical environs and its effects on humans’ beings that underscores the inseparable relationship between bodily health, emotional well-being, and the conditions of our environs. That these three elements must be addressed as inextricable from one another, even intimately connected, is amongst the most significant Romantic inheritances. By
extension, since our technologies are how we interact with our environs, with our technologies we leave our impress upon our world, changing it, so that it is an altered world which in turn changes us. This matters.

The rest of this chapter looks at Wordsworth’s critique of the ways railway technologies impacted our experience of landscape with a brief look at De Quincey’s description of the impact of train locomotion on the mind. This chapter approaches the Romantic lens with the understanding that “there is no such thing as complete detachment from the community of others and from the larger environmental structures and situations” as Noë reminds us (52). Given that Noë refers to the making of the self, of consciousness, he, along with other radical cognitive philosophers, offers a way into comprehending the role of the individual self in relation to a “community of others” and “larger environmental structures and situations” without relegating poetic voices to solipsistic or anthropocentric viewpoints. The “self” cannot be extricated from the relations all around in which the self is embedded. To risk stating the obvious, poets cannot write of or to an environs, others, or situations without writing themselves into or out of such texts. To relegate poetic voices to self-aggrandizement misses the mark and asks for the impossible. However, I propose that many of the environmental dynamics which Romantic authors were responding to were so new, and the effects of the new technologies were still so unknown, that while many of them responded to these changes, they did so instinctively and often lacking the language or culturally clear intellectual scaffolding to articulate their meanings as clearly as many contemporary critics would like—as Jonathan Bate intimates in his criticism of the New Historicists (Bate “A Language” 380).

While our technologies have been shaping our “larger environmental structures and situations” (Noë 52) for millennia, over recent centuries technology grew into a force which has become as much a part of our daily relationship with our environs as nature is and has always been. Our relationships with our technologies have long surpassed any relationship we maintained with
nature as a species. The technologies we have created, while altering our environs, alter us as we live deeply embedded within them in a relationship of reciprocity. In their written critiques of technology’s effects, the work of both William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey address our embeddedness within our environs, poetically articulating a model of the mind that cognitive theorists now call “extended” or “embodied.” Romantic authors addressed embeddedness long before scientists had coined such terms. This too is part of what makes their perspectives so special. An area of ongoing debate, embodied cognitive theories are still considered radical. This chapter taps the more radical end of the cognitive theory while considering the work of Wordsworth and De Quincey with some of the recent proposals of embodied cognitive theories in mind.

I further propose that the work of Wordsworth and De Quincey offers many opportunities to explore a conclusion that John Haugeland reaches in “Mind Embodied and Embedded” (1998):

If we are to understand mind as the locus of intelligence, we cannot follow Descartes in regarding it as separable in principle from the body and the world …. Broader approaches, freed of that prejudicial commitment, can look again at perception and action, at skillful involvement with public equipment and social organization, and see not principles of separation but all sorts of close coupling and functional unity…. [H]uman intelligence abides in the meaningful—which, far from being restricted to representations, extends to the entire human world. Mind, therefore, is not incidentally but intimately embodied and intimately embedded in its world. (236-37)

Here, Haugeland offers what was to become a “benchmark assertion” in embodied cognitive theory, that “cognition leaks out into the body and the world” (Clark Supersizing xxviii). The “intimacy”

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33 An “extended” model of the mind, according to Andy Clark in *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (2011), “is a view according to which thinking and cognizing may (at times) depend directly and noninstrumentally upon the ongoing work of the body and/or the extraorganismic environment” (Clark xxviii).
Haugeland asserts is too easily misread in discussions of technology’s effects—too often reduced to yet another false dichotomy fully integrated into contemporary culture, nature versus nurture. As Andy Clark points out:

What this passage makes clear is that the core claim at issue is not primarily a claim about development and learning. Nor is it about the undoubted role of body and world in fixing the contents of thought or in determining the sequence of thoughts or even in determining what kinds of thing we find it worth thinking about. Rather, what is at issue is something to do with the separability of mind, body, and world, at least for the purposes of understanding mind as the ‘locus of intelligence.’ What Haugeland is selling is a radical package deal aimed at undermining [emphasis mine] a simple, but arguably distortive, model of mind. This is the model of mind as essentially inner and, in our case, always and everywhere neurally realized. It is, to put it bluntly, the model of mind as brain (and perhaps brain and central nervous system): a model increasingly prevalent in a culture where just about everything to do with thinking seems to be accompanied by some kind of image of the brain. Call this model BRAINBOUND. (Clark *Supersizing* xxvii)

In a “brainbound” model, which is the most common notion of mind, “the (nonneural) body is just the sensor and effector system of the brain, and the rest of the world is just the arena in which adaptive problems get posed and in which the brain-body system must sense and act” (Clark *Supersizing* xxvii). Subtly, then, when discussing, for instance, behavior or development in terms of nature versus nurture, we are always defaulting to a brainbound model of the mind which insists upon an epistemological notion of the mind being contained within the skull to be influenced from without or guided through DNA from within.

Conversely, what is now emerging is an “extended” theory of mind which posits a reciprocity of being in the world which has historically been overlooked in cognitive science and
psychology (and culture for that matter). Clark explains as follows: “Maximally opposed to
BRAINBOUND is a view according to which thinking and cognizing may (at times) depend directly
and noninstrumentally upon the ongoing work of the body and/or the extraorganismic
environment. Call this model EXTENDED” (xxviii). Within the framework of an extended model
of mind,

the actual operations that realize certain forms of human cognizing include inextricable
tangles of feedback, feed-forward and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-
cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world. The local mechanisms of mind, if this is
correct, are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world. (Clark Supersizing
xxviii)

In other words, our consciousness, our minds, are fully integrated into the world around us in
relationships of reciprocity. We are not fully separate beings who exist apart from ourselves or our
environs. We are, essentially, entangled within our environs and each other.

As Clark concedes, “[t]hat may sound like a strange idea.” “But it is hardly stranger,” he
thinks, “than the commonplace idea that the activity of brain-meat realizes all that matters about
human cognition” (xxviii). States Clark:

[i]n questioning BRAINBOUND, I shall not in any way be questioning the basic materialist
vision of mind as emerging fully and without residue from physical goings-on. Any added
strangeness flows merely from the fact that some of the relevant goings-on, if EXTENDED
is correct, don’t stay neatly in the brain. They don’t even stay neatly within the biological
body. On the contrary, they prove perfectly and productively able to span brain, body, and
world. (Clark Supersizing xxviii)

Applying the lens of the “extended” model to Romantic texts lends us entirely new perspectives on
Romantic critiques of technological architectures with respect to, for example, discussing the effects
of the railways on places and train travel on the mind. The “extended” model of mind does not simply invite new perspectives, it insists on them. Moreover, it validates observations which consider the tremendous impact technology has on the mind via both the body and our environs. Perhaps most significantly, the “extended” model of mind gives us new ways of thinking and talking about technology’s effects.

If we find new ways to discuss these interrelationships, and if we are able to shake off our habitually dichotomous ways of thinking, we open ourselves to organizing this information about our world in new ways, overwhelming in their implications. Language is no small part of that process. This connects us back to Hubert Zapf’s assertions about the power of literary language, that literature “has a unique capacity to address the whole person and cross boundaries between otherwise divided social systems and discourse” (Goodbody 553). This speaks to a point about language that Clark makes:

Our mature mental routines are not merely self-engineered: They are massively, overwhelmingly, almost unimaginably self-engineered. The linguistic scaffoldings that surround us, and that we ourselves create, are both cognition enhancing in their own right and help provide the tools we use to discover and build the myriad props and scaffoldings whose cumulative effect is to press minds like ours from the biological flux.

(Clark Supersizing 59-60)

Clark’s observations also speak to Jonathan Bate’s question in Song of the Earth (2000), “What are poets for?” (251). Poetic language is a special kind of articulation; it foregrounds meaning, slows down looking, and by its very nature, it brings new perspectives to the observed. In The Poetics of Space (1958), Gaston Bachelard says, “[a]ll important words, all the words marked for grandeur by a poet, are keys to the universe, to the dual universe of the Cosmos and the depths of the human
spirit” (198). This understanding through the articulation of poetic language is what Wordsworth brings us.

Wordsworth wrote his famous sonnet against the railway in 1844. His stance was met with an uproar. Wordsworth “claimed to a friend that his publication of the sonnet and public letters against the railways brought down upon him a ‘torrent of abuse’” (Hess 132-33). “The Poet Laureate has written a sonnet to prevent the Windermere Railway! A line of fourteen miles is to be stopped by fourteen lines of metre! And science must yield to sentimentality.” So begins the editor’s scathing and sarcastic response, significantly entitled “Poetry Against the World,” to William Wordsworth’s Kendal & Windermere Railway sonnet (1844) which appeared in the Morning Post on October 26, 1844. This unyielding, often mocking, critique was printed immediately below Wordsworth’s sonnet, “On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway.” The editorial links literature to nature (ecology) (literature-nature) and pits literature against science while linking science to the dominant culture of technology-driven industrial progress (science-culture-technology). These are interesting alliances especially when compared to more contemporary critical views which link literature to culture (literature-culture) and science to ecology (science-nature). The shifting alliances are so pronounced that ecocritics find themselves in defensive postures when linking literature to ecology as apparent in Jonathan Bates’s apologetic assertion in Song of the Earth (2000): “Since poetry is a product of culture whereas ecology is a science which describes nature, it may seem perverse to bring the two fields together. But there has always been a network of intimate relations, as well as an apparent hostility, between culture and nature” (Bate 245). The shifting alliances demonstrate that such hostility has more to do with invested ideological interests than any inherent organic division between culture and nature. Then, literature was linked to ecological nature as sentimental, and science was linked to culture as progressive. Now, literature is linked to
culture, again as sentimental, but science is linked to ecological nature as regressive compared to progress as per politics and business. If nothing else, these shifting alignments establish the arbitrariness of ideological associations. In the *Morning Post* editorial, we see evidence that science is not understood as part of nature but part of culture, linked to Apollo’s side of the divide, not with Dionysian nature. Science and culture are forged to technology and business (science-culture-technology), culturally, a crucial moment. Relationships between culture and nature are broken, intentionally, for monetary gain. But relationships are also broken between science and nature despite the age’s increasing discoveries about nature through science. This is at the height of an industrial revolution which further breaks any sense of responsibility to the natural world. The way the machinery of industry progressed was stunning in its hubris—the likes of which are quite apparent in this little editorial which further reinforces and fortifies its stance with plenty of religious allusions that draw upon Utilitarian ideology as well.

The straw man and ad hominem rhetoric employed in the editorial response to Wordsworth’s sonnet, to scorn and mock any questioning of progress, remains common enough in similar dialogues today. In context, it is ironic that it is now scientists who most often plead on behalf of the earth and who are met with similarly derisive and dismissive chortles by those (protecting business and national interests) who claim climate change, toxic environs, and poisoned foods among other catastrophes are fantastical fictions. As evidenced by Wordsworth’s sonnet, endnote, and letters, as well as the editorial response printed in its entirety in the pages that follow, this dichotomous debate created strong divisions in perspective at the time—divisions which quickly degenerated into witty repartee, rhetorical banter, and damning wordplay. Wordsworth’s sonnet as printed on October 12, 1844 follows here:

34 Before Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859), Sir Charles Lyell published the highly influential *Principles of Geology* in three volumes in 1830-33. Before him, Erasmus Darwin published his influential *Zoomania* (1794-96) which foreshadowed the modern theory of evolution.
Is there no nook of English ground secure
From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
In youth, and 'mid the busy world kept pure
As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,
Must perish;--how can they this blight endure?
And must he too the ruthless change bemoan
Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orresthead
Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:
Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong.

His sonnet begins in medias res, not in reflection or rumination, but in response to the announcement of the railway’s plans for the Lake District. The sonnet underscores the remoteness of the region and its impending penetration by railway lines despite its out-of-the-way location emphasized by the word “nook”: “Is there no nook of English ground secure / From rash assault?” (1-2). The word “assault” invokes the violence of Wordsworth’s interpretation of this intrusion while “Schemes of retirement sown / in youth” (2-3) illustrates the plans and dreams of individuals which are tossed aside before the force of the purveyors of looming industrial might. “And must he too the ruthless change bemoan” (6) brings to mind the rest of England through which the railway companies were laying tracks at such a rapid pace that they would increase from “just under 100
miles” in 1832 to 6,600 miles by 1852 as discussed in chapter two (Freeman 1). Wordsworth’s sonnet was written amidst this pivotal time, the early stages of a process which marked “the moment at which the capitalism that now covers the earth began to take effect” as Timothy Morton describes it in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) (4). The forces with which change would reshape the environs was every bit as significant as Wordsworth intimates. Amidst the cultural episteme, Wordsworth had a keen eye for the inimical attitude which utilitarian purveyors of profit in whom, indeed, “human hearts” may “be dead” (12) had toward not only the environs but the individual people in them.

Another mindset aside progress lingered in the not so distant past—at least in rural areas. A slower and more intimate relationship with a nature which included the land and other creatures had always been sustained by some, a point I will further explore in the work of John Clare in the following chapter. Here, I wish to point out that Wordsworth’s sonnet is reminiscent of Robert Burns’s “To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plough” (1785) in which the poet’s plough crashes through the ground and into the home she had built underground in preparation for cold winter: “Till crash! the cruel coulter past / Out thro’ thy cell” (Till crashed the cruel plough passed / Out through your cell) (29-30). The comparison is faint, but the mindset is not, particularly in relation to the Burns’s lines in the second stanza in which he apologizes to the mouse: “I’m truly sorry man’s dominion” (7), recognizes a broken relationship between humanity and “nature” as it is specifically followed by “Has broken nature’s social union” (8). Burns then emphasizes the intermingling of humanity with other creatures on earth in the lines “earth-born companion, / An’ fellow-mortal!” (lines 11-12).

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Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!

I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion,
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave
'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell-
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
Burns conveys the smallness of one creature in the face of even as simple a technology as a plough. Wordsworth conveys the futility of one human being’s dreams in the way of the trains. It may be very difficult for us now to really comprehend the shock of such rapid change. Burn’s poem is useful in this way, providing us with the emotional distance of species to see the surprise of a creature suddenly unearthed—the roof torn off her home—in what she imagines to be a safe and secluded domain she had carefully planned and prepared for a future season of winter. We think we have access to foresight, but we don’t: “thou art no thy-lane, / In proving foresight may be vain; / The best-laid schemes ‘o mice an men / Gang aft-agly” (36-39). Wordsworth himself alludes to his respect for Robert Burns in the first letter he would write in response to the editorial in which Wordsworth describes Burns as “a man of extraordinary genius, who was bred to hard labour in agricultural employments” (Wordsworth Kendal No. I 10). As a rural poet, Burns maintained a close and intimate relationship with the earth, with nature, and the world’s other creatures. The very subject matter of Burns’s poem belies this intimacy, and its subject underscores a pace of life through which such events may still be discovered and their significance uncovered in language—a gradual pace to which Wordsworth adheres and to which I will return later in this chapter. An accidental connection may be observed here as well—between the inadvertent destruction caused by a technology, the plough, and the foresight of a creature whose plans are literally upended. The mouse is not a target of the technology, just an unfortunate aside who nonetheless suffers as collateral damage. In a sense, one may say that technology leaves no stone unturned, and it encroaches upon the most private of nature’s places.

While some of these themes are indirect, they arise in the letters Wordsworth would write as follow up to his sonnet and in response to his critics. In this context, the editorial response printed
beneath Wordsworth’s sonnet in the *Morning Post* (included in its entirety in the following pages—and in which the sonnet is altogether misconstrued) along with the poet’s accompanying endnote to the poem, are crucial to comprehending the context in which Wordsworth would later write his two famous *Kendal and Windermere Railway Letters* clarifying his position. This is important because, perhaps even more than the sonnet itself, his later letters have strongly influenced later criticism of his position on the Railway as nostalgic or entitled by turns. Moreover, it is in his letters, amidst his own defensive posturing, that he crafts an argument which has been taken to be against the poor. In his first letter, he specifically contextualizes what follows in his letters in such terms: “The Lakes are … at present of very easy access for all persons; but if they be not made still more so, the poor it is said, will be wronged. Before this be admitted let the question be fairly looked into, and its different bearings examined” (*Wordsworth Kendal No. I* 6). Decontextualized from the editorial response to his sonnet, Wordsworth’s position may be too easily dismissed as sentimental attachment to a natural landscape upon which his identity as an author was conceived, as a class issue which reflected an aristocratic distaste for an emerging middle class, or as an irrational and stubborn resistance to a ‘progress’ which supposedly has only the good of the people in mind (and which does not even pretend to revere nature at all).

Here, I look at Wordsworth’s note immediately following the sonnet which draws attention to a local’s attachment to and reverence for nature and local flora, in this case a tree. His note attempts to loosen the sonnet from the polemics of the debate and draws attention to the way the intended railway could inadvertently affect individuals and their attachments to the land. The editorial response follows. Later in this chapter, I look more closely at the two now-famous letters. Wordsworth’s note to the poem reads:

Let not the above [sonnet] be considered as merely a poetical effusion. The degree and kind of attachment which many of the yeomanry feel to their small inheritances can scarcely be
over-rated. Near the house of one of them stands a magnificent tree, which a neighbour of
the owner advised him to fell for profit's sake. "Fell it!" exclaimed the yeoman, "I had rather
fall on my knees and worship it." It happens, I believe, that the intended railway would pass
through this little property, and I hope that an apology for the answer will not be thought
necessary by one who enters into the strength of the feeling. (Wordsworth *Morning Post*)

Here, as in the sonnet, Wordsworth calls for an understanding that nature not only should but does
have a place in life. He does so by juxtaposing a popular opinion motivated by an eye for profit
with another opinion motivated by reverence for nature. Thus, he draws attention to marginalized
nature’s value and its place in the community through the perspective of another human individual
who exemplifies a feeling of such reverence for nature: “‘Fell it!’ exclaimed the yeoman, ‘I had rather
fall on my knees and worship it.’” In this way, Wordsworth refuses the irrelevance of nature in the
eyes of those who would pursue profit at the expense of a tree, but not only a tree, but one person’s
attachment to a tree, but not just a tree, but a tree’s place in the world, outside monetary or use
value, its history, and its place in someone's mind. In doing so, Wordsworth invokes a sense of both
a personal and a shared history in this story. He also refuses the recuperation of nature into what
Heidegger would term “standing-reserve.” As Jonathan Bate explains in *Song of the Earth* (2000):

> [m]odern technology turns all things into what Heidegger calls ‘standing-reserve’ (*Bestand*).
> When a mountain is set upon, whether it is made into a mine or a nature reserve, it is
> converted into standing-reserve. It is then revealed not as a mountain but as a resource for
> human consumption – which may be tourism’s hungry consumption with the eye as much as
> industry’s consumption of matter. (Bate 254)

Wordsworth’s story about the yeoman is not just a personal story of one man but also part of the
shared lore of the community. The story is not just a plea for nature conservation but also evidence
of human relationships with nature. The intermingling of nature and culture emerges here—as does
the intermingling of individuals and nature in which a single individual’s identity has indeed
developed in a relationship to aspects of nature. Moreover, nature, here, exists outside of and
beyond its potential “as a resource for human consumption” which, as Wordsworth’s letters reveal,
applies to “tourism’s hungry consumption with the eye as much as industry’s consumption of
matter” (Bate 254).

However, such personal histories diminish in value under the utilitarian eye which overlooks
the dynamic and integral role such attachments play as part of a community in favor of seeing all
land as “standing-reserve.” The emphasis Wordsworth places on an individual’s experience gestures
toward another kind of “imaginative sympathy” Wordsworth strives to invoke elsewhere—as in the
case of “The Old Cumberland Beggar” which, as Gary Harrison argues in Wordsworth’s Vagrant Muse
(1994), asks us “to admire the purposiveness of the beggar’s position in the community, and …
seeks to establish between beggar and benefactor a common identity” (154). “Thus,” according to
Harrison, “the poem attempts to reclaim for the beggar a place and function within the community,
to conflate the center and the periphery as common space” (154). This is relevant in terms of the
community Wordsworth recognizes in his work as well as the position of more marginalized
figures—such as beggars, or as Harrison points out, poets as well:

Assigning the beggar an important, if not crucial, role in society was in part a function of
Wordsworth’s own need to come to terms with his chosen profession, which, like the
beggar’s, was subject to questions of authenticity and value.

Wordsworth attributes the beggar’s social instrumentality to a natural law that
directly contradicts the cold calculus of the utilitarians, and the poem includes him in a larger
group of marginals or outcasts whose value to society, though not immediately apparent, is
significant. (54)
Wordsworth’s description of the yeoman’s reverence for the tree also “directly contradicts the cold calculus of the utilitarians,” and it alludes to “a natural law” with respect to the tree which is a part of a community. If we lack the language to understand our attachment to ‘things’ such as trees, it is because we use an anthropocentric lens from which we judge things based solely on their quantitative use value. This is partly a failure of language which has a broken relationship to nature. Through our language, we create ideologies which fail to recognize our embeddedness within nature. As a result, our language distances us from nature in most areas of life. Poetic language is a notable exception.

Wordsworth seeks to mend such breaks through poetic thought and poetic language. As such, Wordsworth invokes the powerlessness of an individual’s intimate sense of their own world, the mind and the environs with which it has bonded, with the line “the intended railway would pass through this little property.” He captures the impersonal ambition, singular vision, and cool disregard for individuals, nature and the shared relationship between individuals and nature which pose an inconvenience in the way of the behemoth of the railway enterprise—an attitude reinforced by the utilitarian values fashionable at the time. Unfortunately, calling upon tradition, or the emotional feeling of an individual, was already falling out of fashion. Laws of ‘eminent domain’ were not yet in place, but the cultural mind-set was beginning to roil. Amidst the utilitarian zeitgeist, no one individual may justifiably stand against the might of progress: “Schemes of retirement sown / … In youth, … / Must perish;—how can they this blight endure?” (2-3, 5). In the sonnet, the poet foresees the “utilitarian lure” (7) and its argument, and a prophesy of defeat lingers in the last lines of the sonnet as Wordsworth calls upon nature: “ … if human hearts be dead, / Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong / And constant voice, protest against the wrong” (12-14). He speaks to the very elements, the “passing winds” with a recognition of their timeless, and
perhaps with the knowledge that nature will continue, although the quality of our relationship to it may not.

Scott Hess argues that Wordsworth appropriates nature “to support his own cultural position” (116). However, Wordsworth’s call upon nature in the sonnet taken together with the anecdotal story he provides about a yeoman who would “rather fall on [his] knees and worship [the tree]” rather than “[f]ell it” speaks directly to Wordsworth’s desperate desire to convey a sense of the wonder that is nature intermingling with our own sense of place in our environs, in a world increasingly inimical to a more rural or reverently cultivated nature’s place in the world. Wordsworth’s call must be interpreted as an intervention into deepening utilitarian values amidst the Cartesian enlightenment episteme. Furthermore, he strongly links humanity’s embedded, embodied consciousness with nature and nature’s being. If not explicitly, Wordsworth gestures toward an intermingling interdependence—one which should by now be clear but to which contemporary culture still remains stubbornly resistant. The poet calls upon a unity, a wholeness, and unhesitatingly establishes a space for what Kate Rigby and Gernot Böhme’s describe as “a critical theory of social-natural relations” (Rigby 140). Wordsworth’s direct of address of nature emphasizes a barely concealed despair. The lines, “[p]lead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance / Of nature” (11-12) are striking and entirely overlooked by the editorial response which was printed beneath the sonnet in the Morning Post while the rest of the sonnet is altogether misunderstood, likely deliberately, for rhetorical purposes in a straw man argument in favor of railway expansion and ‘progress.’

The defense of progress in the editorial is reinforced with a strong scaffolding of religious references not to be overlooked. The editorial is liberally sprinkled with references to Robert

Pollok’s *The Course of Time* (1828), an epic poem which was “published to great acclaim and admiration,” now largely forgotten, but which was reprinted in as many as twenty editions over fifty years (Domonye-Lyttle and Davis). *The Course of Time* was a Calvinist version of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). The references to Pollok’s poem contained in the editorial emphasize the contempt, reinforced by dogmatic religiosity, Wordsworth’s sonnet provoked. This contempt is particularly clear when the lines of Pollok’s poem are juxtaposed with Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595/96) with which Wordsworth is aligned in the editorial with “an eye in fine frenzy rolling.” The condescension of the editorial is underscored by appeals to science and utilitarian mores.

Rhetorically, the editorial is a splendid bit of utilitarian and industrial propaganda cloaked in piety.

The Poet Laureate has written a sonnet to prevent the Windermere Railway! A line of fourteen miles is to be stopped by fourteen lines of metre! And science must yield to sentimentality. Trains of people are not to interfere with trains of thought; poetic images being estimated higher than “God’s image,” inheriting only prose. Hills are before human hearts, and streams of water before streams of intelligence. Trees are divinities, before which it is fitting that men should “fall down on their knees and worship them.”* But these tree worshippers must belong to the Lake school. No “utilitarian” must approach that altar. The “beautiful romance of nature” belongs to the Poet Laureate and his clique. The earth is not the Lord’s, any more than “the fulness thereof,” to be given to God’s creatures without respect of persons, and the same exclusive doctrines which have been tried so long for the fruits of the earth are now applied to the crust of the globe itself. All that is beautiful in the lake district belongs to the poet. No eye but “an eye in fine frenzy rolling”37 may look upon

37 “[A]n eye in fine frenzy rolling” refers to Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The lines are contextualized here:

The poet’s eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
such scenes. The valley of Rothay is, by divine right of laureatry, the muses’ exclusive
citadel, and no one must enter there who cannot write a distich. How is it, though, that men

“Who never had a thought in all their lives,
And scarce can tell the name their mother call’d

Them by” –

How is it that these, who lead the Laureate by the nose, got entry to the classic spot? A lack-
a-day! It was in troublous times of party, when Apollo, being too much engaged with
politics, lost watch of the sentry-post, and several ill-bred and illiterate persons crushed into
the immediate precincts of Olympus. But no more incursions of the “common herd” must
be made. If the “million” are to have innocent pleasures, let parks be made into the
neighborhood of Manchester by the purses of the cotton lords. If lake and mountain
scenery be really necessary to elevate the mind of man, and draw him from grosser
indulgences, let the “sons of art” raise artificial hills and make their mill-ponds into lakes,
that the “true romance of nature” may be reserved for the truly romantic.

But we must try to be serious, for a concluding sentence on this rhodomontade of
Mr. Wordsworth. Such effusions as we have now under our consideration will perhaps

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38 Most likely quoted from (now nearly forgotten) Scottish Calvinist poet Robert Pollok’s epic poem *The Course of Time* (1827) (29). It was widely published throughout the nineteenth century. According to the *East Renfrewshire’s Heritage Collection*, by “1828 Blackwood reported that it had sold 12,000 copies. By 1867, twenty-five editions had been published, and in 1868 the 78,000th copy was published in Edinburgh. More than twenty editions came from presses in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. It was also one of the earliest books that Blackwoods published that was illustrated.” A “Calvinistic version of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, *The Course of Time* was Pollok’s attempt to write a poem “in which a Calvinistic poet shall represent his God” according to Julie Nall Knowles in “The Course of Time: A Calvinistic Paradise Lost,” *Milton Studies*, Vol. XVIII, (1983) (179).

39 Might this be a loose reference to Pollok as well? While writing of transforming the meaning of the Bible, Pollok writes, “… argued some / From out this book itself, it was a lie, / A fable, framed by crafty men to cheat / The simple herd …” (Pollok 49).

40 Rhodomontade: boastful or inflated talk or behavior.
teach plain men to inquire into the use of a poet laureate, who thus kicks the hand that feeds him. If poets “scorn a false utilitarian lure,” how inconsistent to pocket a pension raised by the utilitarian. Politicians can tell, if poets cannot, how much the railway system is contributing directly to the state’s revenue, as well as to the commercial prosperity of the empire, and the comforts and morals of the people’ and if no better use can be made of poetry than an attempt to arrest this progress of improvement, the question will soon be decided that idealism should no longer be allowed to batten on utilitarianism.

By the way, what has the Poet Laureate been about? Everybody was on the look for an ode at least on the occasion of the late visit of his Majesty of France. Surely the opportunity was a fitting one for making some poetical recompense for the butt of sack. At all events some such production would have been more becoming and appropriate than fourteen lines of indignation launched at the projectors of a scheme for making the beauties of the lakes more easily enjoyed and more widely appreciated. —Morning Chronicle. 41 (Morning Post)

Nature and humanity are bifurcated throughout the editorial. A false concern with the well-being of the public is reflected in an argument which simultaneously calls upon religious virtue: “Trains of people are not to interfere with trains of thought; poetic images being estimated higher than ‘God’s image,’ inheriting only prose.” A reverence of nature is linked to paganism in the phrase, “[t]rees are divinities, before which it is fitting that men should ‘fall down on their knees and worship them.’ But these tree worshippers must belong to the Lake school.” And throughout, Wordsworth is accused of aristocratic exclusivity and snobbishness with phrases such as, “[i]t was in troubous times of party, when Apollo, being too much engaged with politics, lost watch of the sentry-post, and several

41 Immediately followed by an article on the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway.
ill-bred and illiterate persons crushed into the immediate precincts of Olympus,” or “no more incursions of the ‘common herd’ must be made.”

Wordsworth’s concern for the region is reduced to exclusionary practices supposedly upheld by the Lake School, the Poet Laureate “and his clique” flexing elitist rights, sentimental reactions, rejections of science, and paganist views. In every way, the editorial misses, overshoots, and misconstrues the intent behind Wordsworth’s sonnet. Wordsworth is aligned with the fairy world of A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1595/96) while God and religion are invoked by the editorial through the lens of a Calvinist Paradise Lost on behalf of a marvelously astonishing conflation of nature, the rights of the railway enterprise, utilitarian philosophy, and the rights of the people.

In relation to the use of Pollok’s The Course of Time (1827) as a persuasive tactic, two phrases are of special interest here: 1) the reference to the “common herd,” and 2) the lines “Who never had a thought in all their lives, / And scarce can tell the name their mother call’d /Them by.” When the poetic context of these lines are read while keeping in mind the editor’s description of Wordsworth’s perspective cast by an “eye in fine frenzy rolling,” which is of course a direct reference to A Midsummer Night’s Dream, we get a sense of two cultures of a moment colliding. In the case of the references to Pollok, we have a strong sense of a utilitarian cultural system underscored by religion. In the case of aligning Wordsworth with the more chimerical nature Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, we see utilitarian resistance to a Romantic value system which reveres nature over progress. At 359 pages, Pollok’s poem is far too lengthy to analyze here, but its closing stanza gives us a good sense of the poet’s intent:

Thus I have sung beyond thy first request,
Rolling my numbers o’er the track of man,
The world at dawn, at mid-day, and decline:
Time gone, the righteous saved, the wicked damned,
And God’s eternal government approached. (Pollok 359)

I quote Pollok to emphasize the stern faith invoked in the editorial criticism of Wordsworth’s sonnet while aligning Wordsworth with a fairy land. Pollok speaks of the Bible as unerring in its clarity:

“This did that Book declare in obvious phrase / … / … / So plain, so perfectly distinct, that none / Who read with humble wish to understand, / … / Could miss their meaning … (47). Pollok goes on to write that “This Book, this holy Book—on every line” is “Marked with the seal of high divinity” (48). And, “[m]any believed” (49). However, many “turned to a lie, deceiving and deceived: / Each with the accursed sorcery of sin, / To his own wish and vile propensity / Transforming still the meaning of the text” (49). It is in this context that Pollok sketches a situation in which “the simple herd” is preyed upon by those who would have them disbelieve the rights of humanity through God:

Hear, while I briefly tell what mortals proved

By effort of vast of ingenuity,

Most wondrous, though perverse and damnable,

Proved from the Bible, which, as thou hast heard,

So plainly spoke that all could understand.

First, and least in number, argued some

From out this Book itself, it was a lie,

A fable, framed by crafty men to cheat

The simple herd, and make them bow the knee

To kings and priests. These in their wisdom left

The light revealed, and turned to fancies wild …. (Pollok 49)

Within the contextual frame of the editorial, the meaning of Wordsworth’s reverence of nature in the sonnet shifts when read against Pollok’s stern reproach.
More direct is the editor’s attack on Wordsworth’s reverence for nature as the following line references a juxtaposition Pollok draws between nature and faith on pages 129-132 of his poem: “Who never had a thought in all their lives, / And scarce can tell the name their mother call’d /Them by.” While describing the misery of poverty, Pollok describes a suffering beggar as a product of an unyielding and unsympathetic nature: “Turn now thy eye, and look on poverty; / Look on the lowest of her ragged sons. / We find him by the way, sitting in dust; / He has no bread to eat, no tongue to ask, No limbs to walk, no home, no house, no friend. / Observe his goblin cheek, his wretched eye (129). Pollok continues this grim scene with a line that invokes a sense of pathos and despair: “his hand, / if any hand he has, / Involuntarily opens, and trembles forth.” The stanza continues by painting a picture of an indifferent and even cruel nature in which the beggar is embedded:

As comes the traveler’s foot; and hear the groan,
His long and lamentable groan, announce
The want that gnaws within. Severely now
The sun scorches and burns his old bald head:
The frost now glues him to the chilly earth.
On him hail, rain, and tempest rudely beat;
And all the winds of heaven, in jocular mood,
Sport with his withered rags, that, tossed about,
Display his nakedness to passers-by,
And grievously burlesque the human form.
Observe him yet more narrowly. His limbs,
With palsy shaken, about him blasted lie:
And all his flesh is full of putrid sores
And noisome wounds, his bones of racking pains.
Strange vesture this for an immortal soul!
Strange retinue to wait a lord of earth!
It seems as Nature, in some surly mood,
After debate and musing long, had tried
How vile and miserable thing her hand
Could fabricate, then made this meagre man;
A sight so full of perfect misery,
That passengers their faces turned away,
And hasted to be gone; and delicate

And tender women took another path …. (129-130) In the next stanza, Pollok begins, “This great disparity of outward things / Taught many lessons.” But the chief lesson “Though learned by few” is “That God no value set, / That man should none, on goods of worldly kind; / On transitory, frail, external things, / Of migratory, ever-changing sort.” He concludes that “ … in the soul alone— / … God placed the total excellence of man; / And meant him evermore to seek it there” (130). This is a blatant refusal of materiality – of the physicality of being. And embedded within this view is an abdication of humanitarian responsibility for an abject figure suffering in poverty—a view Wordsworth rejects outright—especially in his early work such as, to name just a few instances, “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” “The Discharged Soldier,” “Last of the Flock,” and “The Female Vagrant.”

Pollok creates a distance between the abject figure and the reader, indeed, between the abject figure and the “passengers” with “their faces turned away” in the poem. By contrast, as Harrison points out, “Wordsworth’s early work negotiates a more genuine, if unsettled and sometime unsettling, familiarity with and sensitivity to the concerns of the poor” (81). He does so through
“the beggars, peddlers and discharged soldiers” (81). In fact, Wordsworth “uses these figures to criticize rather than confirm the reader’s complacency in the face of a growing rural poverty” (81). Pollok, on the other hand, “…sustain[s] the reader’s aloofness from the object of pity” (Harrison 81). Pollok furthermore aligns an unsympathetic nature with the object of pity, and in fact holds nature responsible by projecting an intention onto nature for creating such a suffering figure. This has the effect of creating a distance between those who thrive and those who suffer. In turn, this view supports the abdication of responsibility by social institutions for such suffering, and by extension, humanity’s responsibility to one of its own. Pollok abdicates responsibility for the poor on behalf of society and culture.

Moreover, Pollok emphasizes the supremacy of faith over education. The unlearned, if they keep their faith, are rewarded in Pollok’s poem. This is evident in Pollok’s lines, “Who never had a thought in all their lives, / And scarce can tell the name their mother call’d /Them by.” Here, he refers to the “untaught” faithful who “when he thought he saw the devil in disguise … fled” (131). “The word philosophy he never heard, / Or science; never heard of liberty, / Necessity, or laws of gravitation; / And never had an unbelieving doubt” (131). He lived and died happy: “Lived happy and died happy, and was saved” (132). The context in which the reference appears in the editorial of the Morning Post, ridicules Wordsworth’s concerns, and sarcastically asks how could commoners such as those Wordsworth supposedly objects to get “entry to the classic spot?” Steeped in sarcasm, the editorial states, “[a]ll that is beautiful in the lake district belongs to the poet.” And the real turn of the screw, what turns Wordsworth’s attempts to advocate for the district into something more damningly elitist and unsympathetic to the working classes are the following lines:

It was in troublous times of party, when Apollo, being too much engaged with politics, lost watch of the sentry-post, and several ill-bred and illiterate persons crushed into the immediate precincts of Olympus. But no more incursions of the “common herd” must be
made. If the “million” are to have innocent pleasures, let parks be made into the neighborhood of Manchester by the purses of the cotton lords. If lake and mountain scenery be really necessary to elevate the mind of man, and draw him from grosser indulgences, let the “sons of art” raise artificial hills and make their mill-ponds into lakes, that the “true romance of nature” may be reserved for the truly romantic.

Arguably, Wordsworth’s walks into this trap with his sonnet. Such an editorial response was a sign of the times. Wordsworth is bucking the direction of culture in attempting to advocate for an existing place, a more secluded community, and its importance in relationship to its inhabitants at a time when place was in fact being eliminated and retooled as open space across which the railways might create new and different kinds of places more conducive to profit—thus, in turn, destroying the open space that was created. In the path of the railways, existing places had no value, while spaces had value only insofar as they were profitable. What made resistance more difficult was the effective ways supporters of the railway called upon divine right, strengthening their positions with religious scaffolding and philanthropic promises. Anyone who resisted could be easily shamed. As James Mulvihill points out in “Consuming Nature: Wordsworth and the Kendal and Windermere Railway Controversy” (1995), the well-being of the poor had already been usurped by Utilitarian interests, and speculators had made good use of this advantage. That Wordsworth was well aware of this is apparent in his letters. “Unfortunately,” however, as Mulvihill observes, “the monied interests have the power” (315).

To be fair, there was little if any awareness at all of the idea of preservation—especially in relation to the identity of locale—at the time. So Wordsworth relied on a rhetoric of “taste” throughout his letters, focusing on appreciation of the land from an aesthetic perspective instead of advocating for the land itself. A vocabulary of environmental preservation did not yet exist because
Wordsworth was among those who were creating it for the first time. Few poets, with some notable exceptions such as Wordsworth and John Clare who more or less intuited such issues, were even remotely aware of such issues. Clare fares better in this respect as he arguably developed a reverence of nature on its own terms—especially as in the case of “The Lament of Swordy Well” (which remained unpublished in Clare’s lifetime), but also in poems such as “Beans in Blossom” (1835), “The Mores” (1820-26), and “The Fallen Elm” (1821). Nonetheless, it is most often Wordsworth who is credited with instigating environmental awareness. But as Jonathan Bates points out in *Song of the Earth* (2000), while “[t]he business of literature is to work upon consciousness” (23) literary works are not always as deliberate as they are inspiring. As Bate observes, Wordsworth could never have predicted that his work would provide a foundation for nature preservation and the national park movement (*Song* 23). However, progress is predatory, and Wordsworth senses this. His objections are an intervention, not nostalgia. At stake, among other things, was the identity of the Lake District itself.

Wordsworth’s anxiety matched the anxiety many were feeling across the nation and the world about the collapse of space, the acceleration of time, and the growth of industry. This is easily interpreted as a fear of the masses from a class standpoint rather than recognized as a retreat from the crowds or the acceleration of culture from a phenomenological or an ecological standpoint. Wordsworth’s concern is arguably for the identity of place, and the experience of that place—a matter of emphasis. Because it would be a Romantic perspective that would first forge what we now understand to be ecological awareness, he as yet lacks the linguistic and rhetorical infrastructure within which to craft his argument. The vocabulary is not available yet. Thus, he is left to discuss the matter in terms of taste because he is among the first to forge new ground in the area of ecological awareness and preservation. He is one of the first to open up a dialogue about environmental preservation. He is, however, keenly aware that he is countering an argument
steeped in philanthropic and utilitarian rhetoric which conceals the profit motives of progress. From any number of perspectives, money was the motivating factor, and Wordsworth’s knowledge of this shapes much of his argument in his letters which protest the railways (and protest the backlash against his sonnet) against this monetary motivation.

In “Letter No. I to the Editor of the Morning Post,” Wordsworth seeks to distance the value of the district from the needs of the manufacturing industry which is by then booming. He employs a tactic which renders the district irrelevant to the interests of business as follows. “In this district the manufactures are trifling; mines it has none, and its quarries are either wrought out or superseded; the soil is light, and the cultivatable parts of the country are very limited; so that it has little to send out, and little has it also to receive” (6). Here, Wordsworth addresses what Alan Trachtenberg describes as Wolfgang’s Schivelbusch’s contribution in his book *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space* (1986) to understanding the industrialization of transportation during the nineteenth century as “an event of travel and social encounter [which] was at bottom an event of spatial relocation in the service of production” (xiv):

> It was a decisive mode of initiation of people into their new status within the system of commodity production: their status as object of forces whose points of origin remained out of view. Just as the path of travel was transformed from the road that fits itself to the contours of land to a railroad that flattens and subdues land to fit its own needs for regularity, the traveler is made over into a bulk of weight, a ‘parcel’, as many travelers confessed themselves to feel. (xiv)

In opposition, Wordsworth intends to make a case for another kind of value beyond, outside, or aside new modes of commodity production, a value which is irregular and unsubdued “The staple of the district,” Wordsworth asserts in his letter, “is, in fact, its beauty and its character of seclusion
and retirement” (Kendal No. I 6). Wordsworth was aware that the very identity of a place could disappear once the train arrived.

The loss of identity of place was not only Wordsworth’s concern nor was it relegated to the Lake District. As railroads were “open[ing] up new spaces that were not as easily accessible before,” they were doing “so by destroying space, namely the space between points” (Schivelbusch 38). In fact, Wordsworth’s concern may also be understood in terms of a widely perceived phenomenon of railway expansion, namely, the disappearance of “[t]hat in-between, or travel space, which it was possible to ‘savor’ while using the slow, work-intensive ecotechnical forms of transportation ….” (Schivelbusch 38). Wordsworth’s objections to speedy access to the district take on more subtle layers of meaning in this context, particularly with respect to how this disappearing in-between space simultaneously changed the character of place in much the same way it refigured the character of regional goods. As Schivelbusch observes, “[t]he fate wrought upon the outlaying regions by the railroads affected goods …. [A]s long as production and consumption were strictly regional—which they were until the beginning of modern transportation—goods remained part of the local identity of their place of production” (Schivelbusch 39-40). Industrial transportation turned goods into commodities: “In Grundrisse, Marx makes an observation about the relation between spatial distance and the nature of commodities; it tells us a good deal about how modern transportation has affected our perception of goods …. the transformation of the product into a commodity”42 (Schivelbusch 40). Moreover, as Schivelbusch notes,

[with] the spatial distance that the product covered on its way from its place of production to the market, it also lost its local identity, its spatial presence. Its concretely sensual properties which were experienced at the place of production as a result of the labor process (or, in the

case of fruits of the land, as a result of natural growth), appeared quite different in the distant market-place. There the product, now a commodity, could realize its economic value and simultaneously gain new qualities as an object of consumption. No longer was it seen in the context of the original locality of its place of production but in the new locality of the market-place: cherries offered for sale in the Paris market were seen as products of that market, just as Normandy seemed to be a product of the railroad that takes you there.

(Schivelbusch 41)

As much as anything else, Wordsworth is resisting the commodification of the Lake District. While the district itself cannot be transported to distance marketplaces, by bringing the railways into the district, the region is commodified by becoming the object of “the eye of thousands and tens of thousands” (Kendal No. I 9). He is resisting the transformation of the Lake District into a “standing-reserve,” or “as a resource for human consumption – which may be tourism’s hungry consumption with the eye as much as industry’s consumption of matter” (Bate 254).

While later referencing Wordsworth’s letters, Schivelbusch asserts that it is tempting to apply Walter Benjamin’s ideas about aura onto “the outlying regions that were made accessible by the railroad: while being opened up to tourism, they remained, initially at least, untouched in their physical actuality, but their easy, comfortable, and inexpensive accessibility robbed them of their previous value as remote and out-of-the-way places” (Schivelbusch 41). Schivelbusch then quotes Wordsworth as evidence: “‘The staple of the district is, in fact, its beauty and its character of seclusion and retirement’, Wordsworth wrote in 1844, defending the Lake District against the intrusion of the railways”43 (Wordsworth qtd. in Schivelbusch 41-2). Benjamin explains ‘aura’ in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935). As Schivelbusch observes,

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“[t]he notions of spatial-temporal presence and distance were integral parts of Benjamin’s concept of aura” (41). Benjamin “defined the ‘aura of natural objects’ as ‘the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be’” (Benjamin qtd. in Schivelbusch 41). And, “[t]he aura of a work of art is ‘its unique existence at the place where it happens to be’” (Benjamin qtd. in Schivelbusch 41). As Schivelbusch explains, “[t]his spatial-temporal singularity, this ‘happening-but-once-ness’, this genuineness of the object, is, according to Benjamin, destroyed by reproduction” (41). States Benjamin, “[t]he situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated” (Benjamin qtd. Schivelbusch 41-42). Wordsworth’s concerns with the authenticity of the region may be understood in these terms:

The regions, joined to each other and to the metropolis by the railways, and the goods that are torn out of their local relation by modern transportation, shared the fate of losing their inherited place, their traditional spatial-temporal presence or, as Walter Benjamin sums it up in one word, their ‘aura.’ (Schivelbusch 41)

As regions lost their aura, they were simultaneously sought after for their aura as well. Wordsworth is sensitive to this. He says, “Alas, alas, if the lakes are to pay this penalty for their own attractions!” (Kendal No. II 17). This penalty was paid through tourism, not a matter of class, but as a matter of consumption to the detriment of the object consumed. As Schivelbusch notes: “[t]he remote regions were made available to the masses by means of tourism: this was merely a prelude, a preparation for making any unique thing available by means of reproduction. When spatial distance is no longer experienced, the differences between original and reproduction diminish” (42), and unique places lose their unique character as they are transformed into spaces of consumption.

45 Ibid (220)
46 Ibid (221)
loss manifested in quite literal and tangible ways as well such as the loss of “temporal identity” because “the railroads deprived them of their local time” (Schivelbusch 43):

As long as they remained isolated from each other, they had their individual times: London time ran four minutes ahead of time in Reading, seven minutes ahead of Bridgewater time. 47 This patchwork of varying local times was no problem as long as traffic between the places was so slow that the slight temporal differences really did not matter; but the temporal foreshortening of the distances that was effected by the trains forced the differing local times to confront each other. (Schivelbusch 43)

Standardized time is “analogous to the way in which the machine ensemble constituted by rail and carriage undermined individual traffic and brought about the transportation monopoly (43). It is also analogous to the matter and means of regularizing, evening and streamlining, travel, goods, the land, and even behaviors—a point to which John Ruskin would attend in his later work in “Nature of the Gothic” (1851-53) explored in a later chapter.

As Alan Trachtenberg notes in the introduction Schivelbusch’s The Railway Journey (1986), “[o]nce it appeared, the machine seemed unrelenting in its advancing dominion over the landscape – in the way it ‘lapped the miles’, in Emily Dickinson’s words” as there was little to stop it. Trachtenberg states, “… in little over a generation it had introduced a new system of behavior: not only of travel and communication but of thought, of feeling, of expectation” (xiv). These changes affected the land visibly of course, but they also affected the mind deeply and in ways which were not so visible. Relationships between embodied beings and the land were at stake—and the very potential for ways of life to which people had become accustomed were not just changing, but

entirely disappearing. To overlook such massive changes is to overlook much of Wordsworth’s intent.

Then and now, in editorials and current criticism, Wordsworth’s sonnet and letters in response to the Kendal and Windermere Railways expansion along with his *Guide to the Lake District* are often cited as evidence of Wordsworth’s distaste for the masses, his penchant for aristocratic entitlement, and his sentimental and nostalgic refusal of progress. As mentioned earlier, Scott Hess’s recent persuasive reading of Wordsworth is offered as a corrective to ecological readings such as Jonathan Bate’s in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). Hess seeks to demonstrate that Wordsworth’s “protest was not ecological, but instead aesthetic, social, and cultural” (117). Hess overlooks Wordsworth’s attempt to account for an integrated relationship between environs, communities, and individuals throughout his poetry over decades. Hess, furthermore, fails to note Wordsworth’s particular sensitivity to the irregular and organic ecologies of nature and community as well as the roles of the poor and disenfranchised. Instead, Hess takes issues with “environmental critics [who] tend to conflate Wordsworth’s opposition to the railways with ecology” (117). Hess argues that “[o]pposing the extension of the railways into the Lake District was an attempt to preserve the area as a refuge of culture, aesthetics, and subjectivity against a seemingly all-despoiling tide of modernity, utilitarianism, and industrialization” (117). According to Hess, “Wordsworth’s literary landscape, together with its paired models of nature and culture and his own authorial identity, stood in the balance” (117). While there is clear evidence for Romantic poets’ increasing insecurity in a world increasingly inimical to their work as established by a number of writers such as Peter Coveney in *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society—a Study of the Theme in English* (1967), James Mulvihill in “Consuming Nature: Wordsworth and the Kendal and Windermere Railway” (1995), and Gary Harrison in *Wordsworth’s Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty and Power* (1994), I argue to expand the interpretation. Wordsworth was not only protecting “paired
models of nature and culture and his own identity” (Hess 117), but also the intrinsic, embedded relationship between the natural environs, a local culture, and all of its inhabitants. Mulvihill describes the time’s changes as a “massive cultural shift” (310): “Like others of his time, including Coleridge and Hazlitt, Wordsworth was sensing the massive cultural shift—it could almost be likened to a secular reformation—that Jürgen Habermas has described as ‘the structural transformation of the public sphere’” (310). Much of this cultural shift entailed a shift in aesthetic value to be sure, but it also had to do with the more ephemeral changes of movement of culture in space and time. The shifting spaces of the public intersected with these space and time shifts, and many of these shifts had to do with increasing possibilities because of developing technologies.

Wordsworth’s ambivalence regarding the public plays a significant role in how he builds his argument in his letters against the railway. Wordsworth is appealing to “persons of taste.” “Taste” is a problematic term but one which may be also understood, perhaps, aside class. The full sentence in the opening of his first letter is this: “The matter, though seemingly local, is really one in which all persons of taste must be interested, and, therefore, I hope to be excused if I venture to treat it at some length” (Kendal No. I 5). As Mulvihill notes, “[l]ikely because of the hostile reception greeting his sonnet, the poet laureate carefully treads around the matter of whom he is addressing in the two open letters to the Morning Post” (311). Critiques of Wordsworth often pivot upon his views on “what Patrick Brantlinger terms ‘mass-ness’” in *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983) (Mulvihill 307). “Mass-ness” refers to, among other things, “an exponentially increasing, distraction-seeking urban population” (307), or in other words, popular culture. As Mulvihill observes, and Wordsworth’s “1800 Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*” confirms, Wordsworth had been aware of the emergence of popular culture for decades already when he wrote his railway letters. According to Mulhivill, the juxtaposition between “’the PEOPLE,’ defined by its taste, and ‘the PUBLIC,’ defined by its appetites” is central to
Wordsworth’s argument. States Mulhivill, “Wordsworth’s Kendal-Windermere letters place this cultural issue in the very specific context of a local controversy about land use” (307). What is not addressed, and what is crucial to understanding Wordsworth’s railway letters—and particularly in reference to his early concerns as he outlines them in the “Preface”—has to do with the “seemingly local” aspect of the issue, particularly in relation to speed, or pace as well as access, or collapsing distances.

The description Schivelbusch develops in relation to the railways in terms of identity and aura as they pertain to distances (space) and speed (time) contextualizes Wordsworth’s efforts quite differently. Trains not only carried people and goods but they also had effects which we tend to overlook today. These include the physical changes to the space of the land, the cultural changes to the place, or, in terms of Walter Benjamin’s “aura,” the decreasing physical distances which not only devalued places but also, and crucially, translated into increasing emotional distances. “‘Annihilation of space and time’ was the early-nineteenth-century characterization of the effect of railroad travel” (Schivelbusch 33). This was widely understood throughout the century as significant. Schivelbusch notes that the increasing speed of the trains, “twenty to thirty miles an hour, or roughly three times the speed previously achieved by the stagecoaches” was “expressed mostly in terms of a shrinking of space” during the first half of the nineteenth century (Schivelbusch 33-4). As he notes, “[a]n article published in the Quarterly Review in 1839 speaks of ‘the gradual annihilation, approaching almost to the final extinction, of that space and of those distances which have hitherto been supposed unalterably to separate the various nations of the globe’” (34). The sense was that “[a]s distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were shriveled in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city” (34). It is difficult for us to imagine the intense sensation

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of such enormous changes and the imaginative musings that would have accompanied them because we have become acclimated not only to great speeds and traveling long distances in short amounts of time, but also because we have become accustomed to rapid changes which we no longer experience as quite so disorienting.

Schivelbusch describes Heinrich Heine’s description of the disorienting experience as “traditional space-time consciousness” being “confronted by the new technology” upon “the opening of railway lines from Paris to Rouen and Orléans in 1843” (37). Heine “wrote of the ‘tremendous foreboding such as we always feel when there comes an enormous, an unheard-of event whose consequences are imponderable and incalculable’, and called the railroad a ‘providential event’, … ‘which swings mankind in a new direction, and changes the color and shape of life’” (37)

In *Lutezia*, Heine describes it as follows:

> What changes must now occur, in our way of looking at things, in our notions! Even the elementary concepts of time and space have begun to vacillate. Space is killed by the railways, and we are left with time alone …. Now you can travel to Orleans in four and a half hours, and it takes no longer to get to Rouen. Just imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are completed and connected up with their railways! I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea’s breakers are rolling against my door.50

(Schivelbusch 37)

The changes were rapid and unstoppable. What Heine makes clear in this passage is the loss of the identities of places as well as the effect that changing spaces had on the mind, “in our way of looking

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49 *Lutezia*: The ancient Roman name for Paris; the Gallo-Roman city of Lutetia was the predecessor of present-day Paris.

at things, in our notions!” He provocatively asserts that “[s]pace is killed by railways,” and one may interpret this to also mean the disappearance of places and the spaces in between.

As far as Wordsworth is concerned, place is never neutral, as he takes great pains to establish throughout his work and in his railway letters, but neither are the spaces in between the departure and the destination. These in-between spaces are an essential part of experience in Wordsworth’s view. He clearly believes the approach and the journey is part of the destination, and he objects to those he believes “do not fly fast enough through the country which they have come to see” (Kendal No. II 20). Furthermore, Wordsworth contends that the annihilation of this in-between space, and the slow approach it brings, annihilates the place of destination—by virtue of the technology of transportation. He asks,

[w]hat can, in truth, be more absurd than that either rich or poor should be spared the trouble of travelling by the high roads over so short a space, according to their respective means, if the unavoidable consequence must be a great disturbance of the retirement, and in many places a destruction of the beauty of the country, which the parties are come in search of? Would not this be pretty much like the child’s cutting up his drum to learn where the sound came from? (Kendal No. I 12).

In this passage, Wordsworth strikingly advocates for an experience of the land. In his view, the shortening of the journey via train travel would diminish the quality of the experience of the region by changing the land itself as well as people’s perception of it. So, while he is arguing against “a destruction of the beauty of the country,” he is also arguing against the necessity for speedy access and the collapse of physical distance. His perspective is entirely at odds with the perspectives of those who were advocating for progress. Schivelbusch explains the phenomenon of diminishing distances and newly developing perceptions:
The shrinking of the natural world by means of mechanical transportation was perceived and evaluated in different ways, dependent on the evaluator's economic and ideological position: there was shrinkage as economic gain versus shrinkage as loss of experience. The representatives of industry and free enterprise saw transportation's release from nature's fetters as a gain: nature, in the form of distances that were hard to bridge, and exhaustible and unpredictable energy sources, had been an obstacle to the development of world trade. Mechanical energy rendered all transportation calculable. (Schivelbusch 11)

The above passage underscores the primary tension between “economic gain” and “loss of experience.” In Wordsworth’s sonnet and letters, what is of overriding importance to Wordsworth in the “loss of experience” he fears is inevitable in the wake of the extension of the railway. His concern is in direct opposition to those who see the extension in terms of financial opportunity.

In these terms, one may reach an expanded interpretation of Wordsworth’s directives to “[g]o to a pantomime, a farce, or a puppet-show, if you want noisy pleasure—the crowd of spectators who partake your enjoyment will, by their presence and acclamations, enhance it” (Kendal No. I 11). Rather than reduce Wordsworth’s recommendation to an issue of high versus low culture, one may also take into account his emphasis on a qualitative valuation of the region aside the potential for profit. Wordsworth values the land in another way because “[t]he wide-spread waters of these regions are in their nature peaceful; so are the steep mountains and the rocky glens; nor can they be profitably enjoyed but by a mind disposed to peace” (Kendal No. I 11). Hess characterizes Wordsworth’s protest as classist and representing the impending railway as an “invasion” and “as an unholy alliance that combines corporate magnates and local businessmen, who promote the Lake District as a mass vacation destination for their own profit, with an uneducated and vulgar mass public” (124). He quotes from Wordsworth’s first letter as follows:
The directors of railway companies are always ready to devise or encourage entertainments for tempting the humbler classes to leave their homes. Accordingly, for the profit of the shareholders and that of the lower class of innkeepers, we should have wrestling matches, horse and boat races without number, and pot-houses and beer-shops would keep pace with these excitements and recreations, most of which might too easily be had elsewhere.

(Wordsworth qtd. in Hess 124)

Wordsworth is not wrong. Railway companies did not act from benevolence or philanthropy. They acted from pure profit motives without regard for the effects of the railways on any given region whatsoever. When Hess asserts that “[f]rom this collusion Wordsworth projects a nightmare vision of the Lake District converted into a vast commercial fairground,” he characterizes Wordsworth rendering accurately. However, in the following passages, Hess mischaracterizes the juxtaposition Wordsworth draws. Hess asserts the following:

Against such a vision, he invokes the boundaries of high versus low culture, each needing to be kept in its proper place: “Go to a pantomime, a farce, or a puppet-show, if you want noisy pleasure— the crowd of spectators who partake your enjoyment will, by their presence and acclamations, enhance it; but may those who have given proof that they prefer other gratifications continue to be safe from the molestations of cheap trains pouring out their hundreds at a time along the margin of Windermere”. (Wordsworth qtd. in Hess 124)

In fact, as stated earlier, it is against a description of a “peaceful nature” that Wordsworth juxtaposes “noisy pleasure[s]” (Kendal No. I 11), not the boundaries of “high versus low culture” (Hess 124).

While Wordsworth’s concerns may be relegated to notions of “cultural politics” (Hess 124) and “the association of the Lake District and its aesthetics with the traditional picturesque ‘tour’ of the elite, as opposed to the more modern and democratic railway ‘excursion’” (Hess 124), the interpretation is
limiting. Indeed, it is the same argument presented by the editorial printed beneath Wordsworth’s sonnet, the very rhetorical move that Wordsworth seeks to address with both of his letters.

Toward the end of this first letter, Wordsworth describes those who opposed his view and those who lambasted him for his sonnet:

The cry has been raised and kept up by three classes of persons—they who wish to bring into discredit all such as stand in the way of their gains or gambling speculations; they who are dazzled by the application of physical science to the useful arts, and indiscriminately applaud what they call the spirit of the age as manifested in this way; and, lastly, those persons who are ever ready to step forward in what appears to them to be the cause of the poor, but not always with becoming attention to particulars. (Wordsworth Kendal No. I 13)

He directs his persuasive plea to the second two, believing that “upon the first class what has been said will be of no avail” (Wordsworth Kendal No. I 13). Wordsworth is specific in his characterization: “they who wish to bring into discredit all such as stand in the way of their gains or gambling speculation.” Wordsworth addresses, head-on, the aggressive efforts to discredit his attempts to bring a different perspective to the matter. He is direct in his claim that those who are most invested are so because they are financially, not philanthropically, invested.

Those who were excited about the possibilities of progress were not only thinking of profit however. Then, as today, the appeal of progress was deeply engrained as a process of improvement, teleological in its basis as a desire to break free from the fetters of nature. Technology, as it always had, promised and delivered an escape from nature. Technology allowed the species to transcend nature. Schivelbusch observes: “[h]ow long overdue the mechanically produced means of locomotion must have seemed to the progressive contemporary consciousness—and how hopelessly anachronistic the animal power still in use” (8). But Wordsworth finds the “animal power” sufficient for the region as it exists, stating, “the inhabitants are so few and their intercourse with
other places so infrequent, that one daily couch, which could not be kept going but through its connection with the Post-office, suffices for three-fourths of the years alone the line of country as far as Keswick” (*Kendal No. I 6*). Others, of course, had different views. James Adamson describes a comparison of mechanical and animal locomotion in *Sketch of Our Information as to Rail-Roads* (1826) in a manner that captures the literal material difference between animal/human and mechanical locomotion quite beautifully:

The animal advances not with a continued progressive motion, but with a sort of irregular hobbling, which raises and sinks its body at every alternate motion of the limbs. This is distinctly felt on horseback, and it is the same when an animal draws a load. Even in walking and running ones does not move regularly forward. The body is raised and depressed at every step of our progress; it is this incessant lifting of the mass which constitutes that drag on our motions which checks their speed, and confines it within such moderate limits . . . .

With machinery this inconvenience is not felt; the locomotive engine rolls regularly and progressively along the smooth tracks of the way, wholly unimpeded by the speed of its own motions; and this, independent of its economy, is one of the great advantages it possesses over animal power. *(Adamson qtd. in Schivelbusch 8-9)*

As Schivelbusch sums up, “*t*he mechanical motion generated by steam power is characterized by regularity, uniformity, unlimited durations and acceleration. ‘No animal strength … will be able to give that uniform and regular acceleration to our commercial intercourse which may be accomplished by railway’” *(8-9)*. What is striking here is the emphasis on convenience and uniformity, staples, and qualities of progress for which Wordsworth finds little use. In fact, a

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51 Wordsworth’s assessment of speed, time, and access are of course at odds with our own contemporary minds. This is significant. It is a good example of the ways our minds respond to the ways that technology builds and alters our environs. We have now become accustomed to speed and have grown to expect a timely access over great distances. What is often overlooked, however, is that these changes in our consciousness are material in mind and body.

52 See James Adamson in *Sketch of Our Information as to Rail-Roads* (1826) (51-2).

connection may be drawn between Wordsworth’s sense of aesthetics and “taste” in stark opposition to convenience and uniformity. Interestingly, it is woven into his ideas on the gradual development of taste, a matter of pace and speed.

In his first letter, he speaks of the Lakes as being “at present of very easy access for all persons” via the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway which goes to Kendal “about eight or nine miles from eminences that command the whole vale of Windermere” (Kendal No. I 6). In his second letter, Wordsworth opens by emphasizing that his main argument in the first was to prove that the perception of what has acquired the name of picturesque and romantic scenery is so far from being intuitive, that it can be produced only by a slow and gradual process of culture; and to show, as a consequence, that the humbler ranks of society are not, and cannot be, in a state to gain material benefit from a more speedy access than they have now to this beautiful region. (Kendal No. II 15)

In his first letter, he asserts that taste must be cultivated gradually, and for this he has often been held to be elitist in his stance against the railways, and indeed, there is a case to be made in lines such as the following:

In the eye of thousands and tens of thousands, a rich meadow, with fat cattle grazing upon it … is worth all that the Alps and Pyrenees in their utmost grandeur and beauty could show to them; and not withstanding … it is noticeable what trifling conventional prepossessions will, in common minds, not only preclude pleasure from the sight of natural beauty, but will even turn it into an object of disgust. (Kendal No. I 9)

Wordsworth’s argument may indeed be dismissed as contempt for the masses who he did not believe had an eye or “taste” for the nature of the Lake District. Hess argues as much when he asserts that “Wordsworth’s campaign against the railways was also part of his broader opposition
against the growing ascendancy of a capitalist middle class in national political and cultural life” (123).

Hess cites various correspondence to make his point, including Wordsworth’s letter to William Gladstone on October 15, 1822, “the Tory president at that time of the Board of Trade, which was responsible for presenting recommendations on Railway Bills to Parliament” (123). Hess contends that the letter “clearly draws on these politics” citing Wordsworth’s lines that “‘every man of taste and feeling’ in the Windermere area is ‘in consternation’ about the proposed railway, which he claims ‘will destroy the staple of the Country which is its beauty, and, on the Lord’s day particularly, will prove subversive of its quiet, and be highly injurious to its morals’” (123). Hess refers to Wordsworth’s sonnet as well and argues that “Wordsworth here begins a long tradition of environmental protests that appropriate the voice of nature to advocate on their own behalf, in a way that disguises the specific social and cultural politics of those positions. Yet in classic deconstructive fashion, the sonnet reveals the traces of these cultural politics even in the way it conceals them” (119). However, this view assumes the same Cartesian dualism which Romantics strive to overcome. Hess observes that “[t]he railways represented not only industrial progress but also the new class of capitalists driving that progress” (121). Quoting Harold Perkin who “describes these men in The Age of the Railway as ‘visionary, energetic, self-reliant individuals, scornful of difficulties, ruthless with rivals and opponents moving what they considered prejudice and reaction as they moved mountains of earth and rock to smooth the road to the future . . . [a] typical representatives of the bustling, go-getting, self-confident, Victorian capitalist middle class’” (121-22). Hess asserts that

[i]hey represented, in short, everything the landed class feared and despised—a ‘rash assault’ of speculators and capitalists on the traditional English countryside and the social order it supported. Railways, with their revolutionary new right of compulsory land purchase,
threatened the sanctity of private property, cut up agricultural fields, and spoiled the landscape amenities of aristocratic manors, parks, and gardens. (122)

That the working class threatened “aristocratic manor, parks, and gardens” is a stretch, and it ignores Wordsworth’s careful rendering of what he means about taste in relation to nature—which is arguably antithetical to “landscape amenities.”

In his first letter, Wordsworth offers an example of what he means by beauty in nature that counters this assessment of his aristocratic privilege. After offering two full pages of anecdotal examples emphasizing that “a vivid perception of romantic scenery is neither inherent in mankind, nor a necessary consequence of even a comprehensive education,” Wordsworth asserts that “a taste beyond that,” beyond “the ordinary varieties of rural nature,” no matter “however desirable it may be that every one should possess it, is not to be implanted at once.” As he emphasizes throughout his letters, he insists that “it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals” (Kendal No. I 8). Easily overlooked is Wordsworth’s emphasis on “gradual,” in direct opposition to the signs of the times which were all about speed, convenience, and what would come to be the sign of our times, efficiency. If we insist upon an exclusively class-based reading of Wordsworth’s letters, we overshoot this crucial and central nuance.

Throughout his letters, he reiterates notions of the importance of the gradual, the gradients of beauty, and the richness of a vernal carelessness—all of which emerge in nature and language in opposition to speed, efficiency, and more cultivated sensibilities of technological progress. He offers two examples to make this point. In the first, he relates the words of one of his neighbors:

‘If I had to do with this garden,’ said a respectable person, … ‘I would sweep away all the black and dirty stuff from that wall.’ The wall was backed by a bank of earth, and was exquisitely decorated with ivy, flowers, moss, and ferns, such as grow of themselves in like
places; but the mere notion of fitness associated with a trim garden-wall prevented, in this instance, all sense of the spontaneous bounty and delicate care of nature. (Kendal No. I 9)

Here, however problematically, Wordsworth attributes these sterile sentiments to a “respectable” person, a neighbor, and Wordsworth emphasizes the agency of nature, its “spontaneous bounty,” untrimmed and uncultivated, and importantly, irregular. Just his emphasis on the beauty of irregularity is at odds with an increasing cultural emphasis on regularity, smooth surfaces, and clean lines—all a result of the need for greater efficiency in tandem with the expansion of the railways. In the second example, Wordsworth describes another scene to emphasize his point “[i]n the midst of a small pleasure-ground, immediately below [his] house” from which “rises a detached rock, equally remarkable for the beauty of its form, the ancient oaks that grow out of it, and the flowers and shrubs which adorn it.” He quotes a “Manchester tradesman[s]” thoughts: “‘What a nice place would this be,’ [he said], ‘if that ugly lump were but out of the way’” (Kendal No. I 9). Wordsworth’s intended commentary is clear. An eye for progress means an eye for doing away with the irregularities of nature to the detriment of beauty and in the absence of what Wordsworth calls “taste.”

Wordsworth’s objections to these suggestions are clearly aesthetic, but they find a parallel in the effects of the machine that was being heralded as the great equalizer, the train. This parallel opens another perspective and alternative interpretation of Wordsworth’s intent in the sonnet and his letters. As Schivelbusch observes:

The rail’s primary function, to minimize the resistance caused by friction, was complemented by its further function of leveling the irregularities of the terrain. To keep friction at a minimum, the rail must be smooth and hard, to achieve optimal performance with the least expenditure of energy, the rail must run a level and straight course. Before laying the track,
considerable earth moving was necessary to lay a level and straight roadbed through uneven terrain. (Schivelbusch 22)

“Leveling … irregularities,” minimizing “friction,” and eliminating “uneven terrain” fast became the status quo as tracks were laid and the railways changed the nature of the land to suit the needs of the machine. The competing aesthetic preferences we see in Wordsworth’s challenge of the railways has as much to do with being at odds with a changing zeitgeist and shifting phenomenal experiences as anything it has to do with class.

As Schivelbusch notes, “[i]n everyday existence, the new technology took over. Only during a transitional period did the travelers who transferred from the stagecoach to the railway carriage experience a sense of loss due to the mechanization of travel; it did not take long for the industrialization of the means for transport to alter the consciousness of the passengers: they developed a new set of perceptions” (14). For millennia, our adaptability as a species has always been astonishing. It does not take us long to adapt to new ways of being. It is a testament to our intermingled relationship within our environs that we are able to change so quickly. What is significant, however, is that we do change, and Wordsworth is reaching for expressions which articulate his concerns about such changes as he imagines their larger implications at the time. The changes were happening so rapidly that capturing them with language was a challenge. In a relatively short period of time according to Schivelbusch, “[t]he uniform speed of the motion generated by the steam engine no longer seemed unnatural when compared to the motion generated by animal power; rather, the reverse became the case. Mechanical uniformity became the ‘natural’ state of affairs, compared to which the ‘nature’ of draught animals appeared as dangerous and chaotic” (14). We need not look farther than our own experiences with digital smart devices to realize how rapidly and completely we adapt as a species—to how our levels of comfort may change so completely. In terms of railway travel, “[a]n anonymous text from the year 1825 gives us an idea of the adaptation
to this industrialization of travel. It discusses the ‘sensitive or nervous man’ who will find the new mechanical mode of transport more agreeable than the horse-drawn vehicle” (Schivelbusch 14). So while there were those who saw and described the unfamiliarity of such rapid cultural change, there were also those for whom a fading way of being in life was quickly becoming obsolete. Wordsworth is writing during a moment of uneven developments, apprehending the depth of the cultural changes to the psyche while the changes were not yet complete across the whole of the society. He was experiencing, first hand, the disappearance of one cultural consciousness as it was being replaced with another.

As mentioned before, the perception and valuation of these changes pivoted upon an observer’s “economic and ideological position” (Schivelbusch 11). However, we may also add that the perception and interpretation of these events hinged upon one’s emotional and aesthetic position as well. Romantic authors, deeply invested in relationships with environs, would have felt the impact of these changes sharply. We cannot emphasize enough the magnitude of these changes in our understanding of them. As W. Heimann describes it in Über Dampfmaschinen, Dampfwagen und Eisenbahnen (About Steam Engines, Steam Cars and Railways) (1836),

> [w]e have seen the power of steam suddenly dry up the great Atlantic ocean to less than half its breadth …. Our communication with India has received the same blessing. The Indian Ocean is not only infinitely smaller than it used to be, but the Indian mail, under the guidance of steam, has been granted almost a miraculous passage through the waters of the Red Sea. The Mediterranean, which is now only a week from us, has before our eyes shrunk into a lake; our British and Irish channels are scarcely broader than the old Firth of Forth; the Rhine, the Danube, the Thames, the Medway, the Ganges etc., have contracted their
streams to infinitely less than half their lengths and breadths, and the great lakes of the world are rapidly drying into ponds!⁵⁴ (Heimann qtd. in Schivelbusch 10)

What was at stake was not simply the surface material of culture, but the geographical, material, and emotional aspects of culture. The ways and manners in which human beings found themselves able to intermingle with their environs were changing. The means and ways people were able to internalize their surrounding environs were also changing. In the reverse, people found themselves unable to integrate into their environs, to feel them as immediately as they once did. The changes were at once physical and emotional, not only cultural. As stated in chapter two, advancing technologies have tremendous environmental effects on our lives, and our perceptions of them change as they change the world. Ultimately, as we use technology to change our world, technology changes us. Indeed, we are certainly embedded in technology’s effects. In these contexts, it is easy to see how architectural technologies such as the railways reshape our minds.

Wordsworth, in his letters, is also addressing an inevitable diminishing of space into which he senses his beloved district falling. He is also addressing a diminishing emotional reverence for locality, for nature, and for the relationships of the community within their environs. The expansion of the railways had contradictory results. “[O]n one hand, the railroad opened up new spaces that were not as easily accessible before” (Schivelbusch 38) as in the case of the Lake District which had previously enjoyed its remote location—its remoteness being part of its charm. As Wordsworth asserts, its value is in “its beauty and its character of seclusion and retirement” (Kendal No. I 6). While access was opened, however, railways “did so by destroying space, namely the space between points. That in-between, or travel space, which it was possible to ‘savor’ while using the slow, work-intensive ecotechnical forms of transportation, disappeared on the railroads” (Schivelbusch 38). As

⁵⁴ See W. Heimann, Über Dampfmaschinen, Dampfwagen und Eisenbahnen (1836) (2).
a result, traveling by train created emotional distances between the travelers and the spaces they traversed. So while critics such as Hess maintain that Wordsworth’s characterization of the district’s value being “its character of seclusion and retirement” and its “picturesque natural scenery” as an elite space “which the railways will violate” (Hess 124), this interpretation entirely overlooks the annihilation of space that characterizes the period. As Schivelbusch notes:

[n]ature (i.e., spatial distance), which had caused the animal ‘locomotive engines’ to strain themselves to exhaustion, now succumbed to the new mechanical locomotive engine of the railroad that, in a frequently used metaphor, ‘shoots right through like a bullet’.

‘Annihilation of time and space’ was the topos which the early nineteenth century used to describe the new situation into which the railroad placed natural space after depriving it of its hitherto absolute powers. Motion was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space but on a mechanical power that created its own new spatiality. (Schivelbusch 10)

Wordsworth’s complaints about the speed of the approach, and his questions regarding the necessity of accessibility were not so much about depriving the working classes access as much as they were about preserving the identity of the local places and the deeply intermingled relationships of their inhabitants. These relationships were changing at lightning speed.

Not only did train travel eliminate the in-between spaces as distances collapsed, there were other even more unexpected changes to consider. For instance, landscapes were not only changed in terms of laying track or creating railway towns; it was not just the aura of districts or communities that changed. The very experience of landscape changed from the seats of the train cars—framing the view for passengers of rapidly passing scenes in new and different ways. Part of the reason for this was the scaffolding necessary to keep the trains running safely. Standardized time was not the only system put into place to avert disaster. In fact, “[t]he most important technological addition to the railways was the electrically operated telegraph system” (Schivelbusch 29). As Schivelbusch
notes, the telegraph system had been developed during the early nineteenth century, but it did not have much practical purpose until “the coming of the railways, on which a signaling systems played a vital part from the very beginning” (30). Catastrophes turned out to be unavoidable\(^5\), but at least signaling systems minimized some of the damage.

Various kinds of scaffolding such as telegraph wires and signaling systems were put into place over the years. The result of this scaffolding, however, was that the “landscape appeared behind the telegraph poles and wires; it was seen through them” (Schivelbusch 30), another form of changing distances, in this case, phenomenological. Schivelbusch describes this scaffolding as “a material demonstration of [the] intervention in those poles and wires, which were a part of the machine ensemble” that affected people’s perception by intervening between themselves and the landscapes the trains went through (30-31). Dolf Sternberger\(^5\) described “the resulting perception [as] ‘panoramic’” (30). As Schivelbusch notes, Verlaine would describe the effect in *La Bonne Chanson* (1869-70):

\begin{verbatim}
Le paysage dans le cadre des portières

Court furieusement, et des plaines entières

Avec de l’eau, des blés, des arbres et du ciel

Vont s’engouffrant parmi le tourbillon cruel

Où tombent les poteaux minces du télégraphe
\end{verbatim}

\(^{55}\) When Charles Dickens wrote “The Signalman” (1866), it must have been inspired by his traumatic near-death experience when he was in a train wreck in 1865. As Jill L. Matus describes the accident in “Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection” (2001), Dickens’s train “jumped a gap in the line occasioned by some repair work on a viaduct near Staplehurst, Kent. The foreman on the job miscalculated the time of the train’s arrival; the flagman was only 550 yards from the works and unable to give adequate warning of the train’s approach. The central and rear carriages fell off the bridge, plunging onto the river-bed below. Only one of the first-class carriages escaped that plunge, coupled fast to the second-class carriage in the front” (413). The car had derailed and was hanging off the track so much so that Dickens and his two companions had fallen into the corner. Dickens helped his companions out, and then went back to help the injured and the dying, behaving with “remarkable self-possession” (413). According to multiple accounts, Dickens would suffer from shakes for his remaining years, and occasionally black out into trances. “His son Henry reported that he got into a state of panic at the slightest jolt; [his daughter] Mamie attested her father’s nerves were never really the same again; he would fall into a paroxysm of fear, tremble all over and clutch the arms of the railway carriage” (413-14). Dickens was suffering from trauma, or post traumatic stress disorder.

\(^{56}\) Dolf Sternberger (1907-1989) was a German philosopher and political scientist.
Don’t les fils ont l’allure étrange d’un paraphe.

The scene behind the carriage window-panes
Goes flitting past in furious flight; whole plains
With streams and harvest-fields and trees and blue
Are swallowed by the whirlpool, whereinto
The telegraph’s slim pillars topple o’er,
Whose wires look strangely like a music score57 (Verlaine qtd. in Schivelbusch 30-31)

As Schivelbusch says, [t]he railroad reorganized space (Schivelbusch 45). But as Verlaine’s poem elucidates, it is our perception of space which is also reorganized, recalibrated, and readjusted to new forms of technology:

“The railroad transformed the world of lands and seas into a panorama that could be experienced. Not only did it join previously distant localities by eliminating all resistance, and adventure from the journey: now that traveling had become so comfortable and common, it turned the travelers’ eyes outward and offered them the opulent nourishment of ever changing images that were the only possible thing that could be experienced during the journey.”58 (Sternberger qtd. in Schivelbusch 62)

Panoramas, at least in the context of travel—particularly in rural areas, and panoramic experiences created by train travel were the antithesis of the kinds of gradual experiences Wordsworth advocated for in his letters against that railways and in his poetry at large. When he speaks of a taste that must be cultivated gradually, an aesthetic which may attach itself to landscapes through emotion, he advocates for a slower pace and one which is “in some degree habitual” (Kendal No. I 8).

57 See Paul Verlaine, Oeuvres poetiques completes (1951) (106).
Created by the speed of the trains, these panoramic views were also made possible by another kind of technology, glass. Innovations in the technology of glass production helped elevate the role of glass from one of transparency or admitting light to one of spectacle instead. As Isabel Armstrong writes in *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (2008) in a chapter entitled, “Glassing London: Building Glass Culture, Real and Imagined,” the technology of plate glass “superimposed a glass fantasia on the metropolitan rhythms of changing sensory stimuli, offering an answering landscape of glass aura that repeated the intensity of urban experience even when it seemed to promise release from it” (Armstrong 133). Likewise, in trains, glass framed the passing panorama of scenery. Combined with locomotion, a completely different kind of sensory experience than any ever before was created:

The train was experienced as a projectile, and traveling on it, as being shot through the landscape—thus losing control of one’s senses. ‘In travelling on most of the railways . . .’, says an anonymous author of the year 1844, ‘the face of nature, the beautiful prospects of hill and dale, are lost or distorted to our view. The alternation of high and low ground, the healthful breeze, and all those exhilarating associations connected with “the Road”, are lost or changed to doleful cuttings, dismal tunnels, and the noxious effluvia of the screaming engines.’

The sense of sight necessarily changed with railway travel. This description of railway travel was written the same year that Wordsworth wrote his letters protesting the railway, and this description begins to convey not only the sudden shock to the senses, but the suddenness of a technological transformation on a large scale. Never had human beings traveled at such high speeds. The individual’s sense relationship to their environs was utterly transformed, “most evident in regard to

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59 See *Horse-Power Applied to Railways At Higher Rates of Speed than by Ordinary Draught* (1844) (48).
his sense of sight: visual perception is diminished by velocity” (Schivelbusch 55). John Ruskin would say in 1846, "'It matters not whether you have eyes or are asleep or blind, intelligent or dull …. all that you can know, at best, of the country you pass is its geological structure and general clothing'" (Ruskin qtd. in Schivelbusch 54-5). Moreover, ‘[i]ncreased velocity calls forth a greater number of visual impressions for the sense of sight to deal with’ (Schivelbusch 56). As Schivelbusch explains:

[the multiplication of visual impressions is an aspect of the process peculiar to modern times that Georg Simmel has called the development of urban perception. He characterizes it as an ‘intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli’. ‘Lasting impressions’, Simmel says, ‘impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions.’ (Schivelbusch 56-7)

The novelty of these new industrial experiences must be taken into account when reading Wordsworth’s account of Robert Burns “when he had uprooted a daisy with his plough, and cause him to turn the ‘weeder-clips aside’ from the thistle, and spare “the symbol dear” of his country,” (Kendal No. 1 11) literally turning aside his tool from the flower. Wordsworth makes the appeal that surely “any one of the laboring classes …. ‘would not grudge a two hours’ walks across the skirts of the beautiful country that he was desirous of visiting!’” (11). The contrast is extreme. Scenes, sights, touch, and smell are all transformed with train travel. The individual’s old relationship to their environs was severed. “This loss of landscape affected all the senses. Realizing Newton’s

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60 Ruskin, Vol 36 (62).
mechanics in the realm of transportation, the railroad created conditions that also ‘mechanized’ the traveler’s perceptions” (Schivelbusch 55).

Phenomenologically, these changes were shocking to consciousness. With our technologies, we forced a mighty shift in sensory receptivity. In “The English Mail-Coach” (1821), Thomas De Quincey describes his experience of this mechanization of perception as a train passenger in comparison to being a passenger on the outside of a horse-drawn coach. Among the changes he identifies, two relate to Wordsworth’s concerns: a loss of feeling our consciousness, our being in space and time, as well as a loss of what he calls our “inter-agencies” with “animal-nature” and nature. He describes our loss of consciousness of our being in space and time as follows:

The modern modes of travel cannot compare with the old mail-coach system in grandeur and power. They boast of more velocity,—not, however, as a consciousness, but as a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon alien evidence: as, for instance, because somebody says that we have gone fifty miles in the hour, though we are far from feeling it as a personal experience; or upon the evidence of a result, as that actually we find ourselves in York four hours after leaving London. Apart from such an assertion, or such a result, I myself am little aware of the pace. But, seated on the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity. (283)

Before the railways, as De Quincey explains, we did not need to rely on words to know our experience. Instead, we felt it: “On this system the word was not magna loquimur, as upon railways, but vivimus. Yes ‘magna vivimus’ we do not make verbal ostentation of our grandeurs, we realise our grandeurs in act, and in the very experience of life” (284). He describes a growing distance between our selves and our experiences which may be mediated not only by language, but by being informed through language, “because somebody says that we have gone fifty miles in the hour.” We are one place, and then we are at another, our destination. The experiences of the in-between spaces are lost
to us. This is a dynamic of velocity which does not allow for the gradual emersion in a region which Wordsworth advocates.

This issue of increasing velocity and speed is described in relation to our intermingled relationships in our environs in the rest of the passage. De Quincey describes the experience of animal-transportation as being a kind of intermingling with our surroundings through the “inter-agency” of “animal-nature”:

The very experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible on the question of our speed; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest amongst brutes, in his dilated nostrils, spasmodic muscles, and thunder-beating hoofs. The sensibility of the horse, uttering itself in the maniac light of his eye, might be the last vibration of such a movement; the glory of Salamanca might be the first. (284)

De Quincey goes on to describe the disconnections he sees and feels which may be described as working upon the conscious mind: “But now, on this new system of traveling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man’s heart from the ministers of his locomotion” (284). What De Quincey describes is a severing of the connections human beings had always felt with the natural world. He asserts, “[t]he galvanic cycle is broken up forever” (284). He furthermore renders a broken relationship between human and animal nature: “man’s imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse; the inter-agencies are gone in the mode of communication between the horse and his master out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity under accidents of mists that hid, or sudden blazes that revealed, of mobs that agitated, or midnight solitudes that awed…” (284). What De Quincey so successfully relates are the embodied minds of human beings and animals in relationship to one another and their environs in a process of
movement which nonetheless retains its wholeness. Through machine locomotion, as De Quincey
describes, these connections are lost. From the perspective De Quincey describes, machine
technologies create ruptures in previously existing architectures of the world in which mind, body,
and environs intermingled and moved in relationships of reciprocity.

What both Wordsworth and De Quincey offer us is an alternative view of a changing world.
Rather than looking at the effects of technology impersonally, each author offers an intimate and
personal perspective which accounts for the experience of changing technological architectures—
thereby bridging a gap between technologies and our “selves.”
Chapter Five

THE SUBVERSIVE TURNS AND TRESPASSES OF JOHN CLARE

“I found my poems in the fields and only wrote them down.”

—John Clare

Everyone wants to protect and save nature; nobody wants to stand in the way of an attempt to retrieve its authenticity. Yet at the same time everything conspires to harm it. The fact is that natural space will soon be lost to view. Anyone so inclined may look over their shoulder and see it sinking below the horizon behind us. Nature is also becoming lost to thought. For what is nature? How can we form a picture of it as it was before the intervention of humans with their ravaging tools?

—Henri Lefebvre The Production of Space (1992)

Traces of bodily experience are present in all language, but most palpable in poetic texts working with metaphors and images, hence literature’s special role as a medium facilitating reconnection with nature. In an age of environmental destruction, the cultural archive of literary texts is a resource whose potential should not be overlooked in strategies of renaturalization. Literature records and stores information about how societies position themselves within nature, giving voice to aspects of culture which are otherwise excluded and silenced, such as women, “uncivilized” peoples, and the physical world. The survival of the human race depends on the reinstitution of threatened sensibilities as a high priority. Hartmut Böhme links this role of literature, art and aesthetics in facilitating human survival with a conception of nature as a “cultural project.” We must accept responsibility for shaping it, in the knowledge that our control over it is not unlimited. Works of art can both serve as aesthetic models of human interaction with nature, and imagine and represent utopian alternatives to contemporary patterns of behavior.

—Axel Goodbody “German Ecocriticism” (2014)

Today, it is nearly impossible to summon up a picture of nature without some form of human intervention, and it is a grim picture Henri Lefebvre invokes in The Production of Space (1992), a snapshot taken centuries into a human endeavor that has sought to organize, conquer, distribute, and “improve” the earth’s lands largely through technological prowess. He brings an interesting question to the forefront: what would nature look like before human tools? However, he does not address our deep embeddedness within nature – that nature is as much a part of what and who we are as our human societies are. Before we transformed nature, we ourselves were of nature and still are. Our embeddedness in nature as well as the reciprocity of this relation is often overlooked and too easily denied. Nature creates us, and we alter it, but these alternations in turn recreate us as a

species. Clean or poisoned, ‘natural’ or altered nature leaves its marks on and in us. Yet, despite our deep physical investment in nature, quite literally if ironically, with our tools, Lefebvre illuminates a growing distance between Being and Nature—an imbalance that much of John Clare’s poetry addresses.

As elucidated in chapter two, even our growing technologies are entirely dependent on nature. Ships came from wood, trains from iron and steam, and windows from glass from sand. We create our technologies to interact with nature as our technologies are steeped in nature. Perhaps it can be described as paradoxical, our technological embeddedness within nature as we simultaneously drift farther away from it. As dependent as we remain on nature, we continue breaking our feelings of intimacy with it. This may be accounted for in the line that “natural space will soon be lost to view” (31) as society and nature are largely pushed apart by our uses of technology. But our reliance remains while our awareness of this reliance does not. Perhaps, then, this distance between society and nature is largely couched in perception while our physical dependence on nature remains. However, this break in perception may be more damning than any physically-based break because we behave as though we have surpassed nature when all we have managed to do is discard our sense of responsibility and connectedness toward nature—to our own possible demise. As a Romantic poet, Clare accounts for a relationship between humans being with the nature of which we are a part, and in his endeavors, he captures the intermingling of being and nature most directly. This makes his work contemporarily crucial.

Despite Clare’s project far outside that of High Romanticism, Clare’s work undermines Cartesian dualities as much as, if not in some cases more than, other Romantic poets. In part, this may have arguably been to the detriment of his reception for more than a century. Clare’s work presciently embodies the “ecological consciousness” Mark Lussier describes in “Blake, Deleuze, and the Emergence of Ecological Consciousness” (2011), and Clare’s work opens up discussions in
regards to society’s relationship with nature. This chapter looks at Clare as an abject figure himself, a poet who wrote outside both the dominant ideologies of the industrial era and who, as a poet and a person, cannot be standardized in language, class, or being. In this way, Clare stands entirely apart from the Cartesian zeitgeist. He embodies the green in a way that simply circumvents the emerging technologies of the time. In fact, this chapter argues that Clare’s was a subversive voice which circumvented the dominant ideologies of Cartesian origin that disrupted possibilities of equilibrium between society and nature, and a sense of responsibility toward being and environs. Calling out from the margins, and trespassing across established boundaries, Clare offers a unique view of the losses sustained by the reckless harnessing of nature and people for profit. His poetry nurtures a much-needed wholeness and interconnectedness. And, as McKusick points out in Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology (2000), with Clare’s “detailed knowledge of the local flora and fauna” he has “an acute awareness of the interrelatedness of all lifeforms, and a sense of outrage at the destruction of the natural environment” (McKusick 78). This awareness is made clear in poems explored in this chapter, among them, “Beans in Blossom” (1835), “The Mores” (or “The Moors” written between 1820-26), “The Fallen Elm” (1821) and “The Lament of Swordy Well” (which, like “The Moors,” remained unpublished in Clare’s lifetime). Moreover, Clare’s poems offer rich interpretive possibilities for the seminal origins of current eco-critical concerns. If it is true that literature has a “special role as a medium facilitating reconnection with nature” (Goodbody 553), then Clare’s poetry is particularly well-suited to this effort.

This chapter takes some time to explore aspects of Clare’s life and poetic endeavors in relation to the turns which he had to take and which made him quite unique among British Romantic poets as he strove to overcome the obstacles he faced as an abject figure himself while articulating a radical poetic vision in the face of an unyielding ideological wall which kept him isolated as a poet and a person. Clare’s great achievement was an unending effort at trespass in
many areas of his poetic life. These areas include 1) his outsider status, namely the alternative perspective he achieved from his rural roots, 2) his resulting social standing, largely due to his poverty and class standing, 3) his reputation for being mad, 4) his poetic standing, specifically his position outside the aesthetic project of High Romanticism, and 5) his radical perspective, specifically his criticism of the effects of enclosure on nature and the people and creatures within it. On all counts, Clare’s position related to his marginalized status—which in turn enabled him to sidestep dominant ideologies and offer an alternative perspective that laid a foundation for a symbiotic relationship between dominated Nature and Society. At every turn, Clare is confronted, frustrated, and impeded by walls, boundaries, and borders. At every turn, he climbs, opposes and trespasses. Clare’s was a subversive voice as his poetic vocation itself was a trespass. Through his trespasses, then, his poetry illuminates our embeddedness within our environs even now.

A small sample of his work is presented later in this chapter chronologically, and with the exception of “The Lament of Swordy Well,” in order of publication rather than creation. The reason for this is to comprehend the reception of the poet in relationship to the depth and breadth of his work with the intention of understanding some of the reasons for Clare’s marginalization in the Romantic canon for a century and a half. The poems I have chosen roughly represent areas of conflict between nature and civilization—especially those boundaries created by human constructs such as enclosure or insanity.

John Clare is a puzzling a case. Relegated to obscurity for almost a century and a half, Clare was all but forgotten after his brief bout with fame in the 1820s until the early part of the twentieth century. Then too he continued to be marginalized as a minor Romantic poet until Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield collaborated in the early 1960s to undertake the task of making Clare’s work available to readers by transcribing all available original manuscripts and first publications when manuscripts were no longer available while taking care to respect the integrity and literalness
of the poet’s work. It is only since then, as Hugh Haughton and Adam Philips observe in their introductory chapter to *John Clare in Context* (1994), that critics have been: “Relocating John Clare,” that “Clare’s buried work has been gradually emerging into the light of day” (18).

Clare’s poetry is profoundly moving. Its depths are filled not only with the natural beauties, as he called them, but also with a haunting quality that both remembers and foresees the destruction of a manner of living in relationship to the land. Throughout his work, Clare conveys a sense of what it means to be an embodied mind embedded in one’s environs. His poetic sensibility borders on what one might call the prophetic. As David Perkins notes in his introduction to a very brief selection of Clare poems in *English Romantic Writers* (1994), “[Clare] explores … ‘the dark passages,’ as Keats puts it, that open on all sides as we begin to feel the mystery of man’s nature and place in the cosmos” (1106). Through his poems, both past losses as well as those yet to come are immediately present in the natural scenes Clare describes so fluidly. Clare saw then what we are experiencing now—the loss of equilibrium between humanity and nature, and he resisted what has overwhelmed us now—boundaries motivated by profit, fashion, class, and tradition. Perkins also observes what may be apparent to many of Clare’s readers; in some poems (Perkins specifically refers to “What is Life?”) “Clare’s most obvious affinity is with the visionary lyrics of Blake” (1106). Perkins’s observation calls to mind both the marginalized status of both poets as well as their uncommon approaches to society. Both Blake and Clare, in all their work refuse the dominant ideologies of society—particularly those of institutions, be they churches or workhouses. And yet Clare is afforded, typically, only enough space for eighteen poems in Perkins’ anthology. Clare wrote more than three and a half thousand poems.

Only a quarter of John Clare’s poems were published during his lifetime. His first publication, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), was remarkably successful. His second publication, *The Village Minstrel, and Other Poems* (1821), had a cooler but respectable reception. *The
Shepherd's Calendar; with Village Stories, and Other Poems (1827) was somewhat of a disaster; it sold only 425 copies, a dismal failure when compared to Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery (1820) which sold 3000 copies the first year. However, The Shepherd's Calendar's (1827) failure was not connected to the quality of Clare's work (Clare was writing some of his best poems at this time), but rather to a number of other circumstances and crises that had to do with changing fashions and personal conflicts. The peasant poet was no longer in vogue, the market for “single-author volumes of poetry had collapsed” (Vardy 6), the publishing industry was in a financial crisis, political unrest was increasing, and the editor-writer relationship with John Taylor upon which Clare’s prior work had been built was falling apart, not to mention that Clare’s own ill health was worsening. These circumstances took their toll on the editing of the manuscript, and it was during the preparation phase of this collection that the relationship between Clare and Taylor disintegrated in part because “Taylor’s deletions and emendations were severe, capricious and seemingly arbitrary” (4) and also because Taylor was under enormous pressure, and he took much of his fury out on Clare. Thus, the editing of The Shepherd's Calendar (1827), as Alan Vardy points out in John Clare, Politics and Poetry (2003), “represents a crisis in the poet/editor relationship, and Taylor’s expurgation of radical references to enclosure [could] indicate a shift in Taylor’s own socio-political commitments” as well as “the collapse of [Taylor’s] hopes for the London Magazine” (7). “We must deplore the mess Taylor made of the volume,” says Vardy, but it is important to recognize that the editing debacle that negatively impacted The Shepherd's Calendar (1827) was “perhaps triggered by psychological trauma and quite outside any aesthetic or political issues inherent to the poetry” (8).

The last collection to be published while Clare was still alive was The Rural Muse (1835) which replaced the collection Clare had prepared for publication, The Midsummer Cushion (not published until 1979). The Rural Muse (1835) failed to reflect the magnitude and depth of the poet’s vision as Arthur Symons pointed out in his 1908 introduction to Poems by John Clare. Many of Clare’s
finest poems never went to print. John Taylor was no longer in the picture, and Clare’s editors cherry-picked some of the shortest poems for *The Rural Muse* (1835) from five times as many that Clare wrote for the *The Midsummer Cushion*:

[I]t may be questioned whether the impression made upon us by *The Rural Muse* is wholly the fault of Clare…. Whittaker & Co. [was] fearful of risking money in printing too large a quantity of rural verse, so much out of fashion for the time, [and so] had picked those short pieces from about five times as many poems furnished by the author. (Symons 22)

*The Rural Muse* sold fairly well but left some of Clare’s most compelling work inaccessible to posterity. As Merryn and Raymond Williams state in their introduction to *John Clare: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1986), “the change of the title, and other corrections, indicate well enough the cultural distance between what Clare was actually writing and the models that with a patronizing kindness, were still being imposed upon him” (11).

Those unpublished poems were finally published one hundred and forty-four years later in *The Midsummer Cushion* (1979). Clare had put together the volume hoping to publish it privately himself although that never came to pass. Given that some of Clare’s most mature work was not published as he wished it to appear until nearly a century and a half after being written, it is not so surprising that the poet was left to languish in the margins of the canon for so long. In the most recent collection of Clare’s poetry, “I AM” *The Selected Poetry of John Clare* (2003), editor Jonathan Bate takes care to point out that the poems of *The Rural Muse* (1835) and *The Midsummer Cushion* (1979) really should be read with the understanding that they belong together.

Clare was very successful at first—in part because John Taylor exploited Clare’s status as a “peasant poet.” As Bate notes in *John Clare: A Biography* (2003), Clare’s first volume, *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) “sold out its edition of a thousand copies within two months” (Bate 148-9). Clare’s induction into the literary world hinged on his reputation as a peasant poet since
Nature, in keeping with the aesthetics of Wordsworth, was very much in fashion. Taylor’s introduction to the book made the most of Clare’s class origins and his ability to give “voice to ‘the unwritten language of England’” (Bate 148). However, Taylor’s introduction of Clare to the public had certain negative long-term consequences for Clare. As Alan Vardy points out in John Clare, Politics and Poetry (2003), “Taylor’s preparation of the public conformed to pre-existing critical notions, and made Clare’s class identity, his exceptional status as the ‘peasant poet’, integral to public consumption of his poems” (44). Taylor, in fact, limited the scope of Clare’s work by shaping the scope of the poet’s mind in the public eye from the beginning. As Vardy says,

[a]ccording to Taylor’s introduction Clare was a genius, but one severely limited by the deprivations of his class. As a result, he was believed to be incapable of philosophic reflection, and that lack of reflection was partly converted into a poetic virtue both by Taylor, for strategic reasons, and by conservative critics suspicious of philosophical affectations. Taylor related that Clare had to record the poems immediately because: ‘He could not trust his memory, and therefore he wrote them down with a pencil on the spot, his hat serving him for a desk; and if it happened that he had no opportunity soon after of transcribing these imperfect memorials, he could seldom decipher them, or recover his first thoughts.’ In describing Clare as completely dependent on the moment of sensation … Taylor painted a portrait of a brilliant child for whom even the act of memory was a puzzle beyond his grasp, let alone the careful meditation required by a more philosophical poetics. (43-4)

In his efforts to pave the way for a warm reception of Clare, Taylor inadvertently set the stage for a reputation that Clare would never be able to shake. The Williams’s point out that

Clare, from the beginning, and in too many subsequent accounts, was seen from and through his public condition before what he was actually writing was heard as itself. The fact that he was a labourer; the fashionable label that he was a ‘peasant poet’; the hard subsequent history of his
confinement and death in an asylum: all belong to the record but cannot be permitted to muffle or, at worst, to override the voice. (2)

The history of Clare without the vision and voice of Clare perpetuates injustices already done and robs readers of the experience of “Clare.” An alternative view of Clare recognizes that the poet lived in relation to an intimate intermingling with nature because he established an intimate relationship with nature throughout his life and his mind was cultivated by rural nature. His rural roots underlay the strength of his poetry. Such a perspective would also recognize how gracefully Clare cultivates an intimate linguistic reflection of his deeply embedded personal relationships with his environs.

To make matters worse, not only did Clare have to contend with the condescending views that accompanied his success, but he also had to live and write amidst two incompatible worlds. His existence in the literary world was dependent upon his origins in the rustic one; but Clare’s entrance into the literary world was an exit out of his rural one—an exit that alienated him from his hometown and its rural inhabitants. What gave him caché served to at once alienate him from the canon and from what gave him that caché in the first place, his rural roots. Once Clare entered the literary world, there would be little comfort for him in quite the same way at home again. A letter reveals Clare’s frustration with his alienation. He writes to Taylor on February 8, 1822:

… the Muse is a fickle Hussey with me she sometimes stilts me up to madness & then leaves me as a beggar by the wayside with no more life then whats mortal & that nearly extinguishd by melancholy forbodings—I wish I livd nearer you at least I wish London wou within 20 miles of Helpstone I don’t wish Helpstone to shift its station I live here among the ignorant like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seems careless of having anything to do with—they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I shoud mention them in my writings & I find more pleasure in wandering the fields then in mixing among my silent neighbors
who are insensible of everything by toiling & talking of it & that to no purpose. (Clare qtd. in Mark Story 190)

Clare’s reference to his “silent neighbors who are insensible of everything by toiling & talking of it & that to no purpose” is a revealing line. He contrasts his disconnected relation to them as compared with the “pleasure” he finds “wandering in the fields.” He furthermore emphasizes the disconnection they feel to their “toil,” inherently unpleasant, and empty talk of it—implying a meaningless and empty relation to their own efforts and days. The villagers who “hardly dare talk in [his] company for fear [he] shou’d mention them in [his writings]” would view him with suspicion as one who left home and set off into another world. There was resistance to his legitimacy as a poet as well:

Envy was up at my success with all the lyes it coud muster some said that I never wrote the poems & that Drury gave me money to father them with my name Others said that I had stole them out of books & that Parson this & Squire t’other knew the books from which they were stolen Pretending scholars said that I had never been to a grammar school & therefore it was impossible for me to write anything our parson industriously found out the wonderful discovery that I coud not spell & of course his opinion was busily distributed in all companies which he visited that I was but a middling promise of success. (Clare qtd. in Edward Storey 135)

As John Lucas explains in “Clare’s Politics,” “Clare was cut off from those shared experiences in labor and social relations about which he sometimes wrote and from which he wrote but from which the very act of writing separated him” (150).

As Clare’s journey into exile began, the walls between him and a literary escape were being erected. The following excerpt is from a letter dated April 20, 1819 written to John Taylor by Edward Drury, who introduced Clare to Taylor in the first place:
Clare cannot reason: he writes & can give no reason for using a fine expression or a beautiful idea: if you read poetry to him, he'll exclaim at each delicate expression – ‘beautiful!’ ‘fine!’ but can give no reason. Yet he is always correct and just in his remarks. He is low in stature – long visage – light hair – coarse features – ungaitly – awkward – is a fiddler – likes ale – likes the girls – somewhat idle – hates work. (Drury qtd. in Edward Storey 25)

And no matter how successful Clare became or how well his work was received, his social standing would never be forgotten in literary circles, and there would always be an acute awareness of his low, peasant status. Clare’s excitement about the possibilities of his future were met by responses like these expressed in another letter from Drury to Taylor written in June of 1829: “Though his daydreams picture the most exaggerated success & though his hopes are preposterous to excess, I do not fear with careful management his pride and ambition will be checked” (Storey 135). His literary success would never be enough to overcome the class prejudice and condescension that prevailed even amidst those who wished him success. He would never fully enter the literary world that made so much of “The Peasant Poet” for the same reasons they embraced him.

Clare’s class status along with depreciating views such as “Clare cannot reason” plagued him into the next century. The following excerpt is from a review published by Edmund Gosse in 1924 after Edmund Blunden’s and Alan Porter’s publication of John Clare, Poems Chiefly from Manuscript (1921):

It was the misfortune of Clare that, with unsurpassed exactitude of vision and delicate skill in stating fact, he was devoid of all reflective power. I am surprised that Mr. Blunden, whose introduction displays candour as well as sympathy, does not admit this defect. Clare had no thoughts. He wandered through the country, storing up images and sounds, but he wove his reproductions of these upon no intellectual basis. His was a camera, not a mind; and while we must admit that he showed a praiseworthy reserve in not pretending to find any
philosophical relation between his negatives and the human spirit, still, the fact cannot be ignored that the philosophy was absent. (Gosse qtd. in Mark Storey 375)

This view had a long history by the time Gosse wrote, but many of Clare’s mature poems had not yet been made available to the public; and crucially, a critical context for Clare’s work had not yet been established. His poetry was not yet being judged on its own terms, but rather by a Wordsworthian standard to which Clare never did aspire. Moreover, this view reveals and then perpetuates a dominant ideology that carries with it a set of expectations for those of less privileged class standing; that Clare supposedly shows “a praiseworthy reserve in not pretending to find any philosophical relation” betrays the prejudice of entitlement.

The deeply entrenched class bias that plagued Clare throughout his life and the nineteenth century has continued well into the twentieth century—if for different reasons. In the critical world of Romantic poetry, Clare has often been viewed as a failed or mad poet. “The most notorious opinion in that tradition belongs to Harold Bloom who opined in The Visionary Company (1971) that Clare was a ‘failed Wordsworthian poet,’” a view which has persisted in “the selections chosen for anthologies” (Vardy 3). As Vardy points outs, the problem with this view is that Clare “is not Wordsworth or Coleridge, and, frankly he does not share their aesthetic project” (28). Unlike Wordsworth, Clare strove for “what might be called a truthful representation of the natural objects around him. They were in themselves ‘the beauties’, not the source of an intellectual achievement called ‘beauty’” (18). For Wordsworth, on the other hand, “the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime are the ultimate ends of the poem; the objects of nature are the means to those ends not ends in themselves” (18). This crucial difference has been used to relegate Clare to the status of a ‘minor’ Romantic poet—overlooking the deliberate choices Clare made—his conscious “refusal to recuperate the objects of nature into the aesthetic construction of the self…. ” (18). This refusal contextualizes Clare as a Romantic poet whose work also refuses Cartesian dualities and separation.
That Clare strove to represent the beauty of nature itself has positioned him as a green poet because the value he finds in nature does not reside in its use value to culture or the mind for that matter. However, his rendering of nature in his poetry does not contextualize nature as isolated from culture or individuals either. Rather, while nature is part of who we are, nature has value quite apart from us. His understanding of nature distinguishes him among nineteenth-century poets as a profoundly subversive voice and visionary green writer whose more than 3,500 poems offer rich interpretive possibilities for the seminal origins of current eco-critical concerns.

However, Clare’s social reputation and a narrow focus on the man without the work has somehow survived even in current mainstream culture, and as several contemporary critics have remarked, criticism of John Clare has often revolved around the measure of the man, or in this case, the peasant, rather than the poem or even the poet. The tendency is still true today as evident in the reviews printed in response to Jonathan Bate’s publication of John Clare: A Biography in 2003. The Observer titles Jonathan Heawood’s book review, “Poor Clare – rhyme but no reason.” The sub-title reads “Jonathan Bate’s biography shows that Clare was a true Romantic poet. The only problem was it went all to this head.” The New Yorker dubs Clare “The Natural” with a subtitle that reads “The poetry and madness of John Clare.” He is referred to as “Man Out of Time” in Slate, and then defined within the first line: “Among English poets, John Clare has two distinctions: He was the poorest, and he was (with the possible exception of Christopher Smart) the craziest.” Poor Clare. Mad Clare. Crazy Clare. His poverty and “madness” are just too sensational to overlook. It seems there is no getting away from it.

Was Clare insane? He spent a quarter of a century interred in two asylums—twenty-three years in the second one, Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, after escaping from the first after a few years (with the help of gypsies) and walking home. During the asylum years, he was as prolific a writer as before although, removed from his native rural environs, his subject matter changed
somewhat—becoming more melancholy, angry, bitter, sad, and somewhat tragic at times. The turn of his subject matter could reasonably be attributed to his removal from his rural environs. It was thanks to the asylum steward William Knight that Clare’s asylum poems survived. But, what of these years? As Bate observes, “[m]adness is of an age, not for all time…. Medical disorders, especially those of a psychosomatic nature, are influenced by the ways in which they are conceptualized and treated (412).” Ironically, when Bate ventures the hypothesis that “Clare conforms to the classic pattern not of schizophrenia,” which was posthumously diagnosed during the “first half of the twentieth century, when there was a particular fascination with schizophrenia,” “but of manic depressions or ‘bipolar disorder,’” he repeats the same tendency (412). At the time Bate was writing Clare’s biography, bipolar disorder had become the most popular diagnosis for behavior characterized by mood swings.

Posthumous diagnoses are as troubling, difficult and unreliable as fashionable ones. Should we venture into that area, we could guess that Clare had what we might call a nervous breakdown—which would not be surprising given the amount of stress he was under, or perhaps he suffered from depression. His body of work before the asylum years primarily tapped the rural locale in which he grew up. Helpston crafted the mind of the poet he became. He was wrenched out of an environment in which his poetry had thrived. Given the effects of environs on being and the self, this would have had an enormous effect on him. It could also be that he was suffering from malnutrition, anemia, diabetes or vitamin deficiencies—things only now being recognized as crucial in the mental “health” and balance of individuals. I agree with Bate when he says that “[t]here is wisdom in the ancient idea that the seat of melancholy is the digestive system” (413). There is also the possibility that the man was an eccentric—an eccentric who did not have the social mobility, class privileges, or monetary advantages that would allow him the freedom of eccentric behavior without being interred against his will.
So was Clare sane? Clare complained bitterly of his own health saying once, “[l]ast night my very brains seemed to boil up almost into madness and my arms and legs burnt as if it were a listless feebleness that almost rendered them useless” (Bate 398). He drank a lot, and suffered from apoplectic fits and physical pain, “aches, numbness, … stomach pains” (413). He was emotionally volatile, depressive, and in a financially bleak situation during the years leading up to his incarceration (396-401). One of his babies died, his mother died, and several of “Clare’s most reliable correspondents were fast disappearing,” (401). If one takes at face value the idea that “the skull is not a magical membrane”63 and that our selves are constituted by our bodies as well as our minds, Clare’s experiences of suffering take on an entirely different range of possibility quite apart from marginalized madness. Undoubtedly, Clare suffered but he never went willingly to the asylum. “The main reason for putting Clare in an asylum seems to have been that Patty [his wife] could no longer be expected to go on coping with him” (Bate 407). Sadly, a letter that Clare wrote to Patty in 1840 indicates that he did not believe he would be away from home for long when he was taken away and institutionalized at the age of 44-years-old:

You can claim me away from this place as your husband, the same as I was when I left you with honest and good intention to return to my home and my family in a day or two. Since then, months have elapsed, and I am still here, away from them, enduring all the miseries of solitude. (Clare qtd. in Bate 433)

As Bate points out, the “letter has a special poignancy because it offers the only hint we have of Clare’s feeling as he was taken from home in 1837. He honestly thought that he would not be away for long” (433). Throughout his exile, he continued to write.

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Perhaps it is unsurprising that Clare found himself alone. Clare’s poetic vision surpassed the understanding of those around him, and he lacked the privileged class standing and station to facilitate an easy relation with the world. The wealthy can afford to be eccentric. The poor cannot. He was not privileged enough for eccentricity to be tolerated. Moreover, he was married to someone who could not understand his interests or his vision. If not illiterate, Patty, his wife, did not share Clare’s ease with or love of poetry as evidenced by the marriage registration: “The entry in the parish register is both moving and significant in its simplicity. Under the flowing signature of John Clare is the cruse, shaky cross made by Martha as ‘her mark’” (Edward Storey 138). He was surrounded by people who could not understand his mind, but would only come to value his company for his social standing: “When Clare’s change of fortune was known in the district some of his wife’s friends—who had been very cool before—now wanted to know him, but he remembered their former slights and refused to have anything to do with them” (Edward Storey 138). In this way, Clare was also isolated. That his wife was unable to tolerate his erratic behavior is not surprising,—that his behavior, despite so much evidence to the contrary, was considered sufficient to send him off to be interred in the asylum, is. Taylor, who was concerned about Clare’s health, wrote to his brother before paying a visit to Clare’s home: “…I fear [Clare] will require Confinement in a public Asylum before long unless some neighboring Surgeon should have the skill to understand how to treat him so as to prevent so undesirable a Catastrophe” (Bate 406). Yet, after visiting Clare, the letter Taylor wrote to his sister indicates that Clare was not insane but depressed and in ill-health:

We found him sitting in the Corner Chair, looking much as usual—He talked properly to me in Reply to all my Questions—knew all the people of whom I spoke, and smiled at my Reminding him of the Events of past Days—but his Mind is sadly enfeebled.—He is constantly speaking to himself and when I listened I heard such words as these pronounced
a great many times over, and with great Rapidity—‘God bless them all’—‘Keep them from Evil’—‘Doctors.’ (Taylor qtd. in Bate 406)

Nothing in Clare’s behavior suggests that he should have been confined, nor does his muttering prove that he was delusional. Although he had referred to his family being “bewitched” in times prior, there is no indication that he believes that witchery or possession was involved. His words may be understood to reference a deep injustice. But, as Clare himself once wrote, “one can only repeat what has been written—.” As a result, an interpretation of sanity or insanity is rather dependent on the interpretation of other witnesses to Clare’s behavior—unless we look to Clare’s words themselves. It was Taylor who went to Matthew Allen, “owner of a private asylum in the Epping Forest,” and Clare was admitted a week later “by authority of his wife” (Bate 407).

Much has been made of his outburst at a performance of The Merchant of Venice, the notion that he thought he had two wives, and the idea that he might be Byron, Shakespeare, or Jack Randall the prizefighter as evidence of his insanity. The reputation stuck. In “The Natural” published in 2003 in The New Yorker Magazine, John Lanchester interprets the following letter from Clare to a fan as evidence he was insane:

March 8th 1860

Dear Sir

I am in a Madhouse & quite forget your Name or who you are you must excuse me for I have nothing to commu[n]icate or tell of & why I am shutup I dont know I have nothing to say so I conclude

yours respectfully

Quoting Bate, that “‘this is a voice not of madness but of quiet despair,’” Lanchester replies, “I’m not sure that [Bate] is right—not caring whom you’re writing to or why you’re in a madhouse would be despair; not knowing is surely closer to insanity” (Lanchester 1). I disagree. Questioning why
one has been shut up against one’s will can surely be a mark of a lucid mind—a mind that knows its person has no power, control, or agency.

In fact, according to Cyrus Redding, a literary editor who visited Clare in Matthew Allen’s asylum, “the only symptom of aberration of mind [they] observed about Clare” was what, today, we would call a tangent or imaginative flight from reality—a reference to prize-fighting “in which [Clare] seemed to imagine he was to engage” (Mark Story 248). Redding describes Clare’s reference as being

brought in abruptly, and abandoned with equal suddenness, and an utter want of connection with any association of ideas which it could be thought might lead to the subject at the time; as if the machinery of thought were dislocated, so that one part of it got off its pivot, and protruded into the regular workings; or as if a note had got into a piece of music which had no business there. (Mark Story 248)

By this juncture, Clare had been almost entirely alienated from his beloved home, his family, and his literary connections and correspondences. His behavioral “aberrations” could as well be perceived as a creative act—a kind of sublimation. If we accept the premise that the “self” is deeply informed and even created by a relationship between mind, body and environs, Clare’s alienation from his rural surroundings would deeply impact his state of mind. The question of his sanity cannot be considered without taking his alienation from rural nature into account.

While in the asylum, Clare wrote letters to Mary Joyce, a childhood crush, as if she had been his first wife. The year was 1841. Jonathan Bate refers to this in his biography as a moment when Clare “has passed into the realm of delusion” (436). But he immediately follows up with the sentence, “Or has he? We cannot be certain that he wrote the letter with the intention of sending it” (437). We can be certain, I believe, that Clare did not intend a letter in his journal to be read as a measure of his sanity. We can also guess that the chances are that the letter meant something quite
specifically personal to Clare—that it represented something to him, regret or longing. We can only guess. Bate proposes that it “may have been not so much symptoms of delusion as forms of self-treatment” (437). It may also have been nostalgia and longing for not only an inaccessible past but an inaccessible place, home. Clare makes very clear, over and over again, how great his desire is to be released—to be free, to go home. He found his poetry in the environs of his home. His identity and his joy were entirely wrapped up in his relationship to his home. His consciousness was entirely entangled with his experience of home. In a sense, he was severed from the environs of which he was a part. Clare’s descent takes on a different feeling in light of recent assertions in cognitive philosophy and more established assertions in philosophy of the mind and literary criticism. As Alva Noë, Antonio Damasio, and Gaston Bachelard establish so gracefully from different perspectives, consciousness is deeply embedded in our experience of our environment. In the extended model of consciousness, our worlds are as much a part of our minds as our bodies and brains are. Removing Clare from his home may be understood in this context as alienating him from his sense of self. After he escaped the first asylum he was returned, this time for good and until the end of his life. No members of his family visited but for one son, on one occasion.

While Clare’s sanity has no bearing on the quality and significance of his work, his isolation does. His dramatic displays and playful and sometimes sardonic performances in life and on the page do reveal the complexity of the poet and his work. Clare had wit and originality—something not too often discussed—and a playful nature in some ways designed to circumvent his frequent powerlessness; this propensity had its roots in his childhood. For instance, in order to be taken seriously as a writer, he played at not being the creator of his own work when he was very young:

At first, the only audience he found for his experiments in poetry was his parents.

Pretending, by a strategy of inverse plagiarism, that what he was reading had been written by other people, he records that he ‘scribbled on unceasing for 2 or 3 years, reciting them every
night as I wrote them when my father returned home from labour and we was all seated by
the fire side.’ His almost illiterate parents were his first critics, and he claims to have found
their criticism ‘useful’ because ‘I thought if they coud not understand me my taste shoud be
wrong founded and not agreeable to nature.’ (Clare qtd. in Haughton and Philips 3).

Not only did he play at reading his own poetry as though it belonged to others, but he sustained this
game for two to three years. His thoughtfulness about his own intentions is evident as well. It is not
impossible that he pretended to be Byron, a poet he respected and perhaps envied, as a kind of
mental escape from the life and circumstances to which he was subjected. His poetic play also
points to his marginalization as a rural resident.

John Clare’s life was very often bitterly disappointing, and those circumstances in fact do
have bearing on his work. They give us a glimpse into his perspective and some sense of the spirit
in which he wrote. His circumstances also help us account for his marginalization as a poet, and the
lengths to which he went to resist the boundaries imposed upon him. His escape from the confines
of the first asylum making his way home subsisting on grass showed remarkable determination; his
rewrite of “Child Harold” and “Don Juan,” can be seen as profound acts of sublimation; his
purchase of a fine green coat after his initial literary success to visit a patron (a coat which Drury
advised him to take off as it was not befitting a peasant) was a measure of his great expectations; and
that he wrote until he died despite all of his hardships shows him to be a poet of great strength,
determination and resistance. He did not wear the harness of social tyranny willingly. It was hard
on him as evidenced by these oft quoted lines: “Why, they have cut off my head and picked out all
the letters in the alphabet… All the vowels and all the consonants and brought them out through
my ears” (Caldwell 1).

He knew early on what struggles lay ahead as he pursued his literary career. When he is very
young and first discovering literature,
he discovers very quickly that the boundaries of culture are imposed, not only from within, but also from without; for the [book]shop is closed on a Sunday, the one day one which a farmboy might visit it, and the conclusion that bookshops [were] not for working people seems inescapable. This is, as he says, ‘a disappointment most strongly felt’; but Clare hardly pauses and in the same sentence is describing his plan to ‘obtain my wishes by stelth’.

(Goodridge and Thornton 89)

During his later years, as Bate notes, Clare was known to often say, “I have lived too long” and “I want to go home” (529), a complex combination of anguish and lingering hope from a complex man who refused to submit to his place in life, and who, while living in the asylum, deeply mourned his extraction from his beloved rural nature and home. Tenacious, original, and radical, Clare long ago earned the right to be judged by his own standards. Clare was aware of the critics’ refusal to judge him on his own terms as is evident in a letter he wrote to Eliza Emmerson in 1832: “All I wish now is to stand upon my own bottom as a poet without any apology as to want of education or anything else & I say it not in the feeling of either ambition or vanity but in the spirit of common sense” (Clare qtd. in Haughton 51).

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The discrimination to which Clare was subjected is deeply intertwined with his poetic identity and the subjects of his poems. As a peasant poet of rural nature who wrote so often in relationship to rural nature, his mind, class, and environs cannot be extricated from each other. Clare’s identity and his work, his mind and his poems, perhaps more than any other Romantic poet, are inextricable entangled. Clare’s vernacular language, its relationship to the land, and its critical
reception and transcription also plays a significant role in Clare’s marginalization for over a century. Here, I look at poems which establish Clare as a Green poet whose Romantic poetics most strongly capture the role of nature in relationship to the embodied mind, outside Cartesian separations. The poems contained here are primarily transcribed from the most recent standard collection of Clare’s poetry, Jonathan Bate’s “I AM” The Selected Poetry of John Clare (2003) with only minor changes—mostly with respect to punctuation. I chose Bate’s edition because therein, “all poems are edited afresh from manuscript and/or early printed editions” (XXII). Original manuscripts have also been consulted whenever possible, and when unavailable, the meticulous manuscript transcriptions of Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P.M.S. Dawson have been compared to Bate’s edited versions of the poems.

Unlike many of the earlier collections which represent one of two extremes, either editing out even literal meanings from the poems or leaving entirely unedited even the basic spelling and punctuation Clare expected his editors to correct, Bate is careful to remain as true as possible to both Clare’s words and wishes. Clare’s language was not standard, particularly with respect to punctuation and diction. The tendency to tamper to the detriment of Clare’s poems is exemplified by J.W. and Anne Tibbles’ version of “The Moors,” published for the first time in 1935 under the title “Enclosure.” The Tibbles, for all their good work in preserving and publishing Clare, delete more than thirty lines from the original manuscript version of the poem to the detriment of the poem’s meaning. Moreover, their severe edits often significantly change meanings within the poem as demonstrated by the difference between Clare’s description of the moors that “Are vanished now with commons wild and gay” (39) and the Tibbles’ version of the moors that “Are banished now with heaths wild and gay.” Given the political context of Clare’s times and his abhorrence of enclosure laws, the deletion of the word “commons” also deletes Clare’s pointed attack on the loss of the commons to the people in the countryside.
Bate, on the other hand, regularizes spelling—changing “’centurys” to “centuries” for example, and adds light punctuation to assist the reader in following the poem. This sort of editing is in keeping with Clare’s wishes. Clare never expected his poems to be circulated without the benefit of editorial expertise. It is true that he had strong feelings about certain editorial revisions; he did not want his editors to “remove the regional dialect words that were so essential to his voice” (Bate XIX). However, “Clare differentiated between dictio


n, which he saw as expressive of the integral value of the local names of things, and grammar, which he saw as a necessary feature of publication” (Vardy 57). And so, while he was determined to retain his local vernacular language that was often at odds with a Standard English that was being standardized throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he did expect his editors to “normalize his spelling (“I’m” for “Im” and “used” for “usd”, etc.) and to introduce punctuation for the sake of clarity” (Bate XIX).

Bate remains true to these contingencies. As he explains in his introduction:

This anthology is aimed at readers who are not familiar with Clare. In the absence of punctuation, many such readers often struggle with his sense and so lose the immediate impression that is one of the keys to his art. Once the reader has become familiar with the tone of his voice and the flow of his lines, it should become possible to ignore the punctuation and to find the pauses for oneself…. Punctuation is a ladder that we need in order to climb to Clare’s level; once we have got there, we can throw it away. (XXI)

On the other end of the spectrum, many collections have been printed entirely unedited—without the simplest corrections to spelling or punctuation—since Robinson and Summerfield began the task of providing Clare texts “that respected the literal forms of Clare’s poems” (Haughton and Philips 18). The rationale behind these “raw” or “primitive” versions of the poems makes sense as well, especially in light of “the belief [of many scholars] that Taylor’s editorial imposition on Clare must be reversed” (Vardy 4). Some of the collections are beautifully rendered. In fact, Merryn and
Raymond Williams’ *John Clare: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1986) is a particularly thoughtful and compelling collection. However, one runs the risk of alienating readers who might find the poems less accessible without standard spelling and punctuation.

Of course, the “edited” Clare has proven to be problematic for nearly two centuries. As Symons observes as far back as 1908, “for the most part what Clare actually wrote was better than what his editors made him write.” It may be as accurate to say “what his editors re-wrote.” And as Alan Vardy points out in *John Clare, Politics and Poetry* (2003), “[e]xamination of the manuscript materials for *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827) contained in the Peterborough Clare MSS, caused [scholars] genuine shock and outrage” (4). It is important to keep in mind, however, that Clare worked very closely with his editor, John Taylor (also John Keats’ editor) while preparing his first two collections, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) and *The Village Minstrel, and Other Poems* (1821), for publication. We can safely assume, I think, that Clare was satisfied with the final results—and that he worked very closely with Taylor on the two volumes.

Clare’s class standing in combination with his poetic project presented a whole other set of problems for him within the enclosure of language. From the beginning of his publishing career, Clare was forced to cope with the editorial struggles that plagued his printed work. He never attended a university and his was a limited formal education so that his grammar and spelling were shaky, but he had a book collection which numbered somewhere around 400 volumes, and he read everything he could get his hands on and wrote prolifically. Because Clare was not always familiar with the norms of English grammar and spelling which were rapidly being standardized during his lifetime, he relied a great deal on his editor, Taylor, to make necessary changes to his texts. But Taylor relied on Clare for content and local meaning. Clare did not want changes to be made at the expense of his meaning and intention. Alan Vardy explains Clare’s principles as follows:
Central to Clare’s poetic principles was the idea that an interrelationship existed between the aesthetic issues of ‘low’ diction and self-creation. He believed that the ethics of representation per se was at stake in discussions of his use of local vernacular speech. Clare’s defense of idiomatic speech was based on the assumption that only through local language could local objects be accurately, and truthfully, represented. Calls for the purification of Clare’s language, besides being couched in class condescension, threatened the very objects Clare wanted to preserve and elevate. His poetic representation of the landscape established the aesthetic value of its constitutive objects and resisted the commercial values that threatened its destruction. (17)

Clare’s concerns move quite beyond grammar, in keeping with the times. While he was “praised for his distinctive use of a vernacular style and regional dialect” when he first began publishing, politics and patrons were often responsible for exerting pressure on Clare to “expunge objectionable lines”—as in the case of Lord Radstock, a conservative aristocrat and an important patron (Bate 198). Although the radical Taylor resisted some of the pressure, he caved in to some which may have something to do with the misconception that Clare was not a political poet. In other instances, Taylor’s judgment, upon which Clare relied, was sometimes not in keeping with the poet’s principles as Taylor wrote:

We have but few Provincialisms in the poem, and I should be glad if we could get rid of one that is left himsen; but if it cannot be easily done never mind.—Real English Country Words are different in my mind and should be judged differently from those which are only peculiar to as district, and perhaps himsen and shanny are of the latter Class.—Shanny is not used beyond the Trent, tho’ himsen is common enough I know. (Taylor qtd. in Bate 220)

It must have been a great struggle for both editor and writer to negotiate decisions suitable to all sides, and Taylor relied on Clare a great deal to make these decisions as evident in his tone. The
“reality” of the collaboration between the two, according to Bate, was “a process of frank and courteous exchange [for the most part] of views” (221). This did not make the task any easier though. The stakes were high, and not unlike contemporary linguistic debates—particularly in pedagogical criticism where, for instance, class and race bias still play a mighty role with respect to Standard English. Nonetheless, Clare did expect the same editorial consideration given to other poets. He did not expect spelling and punctuation to be entirely discarded.

As Olivia Smith illustrates throughout *The Politics of Language: 1791-1919* (1984), the domination of subordinate classes was largely carried out through the use of language: “The division between those who knew grammar and those who did not, was, according to [William] Cobbett64, one of the primary means of class manipulation” (1). “To speak the vulgar language demonstrated that one belonged to the vulgar class; that is, that one was morally and intellectually unfit to participate in the culture” (2). This view extended to the right to exercise freedom of reason. In fact, those who would have been from the countryside, and therefore not privy to the grammar, rules, and sounds of upper classes would be considered undeserving. Like the blinding double speak enacted to justify the laws of enclosure which so drastically effected difficult changes in the countryside, justifications were found for the poor treatment of the rural and working classes. In various conservative pamphlets, means by which the classes could be controlled and manipulated were sought. “The statements assume that such minds are entirely passive and can be ‘arranged’ by various techniques” (Smith 73):

Sarah Trimmer wrote to the Association recommending that the poor be given a loaf of bread and a pamphlet a week to keep them happy for seven days. After several weeks ‘their

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64 “In 1817, William Cobbett discussed the subject of grammar in two issues of his newspaper, the Political Register” after he had to flee to the United States after the suspension of habeas corpus (Smith 1).
minds may be gradually impressed with the principles of loyalty, subordination, and every
other virtue of humble life.’ (Smith 74)

While some advocated numbing exercises such as those listed above, Edmund Burke
advocated repression of the reading audience as well as of authors in the belief that the lower
classes were incapable of understanding the complex argument that would justify their
subordination: ‘where a man is incapable of receiving Benefit through his reason, he must be
made to receive it thro’ his fears. (Smith 74)

The pomp, narrowness, and arrogance that marked such views formed a tightly woven matrix
around the subordinate classes of the time—as they continue to do today. Class warfare was waged
through language.

When Thomas Paine published Rights of Man (1791) in response to Edmund Burke’s
Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), it had what might be called an unintended and radical
consequence as Smith points out: “The extent to which Paine facilitated expression by writing in a
vernacular language is the invisible extent of his influence” (61). Furthermore, something Paine
does is reflected in Clare’s work: “By frequent use of rhetorical questions and frequent reference to
an understanding shared between himself and the readers, Paine brings his readers into the book. ‘I’
and ‘we’ become two identities which share a relation and various activities” (Smith 52). As John
Horne Tooke, “as notorious as a radical as he was renowned as a linguist,” observed, “current ideas
about language emphasized metaphysical, abstract, or general ideas to a degree which falsified
perception and increased the distance between social classes. Thomas Paine, James Gilchrist,
Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and William Blake made similar observations” (Smith 135).

This was the world Clare was born into without the privilege or the cushion of money to protect
him or stave off the blows of defeat. It is no wonder that he had outbursts like the following in
attempting to accommodate the demands being made of him:
grammar in learning is like Tyranny in government—confound the bitch Ill never be her
slave & have a vast good mind not to alter the verse in question—by g-d Ive tryd an hour &
cannot do a syllable so do your best or let it pass the last way woud please me the best. (Clare
qtd. in Vardy 57-8)

Importantly, it is not that Clare is disposed to discard anything, but that as Vardy points out, Clare
meant “that it be published in its ‘uncorrected form.’”

With all of that said, too much punctuation can seriously impede the fluidity of Clare’s lines.
An examination of his original manuscripts shows that he uses indents and dashes to indicate a
change of direction or a long pause in rumination or scenery. Moreover, once readers have
familiarized themselves with the poet’s biography and his feelings about and relationship to the
various boundaries which haunted him during and after his life, those of enclosure, grammar, sanity,
and even the canon, punctuation marks sound louder, look darker, and feel more intrusive than in
the poetry of many others. Given the political context of language at the time, to the imaginative
reader, some of the marks take on the look of little signs and fences setting up boundaries for the
lines which seem to belong more intimately with the next.

Clare’s use of language and punctuation references his relationship to his rural environs. His
position as a peasant poet yielded for him a different experience than many other poets of his time.
In fact, his youth, his upbringing, his work, and even his exile from London circles all allowed for a
cultivation of self which was never alienated from nature, that is, until he was admitted into the
asylum so far from his home. Unlike Wordsworth, for instance, who could immediately feel the
presence of nature ebbing away as evident in “The World is Too Much With Us” (1807), “Little we
see in nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (3-4), Clare was able to
maintain a deep resonance of connection. In fact, his distance from London society and his success
as a poet may be measured in part by his intimacy with the natural world. Through his poetry, Clare
demonstrates what cultivating and maintaining an intermingled relationship with nature looks like. He does so by articulating a mutually shared relationship between human beings, other creatures, and society with nature and without privileging the experience of the mind over nature. In some cases, as in “The Lament of Swordy Well,” he arguably displaces imagination’s experience with that of nature’s experience. In Clare’s poetry, we are given insights into what an intermingled, reverent relationship with nature might look like through Clare’s own intimate relationship with the natural world.

“Beans in Blossom” was first published in *The Rural Muse* in 1835. In the wake of the utter failure of *The Shepherd’s Calendar; with Village Stories, and Other Poems* (1827), Clare unsuccessfully tried to have *The Midsummer Cushion* published through private subscriptions. Instead, Howe and Whittaker published *The Rural Muse* (1835)—leaving out the majority of the poems Clare had written for the manuscript. As Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield note in *Selected Poems and Prose of John Clare* (1967), *The Midsummer Cushion* “is particularly rich in sonnets, a verse-form with which Clare had great success” (xxviii). They describe them as follows:

The sonnets are the pen-and-ink sketches of the great painter—they capture the scene just as the artist saw it before he had time to reflect deeply upon it. . . . They lie so rich and profuse among his work that it is very difficult to choose among them, and like a child sorting sea-shells in a bucket, one finds it almost impossible to throw one away. (xxviii)

Here, Robinson and Summerfield capture the moment of Clare capturing moments of nature. Their beautiful description calls to mind Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes and Heidegger’s description of them in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1950). By comparing Clare’s sonnets to sea-shells, one is reminded of their thingness. And like Van Gogh’s peasant shoes from which, as Heidegger notes, “the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth” “from the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes” (33), each of Clare’s sonnets opens a world. “In setting up a world,”
states Heidegger, “the work sets forth the earth” (45). “Beans in Blossom” provides us with an example of the way Clare’s opens a world through a sonnet.

The editorial changes made to “Beans in Blossom” over the years offer a glimpse of just how much the original Clare was subject to subsequent misreadings as a result of seemingly small but immensely significant changes. Two significant editorial decisions in early publications of the sonnet, one regarding punctuation and the other regarding language, detract from the sonnet as it was originally written in manuscript form. Regarding punctuation, one of the most distinctive characteristics of early published versions of “Beans in Blossom” is the use of exclamation marks in the beginning of the poem. The exclamation marks appear in the first published edition of the poem, *The Rural Muse* (1835), and they survive in most editions throughout the mid-twentieth century. The punctuation marks lend exaggerated pauses and an air of sentimentality to the sonnet that is uncharacteristic of Clare: “The south-west wind! how pleasant in the face / It breathes! while, sauntering in a musing pace” (1-2). They give an air of surprise or excitement to the poem which is off-kilter. In the manuscript transcription, *Poems of the Middle Period* (1998), edited by Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P.M.S. Dawson, the exclamation points are absent. They are also absent from subsequent editions.

The other significant difference between early manuscript versions and published versions transcriptions has to do with language, evidenced in lines 8-9 of the sonnet. Early published versions depart from manuscript versions as follows: “As o’er the path in rich disorder lean / Its stalks; whence bees, in busy rows and toils ./” Manuscript transcriptions read “That o’er the path in rich disorder leans / Mid which the bees in busy songs and toils./” “As …” instead of “That …” lends a sense of breaking from the previous line. “Its stalks” is simply abrupt, added perhaps to give grammatical sense to a natural scene unnecessarily, a punctuated boundary which interrupts the flow of the line—adding a linear image which is jolting in sound and sight. “Whence bees” adds
another break in the poem that is not in the original, and changing “songs” to “rows” utterly changes Clare’s meaning. “Songs” is a living word lending sound and movement to the activity of the bees while “rows” is more static and restrains the motions of the scene.

A third editorial decision worthy of note was the presentation of the poem in its first printed edition. Although it was published as part of a collection, its initial presentation does not contextualize the sonnet with other like subjects thereby downplaying the glimpse the sonnet offers of a “green” world. The sonnet is preceded by a poem titled “Winter” and followed by the poem “Boys at Play.” The poem cuts off at the end of the fourth line and continues on the next page. In this context, it reads as a playful sort of nursery rhyme, and in combination with the exclamation points the result is a sing-song rhythm that feels entirely at odds with the kind of intermingling of mind and world Clare achieves in the sonnet. On the other hand, in Arthur Symons’s collection, *Poems by John Clare* published in 1908, Symons contextualizes Clare’s nature sonnets together; as a result, the presence and importance of nature in Clare’s poems becomes clearer. Symons selected only ten poems from *The Rural Muse* to include in his collection, and he placed “Beans in Blossom” between “Sudden Shower” and “Evening Primrose.” This editorial choice arguably reflects a better understanding of Clare’s “green” intentions. In “Beans in Blossom,” such choices are particularly significant to a reading of nature intermingled with creatures, people, culture, and society.

Clare’s so-called critical failure as a Romantic poet must be reconsidered in light of the ways he achieves “what might be called a truthful representation of the natural objects around him” (Vardy 18). While in Wordsworth’s poems, “the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime are the ultimate ends of the poem” (Vardy 18), for Clare, “the objects of nature” were in themselves ‘the beauties’, not the source of an intellectual achievement called ‘beauty’” (Vardy 18). In Wordsworth, on the other hand, “the objects of nature are the means to those ends not ends in themselves” (Vardy 18). Whereas Wordsworth’s poetry may often focus on his experience of the
environ, the mind aspect of embodied being in an intermingling relation with embeddedness, Clare may be said to focus more so on the bodily aspect of embodied being embedded in his environ. Thus, the differences between the two poets may be considered a matter of emphasis.

While both poets enjoyed an intimate relationship with objects of nature, the different projects of the poets become evident in the different perspectives present in Clare’s “Beans in Blossom” (1835) and Wordsworth’s “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798). Although Clare does not write his ‘self’ out of the natural surroundings at all—he is certainly present—the emphasis is on the objects of nature and their various relationships, including the physical presence of the poet, and in this case, particularly the “scent of blossomed beans.” A human relationship with nature, however, is written into the deep text of the poem, but not as a gesture to “recuperate the objects of nature into the aesthetic construction of the self” (Vardy 18). Instead, Clare achieves a different effect aside the aesthetic project of Wordsworth by conveying a close relationship to and within nature without privileging the ruminations of the human mind over a human being’s relationship with nature. In fact, Clare achieves quite a different effect. While nature may not actually recuperate us, it infuses us with its being. This is evident in the first lines of “Beans in Blossom” when the line between the poet and the “south-west wind” becomes ambiguous in the phrase, “while sauntering in a musing pace” at which point it is difficult to tell if it is the wind or the poet who is sauntering (1-2).

   The south-west wind, how pleasant in the face

   It breathes, while sauntering in a musing pace

   I roam these new-ploughed fields, and by the side

   Of this old wood where happy birds abide

   And the rich blackbird through his golden bill

   Utters wild music when the rest are still—
Now luscious the scent comes of blossomed beans
That o’er the path in rich disorder leans
Mid which the bees in busy songs and toils
Load home luxuriantly their yellow spoils.

The herd cows toss the molehills in their play
And often stand the stranger’s steps at bay
Mid clover blossoms red and tawny-white
Strong-scented with the summer’s warm delight.

As he does throughout his poems, in “Beans in Blossom,” Clare invites the reader into a moment held open by nature. By virtue of language, “The south-west wind, how pleasant in the face” positions the reader in the space/time of the poet to imagine and feel the wind—warm, “south-west,” and caressing, “pleasant.” Simultaneously, the line relays a moment of the poet’s bodily and sensory experience of the wind. As they so often do in his poems, the objects of nature have agency and being—“it breathes,” but then the line “while sauntering in a musing pace” could refer to wind or poet, either at a tempo which allows time for thought, for rumination. The poet is in sync with the nature of the wind as he “roam[s]” and listens to the “wild music” of a “rich blackbird through his golden bill.” Clare pointedly describes a kind of richness and labor outside the world of humanity. He describes an expansion of time through the wind and the scent of blossoms which hold the moment of nature open. “Now luscious the scent comes of blossomed beans” (7) infuses the poem in a way that fills the scene of nature Clare is relating while also filling the text. These lines, coupled with the following, “That o’er the path in rich disorder leans” (8) call upon senses and body entangled in the environs. He accounts further still for time—a further invitation to the reader to take part in this scene—with “Now luscious comes” and allows “the scent of blossomed beans” (7) to roll into the scene and the poem. “Rich disorder” is a beauty found in nature, not in
picturesque landscapes, and the path covered in blossoms is a site of productivity, “Mid which the bees in busy songs and toils / Load home luxuriantly their yellow spoils” (9-10). Here too is reference to gold, “yellow spoils,” and value found in pure nature. Evidence of human work is at play as well with “herd cows” who “toss the molehills” (11), moles being a bane of the agricultural laborer, but all amidst the beauty of nature—“Mid clover blossoms red and tawny-white / Strong-scented with the summer’s warm delight” (13-14).

A short portion of “Tintern Abbey” illuminates another kind of emphasis—that of a singular mind’s experience of nature. In returning to “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth hopes to reclaim a state of mind lost to him with passing years, a full emotion he can only partially recall:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again: … (lines 59-62)

As he stands overlooking a familiar scene, nature gives him hope:

While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope … (lines 63-66)

He specifically lifts himself out of the moment in the poem with the hope that he may recuperate from nature “life and food / For future years.” He goes on to ruminate over who he once was, criticizing himself while simultaneously mourning his own lost youth.

Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded over mountains, by the side
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led; more like a man
Flying from something he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. … (lines 67-73)

His description of following “wherever nature led; more like a man / Flying from something he dreads” (72) is curious. One concludes that he followed unquestioningly, immediately, his senses heightened in the present tense—body and mind. Wordsworth inscribes his past youth with a deep sense of presence and describes the nature of youth with phrases like “glad animal movements” (75). He inscribes himself into nature’s environs—deeply embedded.

…. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by,)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time has past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures…. (lines 73-86)
The lines, “That had no need of a remoter charm / By thought supplied, or any interest /
Unborrowed from the eye” (82-84), firmly place the emphasis on the poet’s mind. They assert that the young poet’s mind was so embodied to experience the world unfettered by experience and age. With age come a distance from nature for Wordsworth. Wordsworth is mourning this loss, which accompanies age, of the sensual immediacy that Clare remains able to experience as a mature man. Clare “has no need of a remoter charm” because he seeks the wonder in the nature, and nature is plentiful and beautiful in and of itself as well as for itself. “Beans in Blossom” and “Tintern Abbey” also illustrate the difference between what Clare saw as “the beauties” and Wordsworth saw as “the source of an intellectual achievement called ‘beauty’” (Vardy 18) in that the first emerges in the environs whereas the other emerges in the mind. The difference is one of emphasis but with significantly different effects. Through Clare’s perspective, the agency of nature frames the scene and creates the space for poetic engagement whereas in Wordsworth’s poetry, the poet’s experience of nature in relationship to his perspective on his own experience engages both scene and reader.

In order to view Clare as a failed Wordworthian, one has to ignore, as James McKusick points out in “Beyond the Visionary Company” (1994) Clare’s “resistance to sublimity, abstraction and transcendence, and his enthusiastic engagement with the particularity, local tradition and regional dialect” (222). Clare was aware of the critics’ refusal to judge him on his own terms. Furthermore, Clare’s deliberate self-consciousness and lack of naïveté is evident in the poem “Pleasant Places.”

Old stone pits with veined ivy overhung,
Wild crooked brooks o’er which is rudely flung
A rail and plank that bends beneath the tread,
Old narrow lanes where trees meet overhead,
Path-stiles on which a steeple we espy
Peeping and stretching in the distant sky,

And heaths o’er spread with furze-bloom’s sunny shone

Where wonder pauses to exclaim: divine!”

Old ponds dim-shadowed with a broken tree—

These are the picturesque of taste to me,

While painting winds, to make complete the scene

In rich confusion mingles every green,

Waving the sketchy pencil in their hands,

Shading the living scenes to fairy lands.

In his rendering of the picturesque, Clare does not privilege nature’s object over those created by humanity. Rather, “[i]n rich confusion” (12) “painting winds” (11) …. “mingles every green” (12). If anything, nature creates a sense of wonder for humanity, “[s]hading the living scenes to fairy lands” (15). The transitions are graceful and seamless. There is not such a divide between humanity and nature. Rather, they intermingle. He writes humans, along with our architectures, into nature—establishing an integral relationship between people and wild nature with lines like “Wild crooked brooks o’er which is rudely flung / A rail and plank that bends beneath the tread” (2-3). In doing so, he again invites the reader into the scene—to walk across the plank—to “espy” the “steeple” (5) “[p]eeping and stretching in the distant sky” (6). It is a sense of wholeness one gets in reading Clare—a reverent and infinite understanding of the vastness of nature in the infinite details as well as expanse, and also, the world’s proliferation of relationships between nature and humanity evident in lines like “Old narrow lanes where trees meet overhead” (4). Through such lines he reveals the possibilities for a deeply emotional resonance with nature. He recognizes the picturesque in human-made lanes—and creates a partnership between the lanes and the trees, so many so old. Clare is a
deliberate and reflective poet, well aware of his own intentions. And yet, he has been persistently
misunderstood as naïve and simply descriptive.

As Hugh Haughton points out in “Progress and Rhyme” (1994), “Clare was exasperated by
what he took to be the failure of critics and readers to appreciate his poetry on its own terms – or to
recognize that he stood, as a poet, on his own ‘bottom’” (51). There are several reasons for this, not
the least of which was the very reason he initially was able to draw support for his writing endeavors
during a time when the rustic aesthetic sensibility was in vogue; Clare actually was a peasant poet.
Unfortunately, that also meant he was subject to extraordinary levels of class condescension from
the beginning to the end.

Not only was Clare misunderstood as solely descriptive, he was also considered apolitical.
Yet, Clare’s meticulous attention to detailing the relationships between the environs and their
inhabitants also links the effects of distant technological progress with its effects on rural environs
and their inhabitants. Clare’s awareness of the social and cultural effects on the land and its
communities is apparent in two of his more famous poems, “The Moors” and “The Fallen Elm.”

“The Moors” begins by describing unchecked nature which remains unbound but for the sky:

65

Far spread the moorey ground, a level scene

Bespread with rush and one eternal green

That never felt the rage of blundering plough

Though centuries wreathed spring's blossoms on its brow,

Still meeting plains that stretched them far away

In unchecked shadows of green, brown and grey.

Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene

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65“The Moors”. “The Mores” is Clare’s title, but in early editions, this poem was called “Enclosure.” As Raymond Williams notes in
his Clare collection, the poem is an “impassioned attack” on the enclosure laws which claimed the moors as well as the commons.
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye—
Its only bondage was the circling sky

In the opening lines, Clare provides a sense of time, “eternal green” (2), and a sense of history as “centuries wreathed spring’s blossoms on its brow” (4). “Shadows” remain “unchecked” (6) in this scene, as “Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene” (7). The scene itself evokes a sense of wondering and wandering as nature remains unharnessed. Clare makes a powerful statement with a line which hits out at enclosure directly: “Nor fence of ownership crept in between” (8). Later in the poem, Clare describes the passage of time with the loss of moors and the commons. He refers to the animals as well as the people, accounting for the loss of an environment in which inhabitants and nature once comfortably mingled:

Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours,
Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers,
Is faded all—a hope that blossomed free,
And hath been once, no more shall ever be.
Enclosure came and trampled on the grave
Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave,
And memory's pride, ere want to wealth did bow,
Is both the shadow and the substance now.
The sheep and cows were free to range as then
Where change might prompt, nor felt the bonds of men:

Enclosure was a practice whereby the “common-field system” which enabled villagers to live “their own lives and cultivate the soil on a basis of independence” (Hammond 27) was disappearing via the Acts of a distant and faraway Parliament. Villagers lacked the power to stop the rapid changes occurring during Clare’s lifetime. Importantly, as “The Moors” illuminates, it was not only the economic system that was changing, but also the very act of living in relationship to the land.
Cows went and came with evening, morn and night

To the wild pasture as their common right,

He specifically links enclosure with “tramp[ing] on the grave / Of labour’s rights” (20-1) and makes a direct connection with the disenfranchisement of the rural inhabitants with the words “left the poor a slave” (21). Unchecked nature, moreover, is vanishing:

Moors, loosing from the sight, far, smooth, and blea,

Where swopt\(^67\) the plower in its pleasure free,

Are vanished now with commons wild and gay

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Tibbles tampered with the meaning of the poem in their edits as demonstrated by the deletion of the word “commons” in their version and its replacement with the word “heaths.” Such changes are particularly significant with respect to the poet’s reception given that literary criticism often persists in asserting that Clare was never critically minded, analytical, or political. As John Lucas observes in “Clare’s Politics” (1994), there has been a widely-held consensus that Clare’s work lacks political content (148) despite Clare’s strong stance against the boundaries of enclosure—a profoundly political gesture. Considered alongside “The Fallen Elm,” “The Moors” offers us a glimpse of Clare’s vision as the poet sought to articulate the ways society inscribed itself on nature—cutting aspects of it off from other aspects of itself.

Clare wrote “The Fallen Elm” in 1821 while living in Helpston when the landlord planned to chop down an elm that had stood behind his parents’ cottage since long before Clare was born. It would not be published until 1921. Apparently, the landlord’s plans never came to fruition. However, “The Fallen Elm,” like “The Moors” emerges as a powerful protest against the losses of freedom sustained by laborers as a result of enclosure laws. It also emerges as protest against the

\(^67\) Swopt: swooped
elimination of a tree to which individuals had grown attached. It illuminates personal relationships with nature as William Wordsworth’s “Sonnet Against the Kendal Windermere Railway” (1844) does. Each poet is intervening, albeit in different ways, to local changes happening as the result of distant progress and industrial needs. As John Barrell points out in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (1972), “one important motive to enclose was often, precisely, to deprive the laborer of his right of access to commons [eliminating the ability to collect firewood for instance], to make him more dependent on his wages” (232). It is the social situation and the powerlessness of the laborer that Clare takes issue with in lines like these in “The Fallen Elm”:

Thus came enclosure – ruin was its guide

But freedom’s clapping hands enjoyed the sight

Though comfort’s cottage soon was thrust aside

And workhouse prisons raised upon the site. (lines 57-60)

It is important to note that Clare uses the word “freedom” in two ways in this poem, to mourn the loss of freedom as a result of enclosure and to identify the abuse of another kind of freedom wielded by the landlords. As Barrell says, Clare draws “a clear connection between enclosure and poverty, and … Clare [gives] us a piece of historical information to cement the connection: after the enclosure a new workhouse was built in Helpston” (195). Here, a direct line of influence may be drawn to the development of technologies within industrial progress as having indirect yet substantial influences on the lives of those in the country.

There has been a great deal of critical debate with respect to the political lens with which to interpret Clare’s poems, particularly the connection between enclosure in Helpston and Clare’s development as a writer. According to Barrell, “[p]articularly unhelpful has been the absolute reliance [by most of Clare’s biographers] on *The Village Labourer* (1911) by J.L. and Barbara
Hammond, a book which, for all its virtues, does offer an unusually one-sided account of the economic effects of parliamentary enclosure” (190). The one-sidedness to which Barrell refers has to do with the Hammonds’ heavy-handedness in situating the peasant laborers as powerless and changing enclosure laws as sudden and dramatic. While Barrell does not question the validity of the Hammonds’s observations, he is concerned with the tendency to use Clare’s poems as historical accounts of actual, tangible events—“enclosure” being a trigger for agenda-ridden misreadings. In contrast to readings such as the Hammonds’, Raymond Williams, for instance, points out in “Literature and Rural Society,” that “the same complaints and the same nostalgia appear in rural literature for at least 400 years” (Williams qtd. in Barrell 199). In other words, the effects of enclosure laws had been felt and written about for a long time before Clare was writing. Williams suggests that some political interpretations of Clare’s poems might be exaggerated.

However, as E.P. Thompson points out in The Making of the English Working Class (1963), the years between 1790 and 1830 marked a time of enormous change and loss for the agricultural laborers of Great Britain. The commons or publicly shared spaces, “the poor man’s heritage for ages past” (Thompson 219), were rapidly disappearing during this period:

In village after village, enclosure destroyed the scratch-as-scratch-can subsistence economy of the poor—the cow or geese, fuel from the common, gleanings, and all the rest. The cottager without legal proof of rights was rarely compensated. The cottager who was able to establish his claim was left with a parcel of land inadequate for subsistence and a disproportionate share of the very high enclosure costs. (217)

The “common-field system” which enabled villagers to live “their own lives and cultivate the soil on a basis of independence” (Hammond 27) was disappearing via Acts of Parliament far away from home. The villagers had no agency or power to stop the rapid changes. But importantly, as many of the John Clare’s poems illuminate, it was not only the economic system that was changing, but also
the very act of living in relationship to the land. Clare describes the loss in “Helpstone.” After extolling the “beauties” and “dear delights” of Helpstone, he describes the wake of “golden days, long vanished from the plain” in the following excerpt:

But now, alas, those scenes exist no more; 115
The pride of life with thee, like mine, is o’er,
Thy pleasing spots to which fond memory clings,
Sweet cooling shades and soft refreshing springs.
And though fate’s pleased to lay their beauties by
In a dark corner of obscurity, 120
As fair and sweet they bloomed thy plains among,
As bloom those Edens by the poets sung,
Now all’s laid waste by desolation’s hand,
Whose cursed weapons level half the land.
Oh who could see my dear green willows fall, 125
What feeling heart but dropped a tear for all?
Accursed wealth, o’erbounding human laws,
Of every evil thou remainst the cause.
Victims of want, those wretches such as me, 130
Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee:
Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed
And thine our loss of labour and of bread;
Thou art the cause that levels every tree
And woods bow down to clear a way for thee. (115-135)
The reasons for and history behind these changes is long. Suffice to say here that the potent combination of economic self-interest and ideology provided a powerful motivation for enclosure propaganda and the resulting loss of common lands for rural inhabitants. Members of the dominant landowning classes saw an opportunity for “fatter rent-rolls and larger profits [for themselves]” through the process of enclosure (Thompson 217). Greed was a crucial factor, and in its wake a wage-earning class became the norm. In order to support and obscure this, enclosure propagandists cloaked their greed in parsimony in some instances:

There is a practice which prevails … of giving them drink both forenoon and afternoon, be the world what it will; which is a ridiculous custom, and ought to be abolished without loss of time. What can be more absurd, than to see a ploughman stopping his horses half an hour, in a cold winder day, to drink ale? (Thompson 217)

A humane pace and relation with work—such as stopping to take a break and warm up with ale—is turned with rhetoric into an immoral act. What is suggested here is that rural workers had too much freedom and independence as it stood, and that they took advantage of it in their idleness. Propagandists helped foster the prevailing ideology which encouraged a belief that the system of shared land and public commons “was at the bottom of all the evils of society” and that “it was harmful to the morals and useless to the pockets of the poor” (Hammond 30). In this light, “the commons” became considered an “essential injury to [the agricultural labourers], by being made a plea for their idleness” (Hammond 30). Here, as in the case of the editorial in the Morning Post following William Wordsworth’s “Sonnet on the Kendal and Windermere Railway” (1844), we see parsimony and morality thinly veiling monied interests.

In other instances, class condescension was more direct as evidenced in the following passage in which “[t]he spirit on which the Board of Agriculture approached the subject [of
enclosure] found appropriate expressions in Sir John Sinclair’s high-sounding language” (Hammond 30).

The idea of having lands in common, it has been justly remarked, is to be derived from that barbarous state of society, when men were strangers to any higher occupation than those of hunters or shepherds, or had only just tasted the advantages to be reaped from the cultivation of the earth. (Sinclair qtd. in Hammond 30)

The unrepentant and unrestrained disdain and disrespect to which the rural classes were subjected went a long way in facilitating the enormous changes that were taking place during this era. Moreover, burgeoning industry was encouraging a mindset that saw no advantage to cultivating a relationship with the land. With respect to Clare, its relevance pertains not only to the actual changes to the countryside as a result of enclosure—the subject of so many of his poems—but also to the class discrimination he suffered as a “peasant poet,” which created so much conflict with respect to his vernacular language choices, and which also facilitated his reputation as a “mad poet” throughout his life and long after his death.

Clare’s position within the agricultural laboring class was not simple, and was nebulous at best. But he was also born a peasant. Thompson’s explanation of class experience in the preface to The Making of the English Working Class (1963), drawing upon Antonio Gramsci, helps illuminate the challenges Clare faced throughout his life because of his conflicted identity:

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily.
Clare’s personal experience may very well be the best evidence of his radical intent. He was of the class that was condescended to in the interests of the gentry. Like the land and its inhabitants who had no agency to prevent or even protest enclosure laws, Clare’s opportunities were extremely limited. Despite his successful identity as a peasant poet—one that helped induct him into literary life—and the associations that followed, John Clare did not choose to be born a “peasant poet,” and he had ambitions which led him outside the purview of his class standing. His dreams are evident in his first surviving letter written to J.B. Henson, a bookbinder and schoolmaster through whom Clare later met Edward Drury—the cousin of John Taylor, Clare’s editor later on. Henson helped Clare to get into print. A portion of the letter reads as follows:

Sir

I send you some of the principal Subscribers which I have procured lately: the first of which is a Baronet!!! Who speaks very highly of my ‘Sonnet’ in the prospectus—Good God, how great are my Expectations! What hopes do I cherish! . . . . I may be building ‘Castles in the Air’ but Time will prove it—. . . . —and if ever it lies in my power to give friendship its due you shall not go unrewarded

yours John Clare

In spite of his early success with *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) which “sold out its edition of a thousand copies within two months,” (Bate 148-9) Clare never really achieved the power to give friendship its due. From the beginning, he faced resistance from all directions. Clare was in the unusual position of living and thinking in two worlds, and his existence in the literary world was dependent upon his origins in the rustic one. Clare’s entrance to the literary world was an exit out of his rural one. In this sense, he was destined to be a trespasser—not only into other classes, but also within his own. Perhaps the conflicting critical views regarding his political views or their absence have been inevitable.
Barrell goes a long way in reconciling conflicting views. In response to Williams’s argument, Barrell agrees but then observes that Williams “does not try to explain why the same complaints emerge from time to time when they do” (199). Barrell proposes what he asserts as an important and fundamental point, that the process [of enclosure] did advance at different speeds in different areas; and lines [from poems such as “The Fallen Elm” and “The Moors”] are a reminder that an enclosure, for example, coming as one stage in the process as it took shape in any particular parish, could represent a totally disorienting advance in the creation of the rural proletariat in the particular parish being enclosed. (201)

Barrell also points out that “for Clare the process was a quite conscious one.” It was the “particular, local changes” that Clare’s poems encompass. I would add that it was not only the economic system and widening gaps between the classes that were changing, but the very act of living in relationship to the land. I believe that this last point is important to accurate readings of Clare’s poems when one considers the lengths and depths Clare’s poems create in carving out a space in which nature and human beings as well as objects of nature and objects of society intermingle and relate.

In the case of “The Lament of Swordy Well,” we have an example of Clare’s foresight and ability to recognize the long-lasting effects of unsustainable farming for profit without environmental awareness to the health of the land itself. Politicized by both the use of ballad stanzas, a popular form culturally, and the poem’s point of view from a piece of land, the poem upends conventional aesthetic practices and questions the ethics of economic practices. The ballad stanza invokes the voices of the community and by extension, the common song. The beginning of the second ballad stanza of the poem opens as follows:

I hold no hat to beg a mite

Nor pick it up when thrown,
No limping leg I hold in sight

But pray to keep my own.

The speaker is a piece of land, but the use of the word “lament” in the title of the poem, the use of the ballad measure, and the description of one who “hold[s] no hat to beg a mite” implies that the poem could easily be conveying the voice of a destitute, abject figure in the community—particularly with the use of the word “beg” which alludes to occupying a space within a community. Moreover, the use of the ballad stanza invites the contemplation of a collective loss, the nature of which is not revealed until the next stanza. Furthermore, the use of the ballad stanza refutes the tendency to privilege certain kinds of poetic language over a locale’s vernacular. Each of these elements contributes to creating a poem which occupies the space of the common song of a community. By extension, the piece of land is conveyed as part of the community and indeed, the responsibility of the community.

The use of the ballad intersects with the poem’s point of view in a way that reveals another aspect of Clare’s project. In John Clare, Politics and Poetry (2003), Alan Vardy observes that Clare refuses “to recuperate the objects of nature into the aesthetic construction of the self” (18). This is evident in “The Lament of Swordy Well” as the poem itself subverts the traditional Romantic aesthetic project by announcing itself as a ballad sung from the perspective of a piece of land halfway through the third stanza:

I’m Swordy Well, a piece of land

That’s fell upon the town,

Who worked me till I couldn’t stand

And crush me now I’m down.

The poet, in essence, is absent. And so we glean a sense of loss without the tangible presence of the ruminating poet amidst nature. The perspective of the poem breaks away from the “greater
Romantic lyric,\(^{68}\) one of the dominant forms of Romantic poetry so familiar in Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” or Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight.” The absent poet eliminates any possibility of the anticipated sublime turn through the poet’s recuperation of Nature. The familiar structure of an outward description of a natural scene which prompts an inward meditation on or resolution of (usually) a loss never appears. The expected altered state of the poet’s mind followed by a return to the outward scene is absent. The reciprocity demanded by the “traditional” Romantic tradition between the poet and nature is not a consideration in “The Lament of Swordy Well,” and its absence in this poem forces the reader’s attention to a different aspect of the Romantic project—to call attention to the damages being done to Nature and people’s shattered relationship to nature as a result of the needs of the marketplace and the unceasing march of progress. Instead of using nature as a recuperative object to reach the beautiful or the sublime, Clare’s poem unapologetically exposes the effects of irresponsible, profit-driven plowing.

By extension, he advocates for sustainability. Clare’s poem is direct. In “[t]hat’s fell upon the town,” the play on the word “fell,” as in fallen from its ability to sustain itself, sets the tone and ushers in the content of the rest of the poem. The brutality of being “worked” until being left unable to “stand” and being “crush[ed]” when “down” are stark, cruel descriptions that could also apply to wage laborers who have no other alternatives. While Clare is firm in his description of the land’s perspective, the subtle suggestion of personification in the opening stanza lends itself to cultivating a reader’s empathy. However, humanity in this poem is the object of the land’s perspective, not the other way around. Later stanzas emphasize society’s brutal, hard treatment of the land as in the following lines: “And me, they turned me inside out / For sand and grit and stones / And turned my old green hills about / And picked my very bones.” In these lines, we

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\(^{68}\) The “greater Romantic lyric” is discussed at length in M.H. Abrams describes in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953).
clearly see the “sense of outrage” McKusick refers to in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000) with reference to Clare’s response to “the destruction of the natural environment” as well as the “interrelatedness of all forms of life” (78). In “The Lament of Swordy Well,” Clare gives us a perspective which decenters anthropocentric experience while simultaneously establishing a direct connection between irresponsible human action and behavior with its consequences for the land. Simultaneously, Clare emphasizes the importance of the land by stirring human pity for the personified allusions. As Clare addresses the reckless destruction of the land locally, Clare’s poem may also be read as a call for efforts toward sustainability, an awareness of embeddedness, and a more compassionate respect for our environs globally.

In all of the poems explored here thus far, Clare reveals relationships instead of divisions, and throughout his work, he lays bare the depths and intricacies of those relationships. In “Beans in Blossom,” Clare demonstrates the resulting wholeness from an intermingled relationship with nature. In both “The Moors” and “The Fallen Elm,” he elucidates ways that the encroaching needs of an industrializing society affect nature, communities, and individuals as well as their varied relationships with one another. Finally, in “The Lament of Swordy Well,” Clare gives his readers a perspective from nature itself.

Not only in his poetry, but in his journals as well, Clare explores various and varied relationships between individuals and nature as well as between nature and society. Throughout, he reveals connections instead of divisions and intermingling instead of separations. As he does so, he offers readers opportunities to experience the intermingled relationship he himself shares with nature as he describes his relationship to it, its relationship to aspects of itself, and its and his relationship to even rudimentary technologies—and in the following example, to a wood stile. The following journal entry was written on Wednesday, 29 Sept. 1824. In it, we glean a strong sense of Clare’s material presence in the rural scene along with a sense of his own personal history and
emotional attachment to both nature and the traces of humanity which are left within it—even when dislodged or discarded—as in the case of the old wood stile:

Took a walk in the fields saw an old woodstile taken way from a favourite spot which it had occupied all my life the post were over grown with Ivy & it seemd so akin to nature & the spot were it stood as tho it had taken it on lease for an undisturbed existence it hurt me to see it was gone for my affections claims a friendship with such things but nothing is lasting in this world last year Langly bush was destroyd an old white thorn that had stood for more then a century full of fame the Gipseys Shepaherds & Herd men all had their tales of its history & it will be long ere its memory is forgotten. (Clare Northampton Journal 183)

As he does with “Beans in Blossom,” he writes himself into the scene and as in “The Fallen Elm” he accounts for the relationships we may share with objects in natural environs. Through his journal entry, we are given an immediate first-person perspective, “[t]ook a walk in the fields saw an old woodstile.” His description of the “old woodstile” conveys its embeddedness in its environs along with his own embeddedness through his relationship to it through memory. He describes its removal as a loss as it was “taken way from a favourite spot,” a line which serves to connect the poet with both the spot and his own past. This connectedness through time is emphasized when Clare writes that the stile had always been there with the line “which it had occupied all [Clare’s] life.” In this journal entry, we have a sense of the way the poet intermingles nature, a rudimentary technology, and his own consciousness. However, as he draws a comparison between “an old woodstile” and “an old white thorn that had stood for more then a century,” Clare conveys the sense of community that may attach itself to both natural and built objects of its environs. This sense is emphasized when he writes about the loss of the “old white thorn” that “the Gipsey Shepaherds & Herd men all had their tales of its history.” He links his own experience of loss with others of the community with repeated reference to their memories as well: “& it will be long ere its memory is
forgotten.” Here, we get a sense of the poet’s response to changes in his more familiar surroundings, not only as an individual, but also as a member of various communities—connected only by their shared references—being that gypsies are nomadic while shepherds and herdsmen are more local. The feelings of loss Clare expresses in this entry reveal an aspect of the poet’s vision which can be described as a wholeness which links a number of parts: one individual’s body and emotions with their loved and familiar environs, an individual’s part in a community by way of shared geographical objects, the connection between the past and the present, and the connections of any number of individuals through shared environs. The wood stile had a role and place in the minds, memories, and stories of others—including nature’s. That the woodstile was “over grown with Ivy & … seem’d so akin to nature …” reminds us that the stile was made of nature, and that it had found its place in nature again. Moreover, unlike the signs which Clare abhors, stiles provide a way over walls so they grant rather than forbid access.

Throughout his life, Clare writes about changes he sees, experiences, and protests. He reveals oft overlooked connections and demonstrates emotional and physical interconnectedness throughout his renderings of the natural world and his experience of it. In this way, he sidesteps Cartesian separations throughout his work. Clare’s objections are deliberate, and his perspectives often convey the conflict he feels in the face of an unyielding progress which usurps the land for the use and needs of the more powerful—irrespective of the needs of the land itself or its inhabitants. His poems are grounded in lived experience and they often lament changes motivated by progress or profit which fail to take into account the more negative effects on the environs and various relationships to and within the environs. In some cases, Clare protests changes in a manner which calls out the absurdity of those changes as in a passage from “The Moors” which asks if birds are supposed to understand the no trespassing signs Clare sees being erected:

A board sticks up to notice “no road here”
And on the tree with ivy overhung
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung
As though the very birds should learn to know
When they go there they must no further go. (70-74)

Clare dislikes the disruptions to nature he sees in the transformation of open spaces, the eradication of independent agricultural labor he witnesses, and the erection of fences and signs he experiences—cutting rural inhabitants off from fields, fuel, and passage. He resents the elimination of a way of life—for people, for animals and for the land itself. Throughout his work, we can see the ways that advancing technological progress elsewhere creates the need for more borders, more boundaries, and more separations everywhere. In this changing world, Clare finds himself and others facing more and more moments when simply living becomes trespassing.

Clare was sensitive to the issue of trespassing, and this may have been in part because Clare’s experience with trespassing was long. As John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton tell the poet’s story in “John Clare: The Trespasser” (1994), it becomes evident that Clare began his literary apprenticeship with nature and literature as a trespasser. Goodridge and Kelsey explain:

John Clare was about thirteen when he first saw Thomson’s *The Seasons*. Within days he had bought his own copy of the poem and in order to read it unobserved, climbed over a wall into a private estate. . . . [T]he central excitement here is that Clare’s initiation into literature involves a literal and metaphorical trespass. The appropriate act for climbing into the world of literature is climbing into the private land of the aristocracy. (87-8)

An untitled sonnet titled “Trespass” by the Tibbles in 1935 (when the sonnet was first published) expresses Clare’s conflicted position between irreconcilable worlds very well.

I dreaded walking where there was no path
And pressed with cautious tread the meadow swath
And always turned to look with wary eye
And always feared the owner coming by—
Yet everything about where I had gone
Appeared so beautiful I ventured on
And when I gained the road where all are free
I fancied every stranger frowned at me
And every kinder look appeared to say
“You’ve been on trespass in your walk today.”
I’ve often though, the day appeared so fine,
How beautiful if such a place were mine,
But having naught, I never feel alone
And cannot use another’s as my own.

Clare’s self-consciousness and sophistication of intellect is evident in “Trespass,” and so is his astute awareness of his position as an alienated other. Says Bate, “Clare’s sense of his own status as a perpetual outsider, a man who did not fully belong in either the world of landed property or that of literary propriety, is nowhere better caught than in a sonnet on his fear of trespassing” (Bate 405).

The poem, “Trespass,” captures a sense of trepidation and complexity with phrases such as “dreaded walking,” “cautious tread,” and “wary eye” (1-3). But it also betrays the determination which marked Clare’s character. He “pressed,” pressed on, “where there was no path” (1-2), where none had cleared a way. And although he “feared the owner coming by” (4), because everything “appeared so beautiful” he “ventured on” (6). In life, Clare refused to heed the boundaries he faced due to his class status. What also becomes clear here is the reality of the embodied mind—the wholeness of a person pushing past, walking past boundaries set against him. Upon breaking through the constraints which kept him in his place or when he “gained the road where all are free”
he met with disapproving eye and “fancied every stranger frowned at me” (8). The poem conveys better than any other words by biographers or scholars the conflict Clare was forced to struggle with—and the complexity of a mind which refused containment. The necessity of his early trespasses also marks the isolation with which he began his literary career. Unfortunately, his literary career ended in isolation as well—worse so because after he was admitted to the asylum, the rural nature in which he cultivated his own mind and self was lost to him along with his freedom to roam the fields in which he grew up. Clare conveys the depth of his isolation in two poems written after he was interred, “I AM” and “Left Alone.”

“I AM” and “Left Alone” are two of five hundred poems written between 1841 and 1864 while Clare was incarcerated at Northampton County Lunatic Asylum, the second asylum to which he was committed and where he spent the last 23 years of his life. “I AM” is the most famous of Clare’s poems. While nearly all of Clare’s poems were forgotten throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century (outside the venue of a few critics such as Edmund Blunden), “I AM” continued to be published in anthologies in part because “[t]he old Oxford Book of English Verse preserved ‘I Am’ from oblivion” as Robinson and Summerfield observe in the introduction to Selected Poems and Prose of John Clare (1967). The poem was written at Northampton County Lunatic Asylum and was first published on New Year’s Day, 1848, in the Bedford Times. It did not appear in a collection until 1901 when it was published in Poems by John Clare edited by Norman Gale. The only surviving manuscript is in William F. Knight’s hand, and it appears as transcribed by Robinson and Powell in The Later Poems of John Clare. “Left Alone” was first published in Life and Remains of John Clare: The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet (1873) and edited by John Law Cherry. According to Cherry, Clare’s literary “remains” fell to John Taylor after Clare’s death, and the poems included in the section “Asylum Poems” were taken from those manuscripts—transcribed for Clare by William F. Knight, the steward of the asylum who became good friends with Clare. No original manuscripts
in Clare’s hand survived. The asylum poems, as Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield point out in “John Clare: An Interpretation of Certain Asylum Letters” present a vision “of isolation, abandonment, and a more horrifying struggle to preserve self-awareness” (136). The first two stanzas of the “I AM” capture just how lonely Clare had become:

I am—yet what I am, none cares or knows.
My friends forsake me like a memory lost
I am the self-consumer of my woes—
They rise and vanish in oblivious host
Like shadows in love-frenzied stifled throes—
And yet I am and live—like vapours tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams
Where there is neither sense of life or joys
But the vast shipwreck of my life’s esteems
Even the dearest that I loved the best
Are strange—nay, rather stranger than the rest.

There is an ethereal atmosphere in “I AM” which is absent in his earlier poems. The rich materiality of a being intermingling with his environs is gone. Instead, he states, “And yet I am, and live—like vapours lost” / “Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, — …” (6-7). “Vapours” is ethereal, hardly present, so unlike “sauntering in a musing pace” of “Beans in Blossom.” In fact, here in “I AM,” Clare has written himself out of his natural surroundings quite entirely. The “scorn and noise” of others got him there—away from home and alone with his mind “Into the living sea of waking dreams, / Where there is neither sense of life or joys” (8-9). Just the “shipwreck of [his] lifes
“Left Alone,” an infrequently published poem, is obscure in comparison to “I AM.” “Left Alone” reveals a quieted and very sane voice of loneliness, one which is difficult to reconcile with the public view of Clare the peasant lunatic. The poem disturbs this reputation, and rightly. Too often, as Merryn and Raymond Williams point out in *John Clare, Selected Poetry and Prose* (1986), Clare’s “condition” often guided interpretations of him “before what he was actually writing was heard as itself” (2). Both poems are strong evidence of his clarity of mind—and the agony of his isolation after being removed from his beloved fields and confined far away. In “Left Alone,” Clare proclaims his solitude in the first line, while in the second, he offers a bewildered lament. Three lines into the first stanza, he conveys how tired is of living, and the rest of the stanza ends by giving us a sense, line by line, that life has become too long, lonely, and sad:

Left in the world alone—
Where nothing seems my own
And everything is weariness to me.
’Tis a life without an end
’Tis a world without a friend
And everything is sorrowful I see.

In the second stanza, he describes nature at a distance, both darkly and starkly, and so unlike the poems he wrote from and of his rural nature at home.

There’s the crow upon the stack
And other birds all black
While November’s frowning wearily,
And the black-clouds dropping rain
‘Till the floods hide half the plain

And everything is weariness to me.

In the last stanza, “the sun shines wan and pale,” not warm or bright, the wind is cold, “chill blows the northern gale,” and they are “odd leaves” which “shake and shiver on the tree.”

The sun shines wan and pale

Chill blows the northern gale

And odd leaves shake and shiver on the tree,

While I am left alone

Chilled as a mossy stone

And all the world is frowning over me.

Clare is “left alone” and cold, “Chilled as a mossy stone” (17). A stone has no life or song. Not only is he isolated, but he also feels abandoned in a world which he believes entirely looks down upon him disapprovingly, “And all the world is frowning over me” (18). His exile from his rural home left him exiled from both his embeddedness in nature and also the nature that had woven its way into his poems for so much of his earlier life.

Clare’s poems are profoundly moving—and given the political tides of his day—profoundly subversive. They are filled not only with the natural beauties (as he called them) but also with attempts to reach for something other than the picturesque—with a haunting quality that both remembers and foresees the destruction of a balance between Nature and Being. His poetic sensibility borders on what one might call the prophetic, and certainly political as evidenced by his stance against enclosures as well as his tendency to eliminate class and linguistic boundaries. Yet, as John Lucas observes in “Clare’s Politics” (1994), “[t]here seems to be a widespread agreement
among Clare’s commentators that his poetry has blessedly little to do with politics” (148).\(^\text{69}\) There is a relationship at work here between Clare’s class standing and critical interpretation of his mind’s abilities. Despite the self-consciousness evident in his work, and the obvious political strikes against tyrannical boundaries of so many kinds, throughout his life, Clare was unable to rid himself of the yoke of condescension that marked his very first encounters in the literary circles.\(^\text{70}\) As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Clare was once accused of “having no thoughts” and of his mind being “a camera, not a mind.”\(^\text{71}\) A lack of understanding of eco-critical concerns and the absence for so long of an ideological framework in which to situate Clare’s work contributed to his marginalization—but it was his marginalization that allowed him to see then what we fear now—the loss of equilibrium between humanity and nature. In his poems, he strives to cross the boundaries laid out by society and culture. And throughout his work, he conveys the possibilities of a material intermingling with nature which gives way to a feeling of wholeness. He resisted then what has overwhelmed us now—boundaries motivated by profit, fashion, and tradition—cutting us off from the Nature with which Clare strove to live.

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\(^{69}\) “Clare’s Politics” makes a case for Clare’s “ politicization” with “The Fallen Elm.”

\(^{70}\) Edward Drury wrote to John Taylor on April 20, 1819: “Clare cannot reason: he writes & can give no reason for using a fine expression or a beautiful idea: if you read poetry to him, he’ll exclaim at each delicate expression – ‘beautiful!’ ‘fine!’ but can give no reason. Yet he is always correct and just in his remarks. He is low in stature – long visage – light hair – coarse features – ungainly – awkward – is a fiddler – lives ale – likes the firls – somewhat idle – hates work.” (qtd. Edward Storey 25)

\(^{71}\) See Edmund Gosse quotes in Mark Story (375).
Chapter Six

A Conclusion

A DISILLUSIONED ROMANTIC AND A MODERN URBAN CRITIC:
JOHN RUSKIN AND LEWIS MUMFORD

The paradox of man and the dilemma of environmentalism are here in a nutshell. The definition begins with ‘nature’ as the immediate cause of the entire material world, of all phenomena including humankind, but it ends with an opposition between ‘nature’ and ‘humans or human creations or civilization’. We are both a part of and apart from nature.

Wonder is a response to a momentary presence, not a constant one. The original technē of the Greeks was attuned to the natural unfolding of things.

—Jonathan Bate Song of the Earth (2000)

If before the nineteenth century we cleared the forest to make way for the farm, with the entrance of the industrial pioneer we began to clear the farm to parcel out the city … we formed the habit of using the land, not as a home, a permanent seat of culture, but as a means to something else—principally as a means to the temporary advantages of profitable speculation and exploitation.

—Lewis Mumford Sticks and Stones (1924)

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the work of Romantic authors may provide us with new and contemporarily relevant discourse spaces in which to rethink our relationships with the technologies we create within our environs. Finding new ways to think and talk about technology and our world becomes crucial when we consider that our technologies may not only be architectures of space, but of minds and bodies as well. In fact, we arguably become the creations of the technologies we invent. The pressing contemporary relevance of Romantic perspectives becomes clear when we recognize that our current experiences parallel theirs in that we are living amidst equally enormous forces of change—particularly with respect to technologies and their far and deep reaching influences. I have also argued that what has been taken for nostalgia in Romantic
literature was very often an intervention in prevailing ideologies. These Romantic interventions reflected a strong resistance to the splintering effects of an accelerating culture which refused the intermingling of mind, body and environs while it overlooked the effects of burgeoning technologies on individuals—another tendency which parallels contemporary culture. Contrary to a cultural mindset cultivated by Cartesian perspectives which separated mind from body, environs from individuals, and nature from culture, Romantic authors wrote literature which consistently brought mind, body, and environs together in a manner which underscored how inextricably connected we are to others and our world. Marked by their refusal of Cartesian separations, Romantic texts offer us positive ways to think about the social, environmental, and ethical implications of our various architectural technologies.

Literary language can play a crucial role in encouraging us to rethink our relationships with the world especially given that language has a material reality which is able to “reflect” and “transform” what is “our thinking and reasoning about the world” (Clark Supersizing 59); Romantic literature provides us with a model. This is particularly true when we consider that language acts as our medium for conception (McKusick 16). However, literature wants atmosphere, as Matthew Arnold argues in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864), and it is the critic who is often able to create that atmosphere. Therefore, criticism has a crucial role to play in considering the work of authors who refuse Cartesian gravity. Addressing such literature with social responsibility in mind becomes a vital step in developing a new vocabulary to facilitate a new mindset with which to approach our world—a world now entirely covered and overlaid with technologies which first achieved large-scale proportions during the early days of the industrial revolution.

Technologies are now fully integrated throughout the earth. Given their liquid nature and the ways they have soaked into every aspect of life and the world, their presence is now inescapable.
To ignore technologies and their effects, and our very personal, arguably intimate, relationships to them, would be profoundly self-destructive. What is required is a new perspective, and new critical approaches to the planet and to the kinds of literature which may facilitate new understandings of our world and our place in it. Romantic authors’ works have always refused the “nature/culture binary that has for so long structured Western understanding” (Rigby 140). Given that this “partially illusory” and “culturally contingent” understanding “has now become highly problematic” as Rigby emphasizes (140), the question becomes, what might a world that valued the intermingling of body and world and nature and culture look like? Or, how do we cultivate respectful and mindful relationships to the earth and with each other with the technologies we create? How do we go about recognizing that technologies have become part of who we are and the world we have made? And, how do we cultivate habits of interacting with the world as a home?

In this chapter, I conclude by proposing that nature and culture are not separate, but intermingled, and that we may yet be able to achieve a sustainable balance globally if we begin to act locally with the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants in mind. What is needed is a concerted effort toward cultivating an all-encompassing, wide-ranging, multi-layered cultural episteme which strives toward sustainability rather than preservation, embeddedness rather than separation, and exploration rather than debate. Each point is crucial, and all of these points intermingle. Sustainability recognizes our physical and mental embeddedness in our environs. It suggests mutually ethical baselines which support an idea that cultivating a healthier world benefits all creatures in the long run. Furthermore, sustainability recognizes that we cannot expect to survive as a species and a planet by simply separating out nature and preserving it on its own. Nature does not recede from civilization at all. In fact, nature comes right up to civilization, grows in and around it, always ready to take it back. Technology confronts nature every day. Through our policies and our
systems, our cities and our laws, we need to cultivate a healthy respect for the nature that surrounds us and of which we are, in fact, an integral part. We must apply the same mindful practice to the growth of our technologies. To reach the myriad of solutions that have become urgently necessary, in some instances too late, we need to rely more on critical exploration rather than critical debate. In debate, we too often come from a fixed position which runs headlong into competing voices and interests. If we embrace the movement toward exploration, we allow ourselves to leave our positions to consider new ones, to search for possibilities, to give way to other ideas, and to seek solutions which may yet seem out of reach. Here, I consider perspectives from two perhaps unlikely sources, John Ruskin and Lewis Mumford, both in relation to urban environs, as critics who dedicated a good deal of their lives’ work to the study of both technological progress and urban architecture in relation to humanity and civilization. Mumford’s relevance resides in his lifetime effort to envision sustainable urban communities which regard the well-being of individuals as a necessary component in urban and regional planning. In the case of Ruskin, arguably a disillusioned Romantic, he offers us a perspective as a critic which mingles embodied minds with aspects of their environs in ways which clearly reveal the need for a cultural ethics that takes both the well-being of individuals and the environs into account. Both critics question values born of Cartesian separations. Each strives to articulate perspectives which account for a wholeness of being in the world. Ruskin reveals the roles of both body and language in climate change. Both Ruskin and Mumford resist the mechanization of human labor. Each considers the intermingling of the mind and body within their external environs. Here, I consider the ways each critic offers alternative perspectives in considering the phenomenological experiences of being in the world as it is changing amidst technological progress.

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What makes Lewis Mumford’s work interesting in the context of this study is his lifelong attempt to envision physically healthy living environments in relationship to the mental well-being of individuals and communities amidst an increasingly mechanized and modern society. Throughout his work he consistently sought out a harmonious balance between the personal, political, and social elements of life in search of a more humane culture. As Casey Nelson Blake notes in *Beloved Community* (2000), Mumford tried to “cultivate a culture grounded in the fullest possible human experience” (189). Specifically, as a cultural and architectural critic, Mumford attempted to identify the ways a still-changing and fully industrialized culture might materially accommodate individual well-being through a qualitative value system or ethically-minded aesthetic that embraced ideas such as regionalism in the planning of communities, organic unity in the development of towns, cities, and architecture, and craftsmanship in relation to lived experience. His emphasis on urban planning, architectures, and individual creativity in relation to well-being align his criticism with the work of the last Romantic addressed here, John Ruskin. Like Ruskin, Mumford took issue with the way the machine of industry disposed of its human parts for profit and power.

I first encountered the work of Lewis Mumford in *Harper’s Magazine* while living in one of the oldest areas of Los Angeles proper—a neighborhood between Downtown and South Central that had been designed and laid out with an eye toward its human inhabitants. The wide streets were canopied with ancient and enormous trees. The scent of jasmine, honeysuckle, and orange blossoms lingered over the wide sidewalks. Lush parks were abundant and filled with fountains, walking paths, and lawns. Houses were built far enough from the street to leave room for ample front yards across which large, old-fashioned porches could be seen wrapped around enormous and ornate Victorians and the more linear California Craftsmen. The small-scale apartment buildings, mostly brick with white-painted trim, were built in U-formation around gardens and lawns not
unlike the famous Garden City communities, and in most cases, these gardens had at each center an enormous tree—the sight of which implied that the architectural plans had taken into account the existing environs and had found a way to integrate them into the design. What struck me first about the neighborhood was the layout—the expanse of sidewalks and the feeling of walking in a pedestrian-friendly environment so unlike some of the newer outlying suburbs of Los Angeles which had been built after World War II. Having grown up in New York, I had become accustomed to walking cities and was never comfortable in environments that shed the presence of pedestrians by eliminating sidewalks in favor of wider streets for faster moving cars. The experience sparked an interest in urban planning that never quite died out—and a curiosity about why we live the way we do.

In looking over the Harper's Magazine article that inspired me then, Michael Lind’s “Urban Philosopher: A Walking Tour of Lewis Mumford” (1999), I found the seemingly ordinary lines that had sparked my interest: “Speaking out in favor of historic preservation before it became fashionable, Mumford opposed urban planners who demolished human-scale neighborhoods to create monstrous highways and housing projects” (101). In the context of the twenty-first century, the idea of a human-scale neighborhood seemed to belong to a long-lost past, an ancient value system that once produced local, livable spaces which could be self-sustaining and organic in nature. Mumford was most concerned with the quality of life available to all human beings in relationship to the environments in which they worked and lived—and planning small-scale communities was one of the most important factors in this project.

At loggerheads with the modern, mega-planning policies of Robert Moses who, according to Lind, would have paved straight through Washington Square Park to extend Fifth Avenue, Mumford nonetheless also disliked the high-density neighborhoods Jane Jacobs championed despite
their cultural richness and variety. He did not favor the century’s counterpart to urban living either, the suburb: “The planners of the New Towns seem to me to have over-reacted against nineteenth-century congestion and to have produced a sprawl that is not only wasteful but—what is more important—obstructive to social life” (Mumford qtd. in Lind 101). Mumford’s was a very specific vision that tried to take into account centuries of change—most immediately, those changes created by industrialization and its accompanying technologies which changed the face of cities and towns. His observations echo those of Wordsworth in the poet’s objections to the reach of the Kendal and Windermere railway.

Mumford was a proponent of regionalism and argued for it as early as 1922 in his first book, *The Story of Utopias*. As Howard P. Segal points out in “Mumford’s Alternatives to the Megamachine,” Mumford “argues for regionalism, not as an intellectual abstraction or social imposition but as a welcome fact of life that deserves both recognition and expansion” (105). What resonates in his project is his emphasis on physicality. Two years later in *Sticks and Stones* (1924), he reaches into America’s past in order to find an example of a regional way of life. In a somewhat nostalgic chapter on “The Medieval Tradition,” Mumford expands on the strengths and virtues of the old New England village in which, he asserts, “there flickered up the last dying embers of the medieval order” (1). Much like Ruskin before him, Mumford calls upon an idealized past and synthesizes from it those elements he sees as necessary to an improved future.

With a swipe at England’s enclosure laws, he asserts the virtues of the commons—and the lifestyle that would go hand in hand with common lands: “Whereas in England the common lands were being confiscated for the benefit of an aristocracy, and the arable turned into sheep-runs for the profit of the great proprietors, in new England the common lands were re-established with the founding of a new settlement” (1). By calling attention to the intrinsic worth of the commons,
Mumford reestablishes a discarded ideological perspective—one that could mend a broken relationship between the land, the community and the individual—what he called an organic unity. As he asserts in a later chapter of *Sticks and Stones*, “Architecture and Civilization,” “[i]n every community, as Frédéric Le Play pointed out, there are three elements: the place, the work, and the people; the sociologist’s equivalent of environment, function, and organism” (93). Mumford believed that 1) *where* you are in relationship to 2) *what* you do would be inextricably linked to 3) *who* you are or become. Here we see a practical and potentially productive link between Mumford’s notion of organic communities and the intermingling of mind, body and environs. This perspective has practical value for an ecocriticism which seeks to find solutions to contemporary problems of sustainability.

Unfortunately, Mumford tends toward the nostalgic in seeking a model for his vision. As he explains in *Sticks and Stones* (1924), he sees in the old New England community a model whose roots extend back to a pre-industrial, pre-capitalistic state—the last manifestation of which was to be found during the Middle Ages. First, he applauds the layout of the village in relationship to the “meeting-house” which “determined the characters and limits of the community” (2). Secondly, he likes the controlled growth of such communities: “it does not continue to grow at such a pace that it either becomes overcrowded within or spills beyond its limits into dejected suburbs” (2). In the former, we see the glimmerings of what would become a fully developed philosophy of organic unity, strongly influenced by Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes, in which communities are unified by common interests. In the latter, we see the seeds of his later aversion to both the overcrowding of the cities and the sprawl of the suburbs. In both, we catch glimpses of lingering pre-industrial Romantic perspectives which see the ethical, practical, and aesthetic value of community.
Thirdly, Mumford links his belief in regionalism with his belief in the necessity of organic experience—a belief which would remain central to his philosophy of architecture and environments throughout his life: “The Puritans knew and applied a principle that Plato had long ago pointed out in the Republic, namely, that an intelligent and socialized community will continue to grow only as long as it can remain a unit and keep up its common institutions. Beyond that point growth must cease, or the community will disintegrate and cease to be an organic thing” (3). He further emphasizes his thoughts on organic communities in an article published in The New Yorker more than 50 years after the publication of Sticks and Stones, “Prologue to Our Times” (1975). In it, Mumford ruminates on the concept of organic unity in relationship to a century in which technological progress accelerated into what he called “limitless mechanical Progress.” “Progress indeed!” he says. After sketching the nightmare scenarios that cast their shadows over the twentieth century, the “historic collective evils—war, genocide, enslavement, lawless government—that went into mass production after 1914” (43), he goes on to condemn unchecked progress by way of powerful, biological, and fantastic imagery. “But what monsters would walk the streets—what stumbling giants, what mountains of obesity—if organic vitality meant limitless growth! I find it hard to believe, I confess, that for more than a century some of the best minds of the West could have operated on that faulty premise of Progress” (44-45). Mumford’s notion of “limitless growth” echoes Wordsworth’s thoughts on technology: “it is not against Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending” (Wordsworth Letters). Without moderation, checks, and oversight, limitless growth can consume all that is around it. Mumford’s bitter disappointment is not so much in humanity’s progress but in the limitless growth of progress. His bitterness is clearly at odds with the optimistic and ambitious dreams he had for the organization of society during his early years as a writer when he appeared to believe that progress—when coupled with a healthy respect for what
could be gleaned from the past—could and should be harnessed for the well-being of culture and society with the right planning and energy.

Nonetheless, his later disappointment is a useful counterpoint to elucidate the import and significance of his early endeavors and the urgency with which he applied himself with such determination and commitment to the task of creating a model for a different kind of world which would better support the environs and their inhabitants. One of the most surprising aspects of Mumford’s perspective, coming decades before the ecocriticism that would emerge full force in the 1960s and 1970s, is his emphasis on finding a balance between nature and culture and his recognition that such a vision needed to find its way into public policy. A near-contemporary of Rachel Carson who would publish *Silent Spring* in 1962, Mumford, as a philosopher of technology, took a different approach. His vision hinged on this concept of organic unity—a sociological approach that depended upon a harmonious balance between nature, humanity, and society which was at odds with the immediate needs of an industrializing society that was inextricably linked to a Cartesian ideology that had blind faith in technological progress.

In *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (1989), Donald L. Miller provides an explanation that encapsulates the relevance of Mumford’s approach:

Instead of analyzing society from a class angle, as a structure organized in terms of productive relations and economic interests, Mumford compares society to a biological organism whose health depends upon the smooth cooperation and unity of purpose of its component parts. Harmony, balance, and internal cooperation—the keys to bodily health—are deemed essential to community health as well. This kind of inner harmony and common purpose existed in the late Middles Ages, in Mumford’s roseate view of that period, when all classes and social groups joined in the pursuit of universally agreed-upon values. (361)
As Miller observes, “Mumford’s organic interpretation is less an analysis of change than an attitude toward it” (361). Mumford’s nostalgia renders his views problematic in that a roseate view of the Middles Ages fails to acknowledge any number of severe social and cultural problems which obviously mark the period. However, his views on regionalism and organic unity from his nostalgic perspective are valuable when extracted from his nostalgic idealization. His perspective prefigures what is becoming a potentially optimistic understanding in the sciences and humanities—that brain, body, and environs thrive when the organic unity of individuals in relation to their embeddedness in their environs are able to sync.

The motivation for and influence on Mumford’s attitudes toward regionalism and organic unity may be traced back along two lines. Along the first, this attitude took for its inspiration many nineteenth-century thinkers but particularly Geddes to whom Mumford owed a new perspective on urban studies and cities, “an approach based upon direct observation and a biologist’s sensitivity to organic relationships” (Miller 53). A follower of Geddes for ten years before they met, Mumford, a cultural critic, was a disciple of Geddes, a biologist, and Geddes, a biologist, was a disciple of Frédéric Le Play, a sociologist who influenced the development of Geddes’ “observational sociology that studied communities as an outgrowth of the organic interaction between” *lieu, travail, et famille* (53). Mumford cites the influence of Le Play as well as Geddes throughout his own sociological works.

Both Mumford and Geddes were influenced by John Ruskin. In 1884 Geddes wrote a paper entitled “John Ruskin, Economist” in which Geddes described the value of Ruskin’s work. According to Helen Elizabeth Meller in *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (1990), Geddes’s central argument was as follows:
For all Ruskin’s literary and artistic background, the approach to society that he adopted was that of a natural scientist. Ruskin’s tirades against the modern city, against mechanized industry, against the market economy, were not the ‘incoherent, hyperaesthetic, and even hysterical’ outpourings of an art critic. Ruskin wanted an end to the control of the economy by market forces and, in its place, the creation of a system designed to serve the biological and aesthetic needs of humanity. (30)

Geddes saw in Ruskin’s work support for the bio-sociological perspective Geddes advocated. This bio-sociological perspective was similar to Mumford’s organicism. Both have much in common with the “social natural” critical approach for which Kate Rigby advocates. Each perspective carries the Romantic strain of emphasis on the individual’s material reality of their environs. Both embrace a social/natural, culture/nature partnership. Both views are grounded in a material physicality.

One last point of relevance to this line of influence is the meaning of organic unity as Geddes, and later Mumford, understood it. According to the art historian and philosopher, Caroline van Eck, there are two ways to apply organicism to art, and each touches upon important elements of Ruskin’s social criticism: “One deals with the general relations between art and living nature, while the other centers around the idea of “organic unity” where the part-whole-relationship of living organisms is applied to works of art” (Welter and Whyte 94). According to van Eck,

The idea of organic unity may be applied to cities in two ways. Cities can be understood as organisms composed of physical elements like roads, buildings, and open spaces…. If these parts are coordinated efficiently by the various planning disciplines—which should have the same relation among themselves as their subject matters—the city will function properly as an organism. Organic unity is also useful if the city is viewed as a social whole, composed of
various classes or individuals united by a common interest—keeping the organism of the city alive and preventing fragmentation by different interests. (Welter and Whyte 94)

What is most interesting about notions of organic communities is that they emerge in relation to the needs of individual members of the communities instead of the interests of business or government. This calls to mind Wordsworth’s concerns about the Lake District or Clare’s worries about Helpston. In each case, the poets are concerned that the auras and locales of their communities are disappearing to benefit interests outside of their communities, primarily for profit. Of course, there need not be negative consequences to development, trade, and expansion, but limitless growth, irrespective of the well-being of the communities and their lands and inhabitants, is often destructive.

The destruction of unchecked growth was apparent when the last remaining commons of England were succumbing to the centuries-old process of Enclosure72 amidst the rapidly growing needs of a booming capitalistic machine; the communities and their inhabitants were not taken into account. The factories and mills of the far-off cities had more jobs, and the jobs needed more workers to fill them. Enclosure laws provided the growing cities with a much needed work force. As discussed in the previous chapter, as E.P. Thompson points out in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), the years between 1790 and 1830 marked a time of enormous change and loss for the agricultural laborers of Great Britain. The commons were rapidly disappearing. Self-sustenance became increasingly impossible. This did not benefit the locale or the members of the

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72 While E.P. Thompson marks the significant years of enclosure as 1790-1830, Raymond Williams emphasizes in *The Country and the City* that enclosure had gone on for centuries, and at different periods of time different writers had maintained that rural England “is dying out now” (9). “Just back, we can see, over the last hill” he says, and making his point with a pause and a new paragraph says, “But then what seemed like an escalator began to move” (9). Williams’ view of enclosure is at odds, in this sense, with E.P. Thompson’s. John Barrell, however, goes a long way in reconciling these conflicting views in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* calling attention to the fact that “the process [of enclosure] did advance at different speeds in different areas; and … an enclosure … coming at one stage in the process as it took shape in any particular parish, could represent a totally disorienting advance in the creation of the rural proletariat in the particular parish being enclosed” (201).
communities. And as Martin J. Wiener points out in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981), the historical record would come to remember the ensuing changes as a travesty that “ruptured the bonds between classes, destroyed village community, and erased what the Tudor era had left of peasant proprietorship, forcing much of the rural population off the land and into the new mills” (83). It is interesting to note the propaganda campaign that grew up around policies of England’s enclosure policies in light of the needs of a burgeoning industrial and capitalistic society. Mumford’s belief in the value of the commons may be interpreted as nostalgia for a long-past way of living, but much like Wordsworth’s sonnet and letters protesting the Kendal and Windermere Railway, it may also be seen as an attempt to counter an ideology that disconnects individuals from the communities. Mumford’s belief in organic unity carries with it a respect for the workers or laborers of a community—the individuals.

Like the Utilitarian tirade against Wordsworth’s sonnet, enclosure propaganda could be understood as what Mumford might have called “bulletproof ideological vests” (in Europe and America) “which protected them not merely against other systems of ideas but against the direct impact of their own contradictory experiences” (“Prologue” 43). Suffice to say here that the potent combination of economic self-interest combined with ideology provided a powerful justification for enclosure and the resulting loss of common lands for rural inhabitants. In the nineteenth century, the commons were eliminated with no regard or compensation for the rural inhabitants who had made their living with each other, in communities, and off the land for generations. In the meantime, across the pond, America was racing head-long into a fully industrialized and mechanized way of being that would eventually enable it to become a world power.

In 1800, Thomas Jefferson estimated "that it would take 1000 years to fill up the region east of the Mississippi" (Andrews 153). Jefferson’s inaccurate prediction underscores the sudden
acceleration of technological and cultural progress as well as society’s inability to predict the rapidity of expansion and growth. For centuries, civilization had been advancing slowly but steadily alongside innovation, discovery, and invention. The “doctrine of Progress,” as Mumford called it, “reflected the high humanitarian hopes of the eighteenth-century philosophers—impulses that eventually brought about happy political and social innovations, among them constitutional government, universal suffrage, and free public education” (“Prologue” 43). But the rate of acceleration had been impossible to imagine before. “Industrialism was born in England,” as Martin J. Wiener points out in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981) (81). But it was in the United States that it reached its full strength; the rapid and overwhelming growth of the capitalist-fueled economy engulfed an American society unprepared for the full effects of the Industrial Revolution.

Comprehending the effects of the Industrial Revolution entails recognizing that it was not only the means of production and distribution, the skylines of cities, and the organization of industry that had changed, but also the rhythms of everyday life. From the most insubstantial to the most significant of inventions, every innovation would come to play a role in changing the texture of life. Some of the inventions included the electric light bulb, steam engine, stethoscope, raincoat, toy balloon, matches, typewriter, sewing machine, wrench, propeller, revolver, telegraph, camera, grain elevator, internal combustion engine, bicycle, safety pin, antiseptic, cylinder lock, dynamite, air brakes, barbed wire, telephone, toilet paper, fountain pen, automobile, rollercoaster, zipper, escalator, and Coca Cola to name just a few.

Rhythms of life changed not only with the introduction of novel inventions, but also in response to the needs of growing economies. As mentioned in earlier chapters, during the nineteenth century, the needs of the railroad set the standard for time zones; the rise of the
department stores and invention of plate glass changed the face of the cities; and the explosive
growth of the magazine industry facilitated more wide-spread communication among the population
than had ever been experienced. Of course, none of this happened steadily or consistently but in
waves—rather like the changing Manhattan skyline as portrayed during the final few minutes of
Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* (2002). While America was charging full speed ahead into the
new way, in England “disenchantment with industrialism [was] encourage[ing] historical
reinterpretation of the origins of the machine age” (Wiener 82). The reevaluation, according to
Wiener, was begun by Arnold Toynbee who had been a disciple of John Ruskin—who had foreseen
and written against the dehumanizing effects of industrialization long before “historical writing” at
large became “hostile to unregulated capitalism” (82).

John Ruskin was one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century and his essay
“Nature of Gothic” (1851) was one of his most influential essays. According to J. Mordaunt Crook
in “Ruskinian Gothic” (1983), Gothic Revival was “still so popular twenty years after the publication
of *The Stones of Venice* (1851) that Ruskin “was still bitterly regretting the popularity of the Venetian
Gothic.” States Crook, “[l]iving in suburban London, near the Crystal Palace, he saw himself
surrounded by Anglo-Italian Gothic villas—‘Frankenstein monsters’ of his own making,” an
unintended consequence of his own love for the Gothic (85). Deeply influenced by Carlyle whose
*Past and Present* (1843) rails against Mammonism and the Cash Nexus, Ruskin in turn influenced
other nineteenth-century thinkers such as William Morris and his Arts and Crafts Movement as well
as earlier mentioned bio-sociologist Patrick Geddes who in turn influenced Mumford.

Ruskin’s work met with wide popular approval until 1860 when, as Ruskin said, “people saw
a change come over me which they highly disapproved, and I went on from 1860 to 1875 under the
weight of continuously increasing public recusancy and reprobation” (Ruskin qtd. in Roe x).
According to Frederick W. Roe in his introduction to *Selections and Essays of John Ruskin* (1918), Ruskin’s reputation collapsed when he made the “transition from art to political economy,” and “reviews railed at him as a quixotic sentimentalist suddenly gone mad” (x). Responses to the publication of *Unto This Last* (1862) are reminiscent of Wordsworth’s often quoted opinion of Blake upon his death: "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad,” and the less oft quoted rest of the sentence “but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott” (Wordsworth qtd. in Damon 451). “Rossetti called [Unto This Last] ‘bosh’ and declared that Ruskin talked ‘awful rubbish’” (Roe x). Ruskin was labeled a “delirious visionary.” Like William Blake and John Clare before him, Ruskin’s departure from the dominant ideologies of the time rendered him isolated and alone in his life and observations.

For a time, only Carlyle recognized the importance of some of Ruskin’s later work—writing the following in a letter in 1872, “I am reading Ruskin’s books in these evenings … I find a spiritual comfort in the noble fire, wrath, and inexorability with which he smites upon all base things and wide-spread public delusions.” And in another letter the same year he writes:

There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lightening bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against baseness that Ruskin has, and that every man ought to have. Unhappily he is not a strong man; one might say a weak man rather.  (Carlyle qtd. in Cate 34)

Carlyle’s response to some of Ruskin’s work at this time reveals nearly as much about the world as it does about the text itself—conveying the sense of urgency that Carlyle believes should be felt, and that is not felt, by the vast majority living amidst what Ruskin saw as the “world of Anarchy all around.”
However, Carlyle also had reservations about Ruskin’s ideas as evident in a letter he wrote to his brother John in 1870 referring to a draft of the first of the *Fors Clavigera* (1871) letters—a series of pamphlets Ruskin was writing directly to workers regarding his moral and social vision. Sending his brother the first of the *Fors* letters, Carlyle writes: “‘There is further waiting for you an astonishing Paper by Ruskin …. I think you never read a madder looking thing’” (Cate 34). Though Carlyle supported Ruskin’s efforts in this cause, he was disturbed by what he calls the “chimerical” nature of some of them. Two excerpts from “Letter XXV” dated January 4th, 1873 reveal one way in which political passion was mixed in with “chimerical” material. Ruskin writes, “the constant object of these letters of mine, from their beginning, has been to urge you to do vigorously and dexterously what was useful; and nothing else” all of which sounds reasonable enough (Ruskin *Fors* 4). But earlier passages in the same letter reveal why some thought that Ruskin had become unhinged: “I am, indeed, greatly tempted to give precedence to the receipt for making ‘Fairy Butter,’ and further disturbed by an extreme desire to tell you how to construct an ‘Apple Floating-Island’; but will abide, nevertheless, by my Goose Pie” (Ruskin *Fors* 2).

As Ruskin continued to be perceived as increasingly unstable, certain specific notions began to disturb him—interesting not only because of their sadly poetic nature, but also as metaphorical and literal forebodings of twentieth and twenty-first century realities—particularly climate change, pollution and smog. Ruskin’s observations should really be read as literal observations of changing climate conditions, but his descriptions of emerging weather patterns were often historically considered in a more metaphorical light, including “a notion that a new kind of Storm Cloud and Plague Wind had come to destroy the beauty and pleasantness of the physical world … [and] … an obsessional fear connected with fireflies and fireworks” (Cate 35). Ruskin’s observations of what he described as storm clouds and plague winds continue to be debated today. But in his 1884 lecture,
“The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century,” Ruskin clearly delivers a detailed account of what he believes to be a changing physical world, not only a spiritual one.

Clearly aware that his observations would be doubtfully received, taken for hyperbole, metaphor, or madness, Ruskin opens his lecture by addressing the very accusations numbers of critics would come to bring against him anyway:

Let me first assure my audience that I have no arrière pensée in the title chosen for this lecture. I might, indeed, have meant, and it would have been only too like me to mean, any number of things by such a title;—but, tonight, I mean simply what I have said, and propose to bring to your notice a series of cloud phenomena, which, so far as I can weigh existing evidence, are peculiar to our own times; yet which have not hitherto received any special notice or description from meteorologists. (Ruskin “The Storm Cloud” 1)

The cloud phenomenon Ruskin would describe with great detail would be haunting in its nature. In his account, he also conveys a sense of history of the weather—leading us to believe that the weather had indeed changed, and dramatically, over the course of his lifetime. The following journal entry makes his point:

It is the first of July, and I sit down to write by the dimmest light that ever yet I wrote by; namely, the light of this midsummer morning, in midEngland (Matlock, Derbyshire), in the year 1871. For the sky is covered with gray cloud;—not rain-cloud, but a dry black veil which no ray of sunshine can pierce; partly diffused in mist, feeble mist, enough to make distant objects unintelligible, yet without any substance, or wreathing, or color of its own. And everywhere the leaves of the trees are shaking fitfully, as they do before a thunderstorm; only not violently, but enough to show the passing to and fro of a strange, bitter, blighting wind.

73 Afterthought or hidden meaning.
Dismal enough, had it been the first morning of its kind that summer had sent. But during all this spring, in London, and at Oxford, through meager March, through changelessly sullen April, through despondent May, and darkened June, morning after morning has come gray-shrouded thus. And it is a new thing to me, and a very dreadful one. I am fifty years old, and more; and since I was five, have gleaned the best hours of my life in the sun of spring and summer mornings; and I never saw such as these, till now. (Ruskin “The Storm Cloud” 3)

The “dry black veil which no ray of sunshine can pierce; partly diffused in mist, feeble mist, enough to make distant objects unintelligible, yet without any substance, or wreathing, or color of its own” is most likely smog, the kind of pollution which is inevitable with the burning of coal.

Shortly after his lecture, a review in the *Daily News* on February 6, 1884, ridiculed Ruskin’s observations: “We may not all agree with him that storm-clouds are depraved characters, and have been infected by the various vices of the age. It seems, on the whole, a more plausible hypothesis that Mr. Ruskin, as he gets on in years, is more sensitive to disagreeable weather …. Mr. Ruskin seems to think that the most plausible theory of the wind regards it as composed of dead men’s souls …. (Ruskin *The Complete Works* Vol. 34 77). However, what Ruskin provides in his lecture is an astonishingly accurate description of the kinds of atmospheric changes that we would now expect from unregulated pollution and toxic emissions.

As Brian J. Day notes in “The Moral Intuition of Ruskin’s Storm-Cloud” (2005), John Ruskin’s lecture “is perhaps the best-known piece of nineteenth-century “environmental” writing by an English author” (917). As Thomas H. Ford observes in “Ruskin’s Storm-Cloud: Heavenly Messages and Pathetic Fallacies in a Denatured World” (2011), the lecture has most often (recently anyway) “been read as an early instance of the emergence of modern environmental consciousness”
A Disillusioned Romantic Ruskin (Ford 287). Ford states, “[i]t is assumed that, if real, the changes in the climate noted by Ruskin were caused by industrial air pollution, which is consequently understood to have been his true subject” (287). He notes that “[t]his is the line adopted by Frederick Kirchhoff, for instance, who notes that ‘it has long been recognized that there is a correlation between the coming of Ruskin’s storm-cloud and a dramatic increase in industrial – largely coal smoke – pollution’” (Kirchhoff qtd. in Ford 287). Yet, there are those who take issue with Ruskin’s lecture as an environmental stance such as Denis Cosgrove, a geographer who “wrote in a 1995 analysis of the plague-wind lecture, ‘Attempts to appropriate [Ruskin] for ‘Green’ anti-industrialism are weakened by his remarks upon the beauties of London enhanced by its vast smoke cloud’” (Friedman). However, to think that Ruskin did not have strong objections to the effects of industrialism across the board is to ignore most of Ruskin’s social criticism. In Uri Friedman’s article, “A 19th-Century Glimpse of a Changing Culture” (2015) in The Atlantic, Friedman further remarks that “Ruskin was not the only 19th-century figure to glimpse and grapple with the Industrial Revolution’s impact on the planet; decades before him, for example, the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt warned that humankind was despoiling the Earth through deforestation and industrial emissions” (Friedman), but this perhaps also misses the point.

As Day emphasizes, “E. T. Cook noted [that] ‘industrial statistics fully bear out the date which Ruskin fixes for the growth of the phenomena in question: the storm-cloud thickened just when the consumption of coal went up by leaps and bounds, both in this country [England] and in the industrialized parts of central Europe’” (917). Therefore, Day concludes, “‘Storm-Cloud’ is certainly environmentally conscious: it decries pollution as defacing nature and identifies industrialism as its immediate cause” (917). However, Day continues, “by representing the lecture as a ‘tirade’ against ‘pollution of air and water,’” therefore “establishing it as an exemplary and
foundational piece of environmental writing,” the *Norton Anthology* “overlooks the deeply ecological implications of a text that ends with a call to clean up not the pollution environing (or outside and around) its listeners and readers but rather that which more accurately may be characterized as the pollution within” (917). Here, Day quotes Ruskin’s closing statement:

> What is best to be done, do you ask me? The answer is plain. Whether you can affect the signs of the sky or not, you can the signs of the times. Whether you can bring the sun back or not, you can assuredly bring back your own cheerfulness, and your own honesty. You may not be able to say to the winds, “Peace; be still,” but you can cease from the insolence of your own lips, and the troubling of your own passions. And all that it would be extremely well to do, even though the day were coming when the sun should be as darkness, and the moon as blood. But, the paths of rectitude and piety once regained, who shall say that the promise of old time would not be found to hold for us also?—“Bring ye all the tithes into my storehouse, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord God, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. (Ruskin qtd. in Day 918)

What Day observes is Ruskin’s call for a reformed moral economy, one in which “humankind lives morally and mindfully of the interrelatedness of ‘Sun,’ ‘grass,’ and ‘man’—heaven, earth, and humankind” (Day 918). As Day asserts, “[t]he ecological implications of the lecture rest on Ruskin’s belief in the interrelatedness of the divine, natural, and human economies, his belief that nature polluted by human economic activities signifies humankind’s alienation from both God and nature, and the need for moral reformation” (918). But what is astonishing is the possibility for the power of language to invoke change in our physical environs, to “cease from the insolence of your own

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74 The *Norton Anthology* has contextualized Ruskin’s lecture as deeply environmentally minded.
lips, and the troubling of your own passions,” and to, instead, respect nature. Ruskin is clear on this point: “[w]hether you can affect the signs of the sky or not, you can the signs of the times.” As such, we can affect the culture which may create the nature in which we live, and this is done primarily through policy—and thus, language.

Taken in conjunction with Ruskin’s own reliance on the very kind of pathetic fallacy he condemns in *Modern Painters Vol. III* (1886), one which Thomas H. Ford describes in “Ruskin’s Storm-Cloud: Heavenly Messages and Pathetic Fallacies in a Denatured World” (2011) as “involving the transference of Ruskin's own turbulent mental state onto the heavens” (288), we can recognize the crucial contemporary relevance of Ruskin’s observations in reference to language and its role in policy making and responsibility. While keeping in mind Andy Clark’s observation that “[o]ur mature mental routines are not merely self-engineered: They are massively, overwhelmingly, almost unimaginably self-engineered” (*Supersizing* 59-60), we can glean creative and productive interpretations from Ruskin’s painstakingly careful observations of the atmosphere and changing climate patterns.

For instance, Ford quotes one of Ruskin’s passages describing the new weather conditions in both literal and metaphoric language:

> It looks as if it were made of poisonous smoke; very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on every side of me. But mere smoke would not blow to and fro in that wild way. It looks more to me as if it were made of dead men's souls… The last sentence refers, of course, to the battles of the Franco-German campaign, which was especially horrible to me, in its digging...a moat flooded with the waters of death between the two nations for a century to come.\(^{75}\) (Ruskin qtd. in Ford 287)

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Ford explains that in “Ruskin's argument … pollution is not to blame” (287). “Instead,” Ford continues, “the climate has been changed by a violent breakdown in human communication – a fracture that is realised in the Franco-Prussian War, and that within decades would be incarnated again in the trenches of the Western Front, ‘moats flooded with the waters of death,’ that Ruskin so accurately foretells” (Ford 287-88). In fact, Ruskin alludes to the deeply embedded presence of language in human, and in this case atmospheric, affairs: “The altered atmosphere of modernity, Ruskin explicitly states, is not caused by emissions but by utterances; the poison is evil words, rather than sulphurous combustion compounds; it emanates not from smokestacks but from human mouths” (Ford 288). Ford asks, “[b]ut how can words condense into toxic airborne events? What links language and meteorology?” (288)

Again, keeping in mind Clark’s observations about language’s ability to engineer worlds, it is not a stretch to see how Ruskin brings out the link between language and world-making. Environmental protections are entirely dependent on laws and policies which pass or fail based on diplomacy and persuasive tactics. How we regulate the damage to our environs is most often a language game. As Ford notes,

if it once seemed impossible to accept that words can materially affect the weather, this is no longer the case today. It is now widely acknowledged that language is one of the many factors influencing the climate. The climatic implications of certain types of statements are regularly analysed. Public discussion often focuses, for example, on how economic proposals or political agreements – or failures to agree – might affect global weather patterns. This context throws fresh light on Ruskin’s claim that climate change is an event within the history of communication. As Ando Arike comments, “it is perhaps no longer so easy to
dismiss Ruskin's apocalyptic meteorology as the delusions of an unhappy neurotic” (Arike qtd. in Ford 288)

As Jonathan Bate reminds us, “Central to the dilemma of environmentalism is the fact that the act of identifying the presumption of human apartness from nature as the problem is itself a symptom of that very apartness. The identification is the product of an instrumental way of thinking and of using language” (37-8). The limits of our behavior are largely drawn by language. Action or inaction follows. Thus, “[i]t may therefore be that a necessary step in overcoming the apartness is to think and to use language in a different way” (38). Ruskin’s descriptions of the changing atmosphere mingle with his descriptions of human behavior, social conditions, and language. He implicates humanity in the state of the natural world deeply.

Even in the criticisms of Ruskin’s state of mind, we can see evidence of overlooked intermingling between mind, body and environs at work. Ford describes three common interpretations of Ruskin’s observations. In the first, Ford quotes Martin A. Danahay’s John Ruskin’s Labour: A Study of Ruskin’s Social Theory (2008): “Ruskin's storm-cloud, as diabolic weather, is to be read biographically, as his climactic shadow-struggle projected as apocalyptic myth” (Danahay qtd. in Ford 288). Another interpretation by Raymond E. Fitch in The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin (1982) similarly identifies the cloud to be “a symbol of the madness he feared was encroaching upon him” (Fitch qtd. in Ford 288). In each of these readings, Ruskin’s observations of a changing weather system are ignored and taken to be a state of mind projected onto the world. A third critique by John D. Rosenberg in The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin’s Genius (1984) interprets the text as “a confusion of his own altered response to nature with an imagined decline in nature herself, a mistaking of inner and outer weather, of the cloud within his own mind and the

imagined cloud without” (Rosenberg qtd. in Ford 288). Each of these interpretations allude to Ruskin’s cognitive links to nature and his environs. Each fails to account for the effects of our environs on us or our effects on it. Each individual interpretation somewhat fails alone, arguably due to Cartesian gravity. Our insistence that any one interpretation or any one solution must adhere to any one single perspective is where we repeatedly fail in coming to grips with our own intermingling within the world and our own responsibilities in terms of creating it. In the following passage, we see how Ruskin blends the experience of a changing atmosphere with the internal atmosphere of the embodied mind as we breathe the air of “the plague-wind”, “mix up dirt with it,” and “choke [ourselves] with [our] own nastiness”:

In healthy weather, the sun is hidden behind a cloud, as it is behind a tree; and, when the cloud is past, it comes out again, as bright as before. But in plague-wind, the sun is choked out of the whole heaven, all day long, by a cloud which may be a thousand miles square and five miles deep. And yet observe: that thin, scraggy, filthy, mangy, miserable cloud, for all the depth of it, can’t turn the sun red, as a good, business-like fog does with a hundred feet or so of itself. By the plague-wind every breath of air you draw is polluted, half round the world; in a London fog the air itself is pure, though you choose to mix up dirt with it, and choke yourself with your own nastiness. (Ruskin “The Storm Cloud” 7)

Poetically, Ruskin captures the essence of our existence with nature. His language mixes the essence of our minds with our environs. Creatively, he describes how we inhale the very climate we have created—which is why he describes it as choking ourselves with our own “nastiness.” What is most striking about Ruskin’s observations is his emphasis on the intermingling of internal and external aspects of living.

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As Ruskin describes the changing climate in terms which try to account for the air we take into our bodies, the polluted air we have created, he also attends to the intimate relationships people have to the work they produce and the environs in which they produce them. Decades later, Mumford alludes to such an approach as well. Mumford was less interested in climate than in the mechanisms that contributed to it and our ways of living. In *Sticks and Stones* (1924), he correlates modes of work with the fulfillment of life: “No matter what the material or mode, the carpenter works not simply for hire, but for dear life’s sake, and as a baker’s dozen numbers thirteen, so a piece of handicraft contains not merely the workmanship itself, but a bit of the worker’s soul, for good measure” (7). In a similar vein, Ruskin had decried the effects of a system that deprived the worker of this thirteenth number of a baker’s dozen when handicraft is abandoned for the more sterile but profitable production of goods for sale in the “Nature of Gothic” portion of *Stones of Venice*:

> It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves …. It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure. (179)

In this passage, Ruskin implicitly notes the benefits of progress, “it is not than men are ill fed.” However, he simultaneously notes the loss of fulfillment that may accompany progress. By depriving workers of pleasure in work, society takes its first steps toward degrading people into being more like machines than themselves. Mumford would conclude that the prior century had allowed technology to change humanity’s situation “from that of the creatures of machinery to that of creatures of the machine system,” and he advocated strongly for a change of course—“to alter
Like Ruskin before him, Mumford championed the benefits of the William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement not only as way to satisfy the human craving for fulfilling work, but also as a rejection of the some of the values that disconnected people from their handiwork, values which had been dragged along into the new century by industrialization. In the last chapter of *Sticks and Stones*, “Architecture and Civilization,” he explains craftsmanship as follows:

Craftsmanship, to put the distinction roughly, emphasizes the worker’s delight in production: anyone who proposed to reduce the amount of time and effort spent by the carver in wood or stone would be in effect attempting to shorten the worker’s life. Machine-work, on the other hand, tends at its best to diminish the inescapable drudgeries of production: any dodge or decoration that increases the time spent in service to the machine adds to the physical burden of existence. One is a sufficient end; the other is, legitimately only a means to an end. (104)

“Our modern communities,” he states, “are far from understanding this distinction” (105). When a task is invested with imagination, thoughtfulness, and devotion, the object of work becomes a creation rather than only an impersonal thing, and the practice of work is imbued with a qualitative aesthetic value that may give the worker a fulfilling sense of satisfaction, pride, individual accomplishment, or any number of other emotions. Again, when one considers are intimate relations with the environs we inhabit and all that is in them, it becomes easier to recognize that the work we do matters in a deeply emotional and material way.

In this, Mumford echoes “The Nature of Gothic” (1851) in which Ruskin rails against the industrial values that were reducing people into “creatures of the machine system,” to use
Mumford’s term. In “The Nature of Gothic,” Ruskin asserts that “[y]ou must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions” (178). Ruskin sees little possibility for human uniqueness in the process of demanding uniform perfection in work. In fact, he states that “[i]f you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanise them” (178). Ruskin saw a clear correlation between method of work and quality of mind through the aesthetic principles of production. To his mind, reducing a worker to the menial, repetitive, uniform labor of mass production and perfection deflates the spirit to the point where the person can be no better than a machine. Perhaps more interestingly, Ruskin connects the body with the mind in his consideration of the emotional feeling of physical labor. Moreover, he also connects the embodied mind with the world in which the labor happens, the work environs. In his critique, Ruskin’s descriptions evoke the standardization which became necessary in the laying of the railway tracks. His descriptions remind us that the age was marked by that kind of “mechanical motion generated by steam power” which was “characterized by regularity, uniformity, unlimited durations and acceleration” (Schivelbusch 8). Ruskin’s perspective also encourages us to recognize how deeply engrained our expectations of perfection and efficiency become—and how quickly. With our growing cultural reliance on machine power and labor, we increasingly began to demand the same level of regularity, uniformity, and perfection from human bodies as we did from machines. Ruskin’s descriptions provide us with profoundly clear reflectors of these cultural changes during the nineteenth century. While it may be difficult to imagine the significance of the ways we design our architectural technologies in terms of our embeddedness within space, comprehending our alienated embodied relationships to our spaces of labor provides us with a perspective that elucidates the importance of
our embeddedness. Perhaps ironically then, some of the strongest evidence for the effects of the environs on the development of our selves comes from the dehumanizing effects of mechanized labor.

Alternatively, Ruskin advocates for a change in attitude which celebrates imperfection, engagement, and embodied embeddedness. He strives to persuade us that we must “look for the thoughtful part” of ourselves and our workers, and he articulates the value of individuals’ accompanying imperfections:

And this is what we have to do with all our laborours; to look for the thoughtful part of them, and get that out of them, whatever we lose for it, whatever faults and errors we are obliged to take with it. For the best that is in them cannot manifest itself, but in the company with much error…. You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision …. but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating … ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool. (“Nature” 178)

Ruskin’s description of the kinds of work which would come to mark the assembly line reminds us of the value of human creativity. He counters the ideology of the times which values precision over creative craftsmanship, and he values the possibilities of human ingenuity over the possibilities of machines.

Mumford describes the distinction between machine work and handiwork as a means of articulating the difference between humans working as tools and humans working as people. Most
importantly, his distinction emphasizes the experience of the work with the use of the word “toil”:
“On the human side, the prime distinction overlooked by the mechanists is that machine work is principally toil: handicraft, on the other hand, is a form of living” (Sticks 103). That he says “living” and not “making a living” is, of course, an important distinction which invites us to consider the daily lives we live, the way we fill our days, and the ways we occupy the spaces of our lived environs.

Here, Mumford articulates Ruskin’s desire to counteract one of the depersonalizing tendencies of industrialization and its ensuing mechanization of labor. In Mumford’s description, we see an iteration of what Ruskin begins—a critical view of labor which looks to the phenomenological experience of the worker and accounts for the experience of the embodied mind. The valuation of labor in both critics’ perspectives resides unapologetically with the experience of the individual as opposed to the output of the individual as a machine.

In Ruskin’s description of the changing climate, and both Ruskin’s and Mumford’s description of alienated labor, we see critical approaches to reveal ways in which embodied minds and environs intermingle. In discussing objects of labor, both critics account for another kind of wholeness as well. Mumford’s description of the tendency to aesthetically prefer the old over the new and the hand-made over the machine-made points to our inherent tendency to value objects of labor which have the imprint of humanity on or in them. In this way, we see an aspect of embeddedness accounted for in his description: “the common utensils of life return to dust, whereas those things that hold the imprint of man’s imagination—the amphorae of the Greek potters, the fragile crane-necked bottles of the Persians, the seals of the Egyptians—are preserved from the rubbish heap, no matter how frail they may be or how small their intrinsic value” (Sticks 105). Mumford’s “imprint of imagination” may be likened to Ruskin’s celebration of imperfection:
While the old Venetian cared not a whit whether his edges were sharp or not, but he invented a new design for every glass that he made, and never moulded a handle or a lip without a new fancy in it. And therefore, though some Venetian glass is ugly and clumsy enough, when made by clumsy and uninventive workmen, other Venetian glass is so lovely in its forms that no price is too great for it; and we never see the same form in it twice. Now you cannot have the finish and the varied from too. If the workman is thinking about his edges, he cannot be thinking of his design; if of his design, he cannot think of his edges.

Choose whether you will pay for the lovely form or the perfect finish, and choose at the same moment whether you will make the worker a man or a grindstone. (181)

Ruskin draws direct connections between imperfection, imprecision, and beautiful craftsmanship. In these connections, he traces variety. In this variety, Ruskin sees evidence of imagination—the craftsmanship of the individual. The value is not in the object itself, but what the object retains of its maker. The essence of the individual is mingled in with the aura of the object.

In his architectural criticism, we see Ruskin’s love of imperfection in his celebration of Gothic architecture. Embedded in Gothic architecture were those unique traces that each worker was able to leave behind in stone: “[G]o forth … and gaze upon the old cathedral front, where you have smiled so often at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors: examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues …; but do not mock them …. (“Nature” 179). Ruskin draws attention to the workers’ markers, “for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure…” (“Nature” 179). What Ruskin values here is the ability for each worker to contribute a creative element to the work which occupies their time and life.
Lastly, I wish to briefly touch upon both Mumford’s and Ruskin’s sensibilities with respect to green spaces. When, in 1922, Mumford first championed the concept of regionalism in *The Story of Utopias*, he began the last paragraph of the book with an odd little message. “Our most important task at the moment,” he claims, “is to build castles in the air.” He maintains that if our “eutopias” spring out of the realities of our environment, it will be easy enough to place foundations under them” (307). He pays tribute in the preface to Alfred North Whitehead who was perhaps as instrumental in influencing Mumford’s concept of organic unity—the centrifugal force that holds of many of his disparate observations together—as was Patrick Geddes.

According to Whitehead, clarifying the relationship of organisms to each other and to their particular environment often illuminates aspects of that environment's structure in ways that are useful to understanding its nature and, in turn, its component parts. In *The Modern Tradition* (1965), Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson describe Whitehead's application as follows:

> Things and the perception of things are *events*, modes of interaction with other events in space and time. Parts of nature assume individuality by drawing the surrounding world into themselves and delimiting it; but these individual unities must also be seen in terms of larger unities of which they are functions. As in a plant, the whole dominates each part, and as in organic growth every partial whole virtually contains the whole that transcends it. (Ellmann 382)

In a manner that reflects Whitehead’s precepts, in *Sticks and Stones* Mumford writes, “[t]o see the interdependence of city and country, to realize that the growth and concentration of one is associated with the depletion and impoverishment of the other, to appreciate that there is a just and harmonious balance between the two—this capacity we have lacked” (98). He provides a number of

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77 “Good place” in Greek according to the preface of *The Story of Utopias*. 
examples to support his observation. “Wood,” he writes, “has suffered by just the opposite of neglect: so completely have the Appalachian forests been mined” (97). As a society, we have failed to “assimilate the notion that soil and site have uses quite apart from sale,” and until we realize this we will continue to “barbarize and waste them.” He asks us to “[c]onsider how the water’s edge of lower Manhattan was developed without the slightest regard for its potential functions for recreation” (96). Mumford’s view coincides with the notion of using natural resources as no more than a “standing-reserve” (Heidegger qtd. in Bate 254).

The environmental consciousness evident in these and other passages highlights one of the reasons why Mumford remains relevant today and why his influence on contemporary environmental conservation groups has been so significant. Throughout his work, he emphasizes the need to integrate a consciousness of wholeness in planning our lived spaces—one which always considers the relationship between country and city:

Before we can build well on any scale we shall, it seems to me, have to develop an art of regional planning, an art which will relate city and countryside in a new pattern from that which was the blind creation of the industrial and the territorial pioneer. Instead of regarding the countryside as so much grist doomed to go eventually into the metropolitan mill, we must plan to preserve and develop all our natural resources to the limit. (98)

This interdependence and part-to-whole relationship that is ever-changing, growing, and adjusting to its environment and to itself is the key to interpreting the meaning of so much of Mumford’s work, and it is a small leap to make between his notions of organic unity and the possible reciprocal relationship he believed could exist between urban and natural environments. While city and country or culture and nature may remain conceptually different, materially, they are deeply interwoven. As discussed in chapter one, urban landscapes cannot be separated from nature, natural
landscapes cannot remain untouched, and bodies always feel the effects of both. A conscientious environmental outlook must do away with Cartesian separations of many kinds and consider “[n]atural and built environments” in relationship to one another with the understanding that they are “long since mixed up” (Buell 22). The Romantic authors discussed in this dissertation break up ossified Cartesian dualities in different ways. Blake and Lamb foreground individual experiences amidst communities and the social order. Wordsworth addresses the relationships of communities and their individual members in relation to their environs. De Quincey articulates the intimate relationship the mind has with the larger world in which it is embedded. Clare illustrates the experience of an embodied mind embedded in its natural environs as those environs are intermingled with aspects of society. Ruskin links language with the material and physical reality of weather as well as creative output with the imagination of workers. All of them attend to a number of part-to-whole relationships in ways that reveal the intermingling between nature and society, what is natural and what is built, between individuals and communities, and between communities and individuals and the environs in which they are embedded. Romantic perspectives draw our attention to relationships amidst divisions and lend us perspectives which illuminate the myriad of threads which knit together being and the world. In a world so entirely created by technologies of our own invention, these connections must be consciously and conscientiously addressed. Romantic perspectives provide us with just such a lens, and as a critic of culture and technology, Mumford’s vision uses such a lens to envision a more sustainable future.

In the introduction to the 1946 re-issue of Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902), Mumford asserts that “[t]here are in reality not only, as is so constantly assumed, two alternatives—town life and country life—but a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secures in
perfect combination” (45-6). The opening chapter begins with a quote from William Blake in the preface to *Milton* (1804-08): “I will not cease from mental strife, / Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, / till we have built Jerusalem / In England’s green and pleasant land” (Blake qtd. in Mumford 50). Blake’s lines are immediately followed by a passage from John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1865):

Thorough sanitary and remedial action in the houses that we have; and then the building of more, strongly, beautifully, and in groups of limited extent, kept in proportion to their streams and walled round, so that there may be no festering and wretched suburb anywhere, but clean and busy streets within and open country without, with a belt of beautiful garden and orchard round the walls, so that from any part of the city perfectly fresh air and grass and sight of far horizon might be reachable in a few minutes’ walk. This the final aim.

(Ruskin qtd. in Howard 50)

Here, Ruskin describes the possibility of society resting easily with nature in a community which draws strength from both culture and the natural environs. In *Sticks and Stones*, Mumford would describe the turns of culture which took cities in a far different direction, stating that “[o]ur communities have grown blindly, and, escaping the natural limitations which curbed even the Roman engineers, have not been controlled, on the other hand, by any normative ideal…” (109). He offers a counterpoint to arguments which advocate for a less limited growth in descriptions of human experience similar to Thomas De Quincey’s in “The English Mail-Coach” (1821) as follows:

“The notion that there is anything arbitrary in imposing a limitation upon the area and population of a city is absurd: the limits have already been laid down in the physical conditions of human nature … in the fact that men do not walk comfortably faster than three miles an hour, nor can they spend on the physical exertion of locomotion and exercise more than a few hours in every twenty-four” (109). Applying his observations to modern life, Mumford states,” [w]ith respect to the needs of
recreation, home-life, and health, the growth of a city to the point whether the outlying citizen must travel two hours a day in the subway between his office and his place of works is unintelligent and arbitrary” (109). Mumford’s descriptions reflect the inattentiveness to our intermingled relationships which has persisted in urban and regional planning. Profit and progress has largely overridden human pulses and rhythms of life.

If before the nineteenth century we cleared the forest to make way for the farm, with the entrance of the industrial pioneer we began to clear the farm to parcel out the city …. we formed the habit of using the land, not as a home, a permanent seat of culture, but as a means to something else—principally as a means to the temporary advantages of profitable speculation and exploitation. (95)

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My first significant encounter with a cultural critic was accidental. It was during my sophomore year in the basement of the old Mills College library—in the years before the internet had infiltrated the halls of academia and when discovery still relied upon chance as well as research and mentorship. In the stacks, I had stumbled across Lucien Goldmann’s book, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (1963), while looking for material for a paper I was writing for a class that quite literally changed the way I saw the world. It was in this class that I was first introduced to Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Sarraute, de Beauvoir, Celine, Wolf, and Calvino among others, and it was in the context of this class that I read Goldmann’s detailed explication of the work of Georg Lukács. I still recall the sensation of divisions collapsing between literature and politics, art and society, and criticism and life as I first came to comprehend the contemporary relevance of the differences between qualitative and quantitative values, use and exchange values, and pre-and post-capitalistic ones. Most of all, I
remember recognizing clearly for the first time the exorbitant cost in human life we had paid for progress—a notion I had always vaguely thought of in more humane historical contexts, as the motivation behind the emancipation proclamation, the suffrage movement, attempts to alleviate poverty, and the ongoing fight to end prejudice and injustice, racism and sexism,—endeavors that would ultimately allow us to distance ourselves once and for all from the horrors of our human and not so humane past. And indeed, as teleological as it might sound, our enlightenment notions of progress have contributed, in many ways, to improving the quality of life for many across the globe.

However, far too many “improvements” have been achieved at the expense of billions of people and the planet at large. The ‘doctrine of progress,’ as cultural critic Lewis Mumford came to call it later in life, was in fact at least partially responsible for the very injustices progress had in fact sought to eradicate. In the case of the nineteenth century, for instance, as Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson point out in Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge (2004), nineteenth-century technologies which were meant to liberate often instead further oppressed and entrapped the poor (239-41). This trajectory may have been inevitable given capitalism’s propensity for rapid growth. The economies of far too many nations have been built upon the backs of other people and other nations, extracting blood as readily as diamonds or oil. As I have tried to establish throughout this dissertation, such turns often came from the kinds of Utilitarian values bolstered by Cartesian mindsets which repeatedly failed to account for the more intimate and individual experiences of changes that growing technologies brought to the world without taking into account the changes that the same technologies brought to individual lives.

Toward the end of his life, Mumford’s perspective concluded on a pessimistic note, writing in a letter to “his friend and fellow social critic Roderick Seidenberg in 1969: ‘I think, in view of all that has happened in the last half century, that it is likely the ship will sink’” (Mumford qtd. in Miller
“Myth” 162). What had happened during the “last half century” had to do with the ways technologies had been developed to brutalize, contain, murder, and harness instead of liberate humanity. This historic turn arguably had less to do with the progress of technology than with our failure to develop mindful policies to guide its growth with the well-being of individuals in mind, as well as with the paucity of ethical oversight in developing technologies for war or economic gain.


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