

ROMANTICISM AND THE CULT OF CELEBRITY: AFTERLIVES IN POSTMODERN
FILM AND FICTION

By

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By

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Recent research in celebrity studies demonstrates the importance of fame for a newly literate middle class confronting large-scale publication during the Romantic period. The postmodern English department, as part of its critique of these core values, feels impelled to confront the Romantic category of the author while attempting to find a new institutional identity in a post-nationalist world. I argue that the appearance of the ghostly apparition of the Romantic celebrity in postmodern film and fiction reflects anxieties and fantasies over the decline of literary studies.

My project uses what I call a double history of celebrity to analyze the afterlife of the Romantic author in postmodern film and fiction. Romantic figures have appeared in varied places in postmodern popular and academic culture, often depicted as dying or already dead. Each text reflects, reacts or mocks the anxieties over the marginalization of literature. I analyze the postmodern afterlife of the literary celebrity as a method of investigating the marginalization of literary studies. The following chapters examine episodes in the afterlife of the Romantic celebrity in their confrontation with academic culture.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE DEATH OF ROMANTIC CELEBRITY AND THE END OF
LITERARY STUDIES

In a 2008 article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mark Edmundson invokes the differences between Romantic poets to address a growing divide between teachers and students. He suggests that William Wordsworth's methodical poetry best represents aging academics. Students are, on the other hand, "of a Byronic sort. He would have adored their world of fast travel, fast communication—and fast relationships." The student wants immediate gratification and hooks up with Byron, while the academic secures a more stable and meaningful relationship with the slow but dependable Wordsworth. Edmundson clearly identifies with Wordsworth and believes that the hectic life of students, fed by their addiction to the internet and their multiple majors, will ultimately leave them without either academic success or personal satisfaction. Wordsworthian nostalgia is seen here as an authentic counterpoint to the rise of global capitalism, the emptiness of the Byronic hookup, and the loss of a space for personal reflection in the University.

The substitution performed by Edmundson in this article, poetry signifies an authentic personality that can fill the hollow lives of students, is haunted by a culture of celebrity whose history stretches back to the Romantic period. Wordsworth and Byron were both famous during their lifetimes, though the accounts of their celebrity are very different. Wordsworth's fame is seen as developing gradually and deliberately, over a period of decades and as his readers slowly started visiting him in the Lake District. Byron's celebrity, on the other hand, is seen occurring immediately with the publication of the first edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812. "I awoke one morning," Byron writes in his Memoranda, "and found myself famous" (qtd. in Moore 159).

The characterization of Wordsworth's fame as gradual and Byron's as immediate constructs a tension between the deliberate academic and the overwhelmed, fanatic student. The academic's Wordsworthian values favor the memorialization of loss and a reconnection with a past seen as anachronistic. The student's Byronic values, on the other hand, revel in immediacy and reject the past as unnecessarily nostalgic and ponderous. The distinction between Byron and Wordsworth is transformed into a distinction between the oblivious student and the mourning academic. Romantic celebrity acts as Edmundson's object of mourning against what Alan Liu has characterized as the central anxiety for the postmodern critic, the "loss of loss" (558). Edmundson's ultimate fear that the student, heedless of either the lessons of Wordsworth or even of his celebrity, will forget that there was anything to forget in the first place.

This project connects the pathological mourning of literary academics fearing the end of their discipline to an analysis of the postmodern afterlives of British Romantic celebrity. The Romantic period not only acts as a historical starting point to analyze celebrity, but also acts as a search for authenticity posed against a ruined and degraded world. This search pervades many of the afterlives of the Romantic author in postmodern texts. The Romantic celebrity in my study emerges as a figure consumed by the mass media, stranded with the remains of European colonialism, eviscerated by seedy films and poor adaptations, and replaced by more technologically advanced forms of artistic expression. As an emblem of loss, the Romantic celebrity haunts a discipline that senses the loss of tenure, the implosion of the academic book market, the atrophy of the job market, and the end of theory, the liberal arts, even the University itself. William Deresiewicz, in a review of the twentieth anniversary edition of Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, suggested that the conflicts which defined the field of literary criticism "scarcely matter anymore," and that "the profession is [...] dying." The philosophical

and political struggles that formerly defined the life of the English Department are seen by this critic as, at best, secondary to the slow, inevitable death of literary and cultural criticism. At one point of this institutional malaise stands the dead celebrity, transformed into a nostalgic figure of loss and mourning.

I contextualize my study through several different lines of theoretical inquiry concerning: (1) the relationship between Romanticism and the celebrity; (2) an account of mourning that is tied to the celebrity's fame; (3) a definition of double history (the method I use to connect the historical treatment of dead Romantic celebrities to their postmodern afterlives); and (4) an examination of literary studies and the fears surrounding its demise. My project does not attempt a comprehensive account of Romantic celebrity's afterlives, nor does it provide a history of literary studies. I argue instead that the depiction of the dead Romantic celebrity reflects anxieties and fantasies involving the death and marginalization of literary studies.

This project sees questions of literary death wrapped up in the Romantic celebrity's circuit between the belief in an authentic personality and the narrative construction of that personality. A celebrity is, for me, a literary figure who markets a personality. Celebrities promise an authentic connection to this personality by manufacturing and selling traces of themselves in the form of pictures, interviews, books, reality television shows, and gossip. Accordingly, much of the theoretical work done on celebrity focuses on the contradictions surrounding a life that is marketed for consumption by the public. P. David Marshall, for example, defines celebrity as a tension between "authentic and false cultural value," fixed between an "embodiment of media construction, audience construction and the real, living and breathing human being" (xi). Marshall believes that the celebrity does have a life distinct from the images that circulate in the mass media, but he suggests that the marketing of the celebrity's image always impacts this real

life. Graeme Turner takes this characterization even further by arguing that people become celebrities when interest in their public persona causes audiences to start investigating their personal lives. The desire surrounding the celebrity is focused on accessing the real, personal life underlying the celebrity's public image. Audiences search for the authentic life of celebrities by invading their homes, obsessing about their relationships, and attempting to learn their innermost secrets and beliefs. The belief in a real life underlying a public persona, and the desire to access that life, feed the desire for knowledge about public figures. When celebrities die, Turner argues, people feel a disconnection that "may well stem from an affection that is not dissimilar to that which we might feel for a personal acquaintance" (9). This constructed sense of personal connection is key, I argue, to understanding the life and the afterlife of the Romantic celebrity.

The mourning of celebrity during the Romantic period similarly combined personal affection and a marketed public image, but did so to insure immortality after death. Literary immortality, defined as the use of literature to extend life after the death of the body, existed long before the early nineteenth century. However, the Romantic period provided a discourse of popularity that connected immortality to the newly emergent category of literary celebrity. Authors like William Blake, George Gordon Byron, and Mary Shelley were seemingly made immortal by the public interest in their literary work and by an attachment to what many saw as a unique personality. These Romantic celebrities crafted personalities that were attached to the appreciation of their literary work and became central in their rise to stardom. As Tom Mole has argued, celebrity emerged during the Romantic period. Celebrity focused on the market production of a personality to address the mass publication of books in the early nineteenth century and the rise of a literate middle class. The celebrity acted on a private level for the literate middle class by appealing to the desires of audiences and providing a personal connection

to an authentic personality untethered to the concerns of everyday life. The celebrity acted on a public level by appealing to many of these fans simultaneously and creating fan communities dedicated to spreading the celebrity's popularity. Mole reads celebrity as a category created by Romantic writers to ensure their popularity among readers needing some mechanism to determine good writers from bad ones. The construction of what he calls a hermeneutic of intimacy between readers and writers gave the former an incentive to keep reading the latter's work: it appropriated the charismatic personality as an escape from the standardization of work in industrial life, and assured that, through their knowledge of the celebrity author, readers could remain special and unique (13-14).

Celebrity also promised the preservation of the Romantic author after death. As Andrew Bennett argues, Romantic authors largely wrote for an audience present after their deaths and considered fame during their life to be ephemeral. Immortality became a literary question for the Romantic author seeking celebrity status. The British Romantic period, in this way, signifies a time of profound change in the literary construction of notoriety and its relationship to questions of the afterlife and immortality. Reacting to the mass publication of books, the categories of celebrity and immortality provided a method for nineteenth-century readers to choose which books would survive and which would fade away into obscurity. My project focuses on this literary connection fostered by Romantic celebrity and the fear that such a connection might disappear.

The connection between literary immortality and fame during the Romantic period constructed a discourse of mourning that divided the real friends of these authors from fans who, while perhaps feeling a deep connection to the celebrity, nevertheless did not know the author personally. Consider, for example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's obituary in the August 1834

edition of the *London Times*. Coleridge's obituary exemplifies the drama of connection that would later be translated into a narrative of the poet's immortality. The obituary describes Coleridge's death as "the quenching in the darkness of another of the few bright stars which remained to us." The intimate feeling between author and reader is here made into a public spectacle and the brightness of the celebrity's aura is described on a cosmic level. The obituary also notes that Coleridge's celebrity makes most of his exploits unnecessary to repeat. The image of a life, so well known to the public that most of it needs no repetition, is contrasted with the description of a private funeral at the end of the obituary:

Many of the admirers of his great attainments and his high literary fame and reputation would have wished to attend, but they were not invited, some even excluded by his friends who had the conduct of his funeral, and who were best acquainted with the dislike of the deceased to empty ostentation.

Coleridge's celebrity is made even more mysterious and desirable by the private nature of his funeral, where his closest friends and those who knew him best reject the mere admirer and his lack of real feeling. Proper mourning, in this case, is the performance of real feeling based on a close relationship with the remains of the dead. Improper mourning is empty feeling based on false knowledge and fake affectation. The play between proper and improper mourning, I argue, fixes the celebrity's death to a dialectic between true and false feeling. The true friends at Coleridge's funeral reinforce his memory as a poet dedicated to truth by excluding those who were not already closely acquainted with him. By rejecting the showy fan, Coleridge's true friends buttress the poet's claims to authenticity and prove that his notoriety is worthy of being immortalized.

More dramatically, it is the problem of Coleridge's fame that creates the conditions for remembering him after death. The need for his friends and family to create a private memorial attempts to protect a delicate private life that is threatened by the many admirers who know his

work. If the friend constructs a real depiction of the celebrity that is based on true feeling for celebrities' lives and respect for their reputation, the admirer is busy creating stories based on empty feeling and incomplete knowledge. As we shall see, the confrontation between friend and admirer complicates the construction of the celebrity's immortality, memorializing the celebrity in a mixture of authorized and unauthorized histories, biographies, films, comic books, and fiction.

The afterlife, in my study, designates this uncertain space of literary immortality, particularly the depiction and appropriation of the Romantic celebrity in postmodern film and fiction. As of yet, there is no full-length study connecting Romantic celebrity to the afterlives of the Romantic author. My project does not valorize either authorized or unauthorized versions of the Romantic celebrity, but instead shows how the figure of death in both reflects the fear of losing a connection with the author. In many of the texts I consider, celebrities are portrayed as dying, engaged in activities that prophesy their death, or as haunting other characters after death. This tendency is common in many of the texts that cite Romantic authors or feature them as a character. Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* (1987), for example, depicts the suicide of Thomas Chatterton caused by the poet's feelings of inadequacy and inability to escape poverty. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's steampunk thriller *The Difference Engine* (1992) features Byron and Keats as aging poets turned into scientists and politicians after the early invention of the computer in the nineteenth century. Byron dies during the novel, and his death signifies the annihilation of poetic discourse by a sudden surge in technological innovation. Amanda Prantera's *Conversations with Lord Byron on perversion, 163 years after his lordship's death* (1987) features a computer programmed to think and respond as Lord Byron. By linking

celebrity with death, these appropriations reveal literary immortality to be a discourse dependent upon loss, forgetting, and incomplete knowledge.

I reveal conflicts over the mourning of the celebrity by juxtaposing obituaries, biographies, and literary criticism surrounding the death of Romantic authors with the appearance of these celebrities in postmodern comic books, film, novels, and hypertext fiction. I also analyze a degraded belief in the Romantic author's immortality in postmodern texts by comparing the image of the dead celebrity to the anxieties of academics fearing the ruin of their connection to the past. The language of ruin and confinement is used by Frederic Jameson to analyze a certain strand of postmodern historicism that acknowledges a faded connection to the historical past. I use this analysis to align my project to what he calls postmodernism's "crisis in historicity" (22). For Jameson, the historical novel can no longer gaze directly at the historical past, but must be confined to pop images on a screen that can only reveal the simulacrum of history:

If there is any realism left here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. (25)

For Jameson, postmodernism designates the historical period in which realism is obscured by pop history. He argues that postmodernism condemns historians to the endless repetition of simulation and forces them to abandon the realism of history for the perpetual reproduction of pop images. Searching for historical realism, Jameson finds only pop images that constitute a loss of realism. While I agree with the historical problem identified by Jameson, my response to postmodernism differs from his because I do not seek to historicize this loss or recapture a history obscured by the afterlives of Romanticism. I argue that the postmodern simulacrum of history calls for a new approach to analyzing the afterlife. This new approach takes into consideration the tension between the simulation of history and the receding connection of the

historian to historical realism. I read this tension as a double history between the Romantic celebrity's death and immortality. My invocation of "double" recalls the categories of the uncanny double, mourning and melancholy, and necessitates a turn to psychoanalysis.

By double, I am referring to Freud's understanding of repetition and doubling in *The Uncanny*. Freud suggests that doubles are characters "who are to be considered identical because they look alike" (210). Repetition, on the other hand, includes the "constant recurrence of the same thing—the repetition of the same features or character traits, or even the same names through several consecutive generations" (210). Repetition involves the repressed recognition of sameness that structures history and memory alike. Repetition and doubling began, for Freud and Otto Rank, with the desire of the ego to preserve itself after death. The soul is created as the first double of the body, to outlast the body and provide immortality for the narcissistic ego. After narcissism has been surpassed, the double ceases to promise preservation and instead "becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (211). I reflect the roles of the double as preserver and harbinger of death in the section division of my chapters. These divisions show how the tropes of mourning associated with Romantic celebrity are repeated in fictional depictions of the Romantic author. The section divisions also juxtapose images of the dead Romantic celebrity from the nineteenth century with their repetition in postmodern texts to stage Jameson's conflict between receding realism and the emergence of pop-history.

As a study of doubling and preservation, my use of double history investigates the impact of a receding historical realism on the mourning of Romantic celebrity. Freud defined mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal and so on" (310). He attempts to distinguish mourning from melancholy by suggesting that melancholy is an example of

“pathological mourning,” and by drawing distinctions between mourning patients who hate the world and melancholic patients who hate themselves (317). Melancholic patients are seen refusing to let go of the dead. My study is conceptualized around the categories Freud provided in these essays, but transposes them onto scholarly and academic issues surrounding a proper or improper way to attend to the dead Romantic author. I employ concepts like ruin, necrophilia, academic realism, materiality, and the literary crypt to illustrate different methods of Romantic memorialization tied to the process of mourning. My project does not give a history of memorializing the Romantic afterlife. Such a project has already been undertaken for individual Romantic authors in texts like Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki’s edited collection *The Reception of Blake in the Orient* and Atara Stein’s *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*. Instead, I attempt to trace a certain parallelism between the mourning of the Romantic celebrity in the nineteenth century and the mourning of the Romantic celebrity during postmodernism. The psychoanalytic and institutional concepts I employ in my chapters allow me to give different theoretical accounts of this parallelism.

The double history surrounding the death of Romantic celebrity is also a method used to investigate a series of episodes surrounding the decline of literary studies. These episodes take the form of short vignettes placed at the beginning and end of each chapter, providing a frame for my reading of mourning and Romantic afterlives. My purpose is to provide an impression of the anxiety associated with the death of literary studies by linking this anxiety thematically to the concerns of the chapter. Defining literary studies opens a veritable Pandora’s box of issues that have characterized many of the debates in English Departments for decades. Thus I will provide a simple definition to start addressing the more complex theoretical issues pertinent to my project. Literary studies defines a field within the English Department that is associated with

what John Guillory has called the values of the “old bourgeoisie.” For Guillory, the old bourgeoisie valued literature because it provided what he defines—through a reading of Pierre Bourdieu—as cultural capital: a cultural system of exchange based on power and status (viii-xi). With the rise of the “new class,” and its loss of interest in older cultural symbols of class, the value of literary study has declined. While I agree with Guillory that the definition of literature has been a class issue, and that the emergence of the new class system within the framework of globalization signals the end of a certain form of literary cultural capital, I also agree with Michael Bérubé who argues that the end of this sense of cultural capital does not necessarily signal either the death of literary studies or the end of the English Department.¹

I am more interested in how the image of death and the mourning of the celebrity provide a language for literary academics confronting marginalization and how their responses are reflected in the reception of the Romantic author’s afterlives. I approach literary studies, in this way, as an effect of the double, a persistence left over from the remains of Guillory’s old bourgeoisie that inspires mourning. I am, however, more interested in the process of mourning than I am in the real or imagined state of the institution. Romanticism, in the episodes I cover in my project, rethinks the role of academics confronting the end of literary studies by connecting mourning to the death experienced by the celebrity. Much of the work on the end of literary studies foregrounds marginalization as a consequence of lost connections between the teaching of English and nationalism. It is in the distinction between national spirit and institutional loss

¹ Bérubé suggests that while the cultural value of “literature” might have declined, English graduates remain highly employable.

not because they mark their recipients as literate, well-rounded young men and women who can allude to Shakespeare in business memos, but because they mark their recipients as people who can potentially negotiate a wide range of intellectual tasks and handle (in various ways) disparate kinds of ‘textual’ material. (22-3)

that I situate my discussion of the death of literary studies. I read these texts as evidence of a larger trend in the mourning of literary studies that associates the discipline's past with life, and fears a certain kind of disciplinary death sometime in the near future. Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins*, for example, includes an entire chapter on the development of literary studies in the late nineteenth century. The birth of literary studies occurs, for Readings, as a contrast with the emerging scientific and industrial culture of the nineteenth century and as a cultural vehicle for the spread of nationalism. Its status as the preeminent discipline of the University, moreover, is also shown to be largely responsible for its identity as a discipline. Therefore "once the link between literary study and the formation of the model citizen has been broken, then literature emerges as one field among others" making the literary canon "the arbitrary delimitation of a field of knowledge (an archive) rather than as the vessel that houses the vital principle of the national spirit" (86). Instead of enjoying prestige, fame, and notoriety as the center of the University, literary studies is seen as arbitrary and ultimately irrelevant.

Readings's account of the declining importance of literary study is especially pertinent to my project because it registers this loss in terms of vitality and spirit. The English Department is seen as a direct link or embodiment of national spirit turned into a hollow, arbitrary field whose institutional space is filled with ruin and decay. Spirit provides a language to discuss the disjunction between literature and its vitality. As a spirit, literary study can animate the body of the nation-state; as an arbitrary delimitation, literary study is nothing more than a hideous double of spirit and life. The distinction between vital spirit and arbitrary delimitation fixes the discourse of ruin into a narrative of life and death. What was once alive and vital, connected naturally and logically to the nation-state, is seen now as empty and arbitrary, persisting only as a phantasm of life.

I argue that the appearance of this phantasm is a symptom of a certain institutional malaise that relies upon the following beliefs: that literary studies was once somehow vital and coherent, that academics could connect to this living institution by engaging in literary study, and that now this connection has been degraded by the dissolution of the field. Furthermore, these assumptions are analogous to the beliefs of fans who personally feel the loss connected to the dying Romantic celebrity: that the celebrity was a real person, that poetry or writing connected fans to the personal life of the celebrity, and that the intrusion of the admirer's empty ostentation can somehow degrade or frustrate connections to the past. I trace these analogies as part of a larger analysis of the symptoms governing the connection or disconnection between contemporary readers and writers from the British Romantic period.

Other work on the marginalization of literary studies also circles around the problem of a lost connection between the academic reader and literary writer, and the displacement of literature from the discourse of national identity. Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* argues that comparative literature cannot continue to identify with national identities, yet struggles with an alternative to the figure of the individual author as a locus of study. J. Hillis-Miller's *On Literature* acknowledges that literary studies is dying due to the exodus of scholars from canonical texts and their movement towards film and popular culture. Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* appeals to the inability of literature to be defined as a sign of its persistence even in the possibility that literature is displaced by other objects of study. Both Stephen Greenblatt's and Marjorie Perloff's addresses to the MLA, in 2002 and 2006 respectively, emphasize the need for reconnection with the ghosts of the dead and highlight the spectral role of literature in the English Department. The rhetoric surrounding these texts speaks of a transition from literary studies's living past to its persistence beyond death as a double of its

former self. By juxtaposing these texts with the depiction of the dead Romantic celebrity, I show how the language of death reveals an institution struggling to identify and attend to the ghosts it sees emerging from the once vital body of literary studies.

“Romanticism and the Cult of Celebrity” uses readings of the Romantic celebrity in historical episodes and postmodern texts to show how the postmodern reception of Romanticism inspires, reflects, or reacts to fears of the marginalization of literature and literary studies. The chapters are organized thematically. Each chapter reads a historical or theoretical problem in the memorialization of the Romantic celebrity, and then juxtaposes that problem with a particular postmodern work fictionally recreating or appropriating Romantic celebrities in a narrative of death and mourning. These chapters also investigate Romantic celebrities in different media, demonstrating the impact of literary death on new forms of communication increasingly studied in English Departments. Chapter 2 explores the transformation of the Romantic celebrity’s dead body from an object of mystical veneration to a physical object consumed by academic and popular audiences. The obituaries and early biographies figure Blake as a character revered by literary occultists and spiritualists who saw his mystical poetry and his eccentric life as knowable only by a select group that can decode the poet’s hidden meaning. I then look at more contemporary accounts of Blake’s death that focus on the physical and medical conditions that brought about the end of his life. Instead of hiding mystery and promising transcendence, Blake’s death is reduced to a physical event experienced by a physical body. By examining these accounts, I link the transformation in attitudes over the celebrity’s death to the scholarly focus on materiality in Blake studies. I then argue that both reflect an academic institution anxiously managing its own ruin as it abandons the ideological argument over Blake’s work and focuses increasingly on the physical remains of his body.

The second section of Chapter 2 reads Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (2000), where both Blake's afterlife and the story of the Whitechapel murders are appropriated in an allegory of the rise of mass media. Blake, referred to either in conversations or depicted in the visions of murderers, is made into a symbol of a fading literary and mystical past. I argue that while Moore shows empathy for the mystic past and mourns the loss of mystery tied to that past, he also removes himself from the psychological horror of the Ripper murders and a direct connection with Blake's visions. William Blake, in both *From Hell* and in the accounts surrounding his death, embodies a shift for the celebrity between a literary death and a death mediated by the increasingly forensic imagination of the twentieth century. Literary death, in my analysis, is linked with mystery, depth, and mysticism. Forensic death is linked with the emerging technologies of the mass media and the interdisciplinary politics of an English Department where the celebrity is turned into a material and physical corpse.

An analysis of the institutional fetishism associated with the authorial corpse is articulated more fully in Chapter 3, which examines the necrophilic fantasies surrounding Romantic literary culture. I begin with Byron's corpse and the accounts of friends, lovers, and fans who wrote about seeing his body after the poet's death in Greece. The Byronic corpse is not only made into an object of intimacy and desire, but is also constructed to embody an authenticity that many of these figures fear that they do not have. I also link the construction of Byron's corpse as an object of desire to theories of necrophilia defining the libidinal attachment to the corpse as a sign of pathological mourning. The accounts surrounding Byron's corpse assured readers that the authenticity associated with Byron's poetry and his life had not disappeared when Byron died, and substituted the authenticity Byron signified for the physical characteristics of his corpse. The

fan of Byron's poetry is transformed, by an authenticity figured in the substitution of poetic truth for the presence of the corpse, into a necrophiliac.

My discussion of intimacy and necrophilia is transposed to the ruined University in the second section of Chapter 3. This section focuses on Byron's spectral presence in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), a novel that traces the fate of a University in South Africa through the character David Lurie. The increasingly moralizing tone of Lurie's colleagues and the corporatizing practices of his University are contrasted with a professor's personal interest in communicating the beliefs of Byron to his students. Lurie's invocation of Byron is a desperate attempt to cling onto the intimacy and authenticity his celebrity signifies against the academic's sense of isolation and marginality. It is an example of what I call in the chapter academic necrophilia: a tendency on the part of academics to sublimate fears about the marginalization of literature by claiming intimacy with dead literary celebrities. Lurie attaches himself to the corpse of the Romantic celebrity and the ruined carcass of the University as signifiers of authenticity and intimacy, but by doing so fails to challenge the corporatization of education. By looking at the historical and fictional necrophilia associated with Byron, I show how the corpse transforms promises of intimacy into necrophilia and constructs the celebrity's remains as a connection to a personality that signifies both historical and poetic authenticity.

Chapter 4 connects the celebrity's claim to authenticity with what I call academic realism: the belief that the academic has a special relationship with the dead. Academic realism is an extension of the intimacy constructed by the celebrity between themselves and the fan. I begin by looking at literary biography, which is seen by scholars as a dangerous genre lurking somewhere between popular and academic cultures. By analyzing Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, a text written for fans that demanded information on the composition of the novel,

I reveal that the intrusion of the gothic into Mary's narrative complicates its claim to realism. Some of the events clearly happened, yet others were invented to reflect the gothic conventions of Shelley's novel. I, then, turn to biographical discussions of the summer in Radu Florescu's *In Search for Frankenstein* (1975) and Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler's *The Monsters: The Curse of Frankenstein* (2006). Both biographies stress the gothic nature of the events during a summer and their uncanny role in determining the fate of Mary Shelley's circle.

Ken Russell's film *Gothic* (1987) is characterized in the second section of chapter 4 as an example of film invading the construction of literary history. Literary critics almost universally find Russell's film a degraded and violent representation of the Haunted Summer. *Gothic* critiques literary production as a ticket to literary immortality by complicating the desire to directly enter the private life of the literary celebrity. The film opens with a group of fans wishing to see inside Byron's Villa Diodati and catch a glimpse of the poet. I suggest that this framing device by Russell places the realism of the entire film into question by linking the viewing of the celebrity with sexuality and desire, and by presenting Byron as a shifting phantom unavailable to the direct gaze. I then turn to the phantom of Mary's dead baby William, a ghost who haunts Shelley throughout the film and is provided as the reason the author begins work on *Frankenstein*. While both Byron and Shelley separate themselves from the rest of the circle by appealing to literary immortality, *Gothic* never depicts the authors actually writing anything. Finally, I look at the representation of the painted image in *Gothic* as a flattening out of the indexical link to the literary past. An examination of the Haunted Summer of 1816, in both its biographic and film representations, reveals the historical event as a spectral repetition of fan desire and critiques the separation of history from fiction, academic from fan, and life from afterlife.

The depiction of Mary Shelley in Chapter 5 charts the encryption of the Romantic celebrity's life in her afterlife. Mary was usually referred to as the relative of more famous men: "daughter of Godwin," or "husband of Percy." I examine how this embedding of the celebrity in a history of her relatives impacts the characterization of Mary's melancholy. I also argue that the discourse of melancholy uses a fictional characterization of loss and its ties to writing in Mary's novels to seal off or encrypt Mary's personality as an object of criticism. Reading the diaries and journals that detail the death of Mary's mother, her children and her husband, I show how critical works analyzing Mary's melancholy use fiction to articulate Mary's personality as a depressive. I also show how academic criticism of Mary's melancholy is commodified and marketed in a self-help book, as a cure for people suffering from depression. Mary's celebrity buries her in a crypt of melancholy, sealed off by the academic and commercial writers who market her personality to their audiences.

The second section of Chapter 5 applies Mary's melancholic personality to the disappearance of her character and the annihilation of literature in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995). Reviews of *Patchwork Girl* praise it for bringing the literary experience to hypertext. Yet, I argue that the slow disappearance of Mary Shelley from the text allegorizes the evacuation of literature's significance to hypertext. *Patchwork Girl*, a hypertext presented in a series of screens that open and close, buries Mary Shelley inside her creature. The journal section of the hypertext begins in Mary's point of view, and then switches to the monster, who ingests a sliver of Mary's flesh in memory of the author. Mary is referred to less and less often in the latter portion of the text, until her name disappears completely. I show how the same text designed to preserve literature also narrates the annihilation of the authorial persona. *Patchwork Girl* both preserves and destroys literature by reducing the depiction of Mary Shelley to a blank screen

labeled “M/S.” This screen operates as a blank signifier, preserving a trace of Mary’s name without any content. Mary’s preservation in Jackson’s text only occurs by effacing her memory. By examining the encryption of fiction and literature in Mary Shelley’s afterlife, I link the fantasy of literary preservation to the erasure of the authorial persona.

All of these texts foreground the death of Romantic celebrity to stage a confrontation between literary reading, academia, popular audiences and the mass media. As academic figures are portrayed lamenting the end of literary study, filmmakers, hypertext authors, and comic book writers depict the waning of literature by contrasting a mythical past with an uncertain future. As I show in my chapters, several academics fear a disruption between themselves and the authors they teach in their classrooms. Postmodern appropriations of Romanticism reflect, diagnose, and mock that anxiety, and in the process reveal the literary afterlife as a playground of ghosts and specters.

CHAPTER 2
OCCULT BLAKEANA: THE DEATH OF LITERATURE, THE MANAGEMENT OF RUIN,
AND ALAN MOORE AND EDDIE CAMPBELL'S *FROM HELL*

It is commonplace to suggest that William Blake's fame is mostly posthumous in nature. Blake's notoriety is based on his conversations with dead prophets and philosophers and the numerous writers who decided to argue for his inclusion in the literary canon after his death. His poetic allusions to specters, ghosts, bones, and graves have fixed him in the eyes of some critics as belonging more to the tradition of eighteenth-century graveyard poets than to the more extravagant Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. The centrality of death in Blake's rise to literary status is, in fact, such a widely accepted idea that Andrew Bennett, who excluded Blake from his study of the posthumous reception to Romantic period poets, had to include an apologetic endnote. Bennett knows that Blake's absence might be seen as "perverse," yet he argues that Blake's actual obscurity is a very different problem from the "cultural production of the neglected genius" during the Romantic period (203). While Blake does not fit into the more accepted nineteenth-century forms of obscurity touted by Bennett, his posthumous characterization by poets and academics emphasizes neglect to frame his appeal. Blake is celebrated to the degree that he is depicted as marginal, poor, degraded and, above all, dead. As Christoph Ehland has said of John Keats, Blake is seen as a poet whose "paths of glory began in the grave" (391).

The story of Blake's posthumous fame can be seen as an allegory for more recent attempts to reinscribe literature as a central genre for study in English Departments. J. Hillis-Miller's *On Literature* (2002) recasts the importance of literature in the ashes of its death. He suggests that the death of literature is occurring with the loss of funding, the digitalization of literary works like those of the *William Blake Archive*, and the shift of disciplinary emphasis from literary to popular culture and film by newer scholars. Yet he also suggests that literature has a certain

power to “go on signifying in the total absence of any phenomenal referent,” generating imaginative spaces beyond its institutional ones (16). Miller’s characterization of literature resists, by dying, the real economic entities poised against it. Derek Attridge picks up this hyperbolic role of literature in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), where the power of the literary is seen as a result of a theoretical inability to define literature. Its singularity is a product of its being beyond institutional methods of understanding. These texts articulate a spectral property to literature in its relationship to the English Department that is central to this chapter. Literature may have lost its place institutionally, according to Miller and Attridge, but some property persists after institutional and theoretical failures to articulate a single field for literary discourse. Literature’s persistence, like that of Blake’s fame, is articulated as a ghostly singularity whose power resides in death and failure.

This chapter examines this spectral persistence of literature by analyzing the politics surrounding Blake’s death. I argue that depictions of Blake’s death appropriate the remains of the poet in both institutional and popular controversies surrounding the perceived demise of literature. The character of these depictions reflects what I call an interdisciplinary management culture embedded in Blake’s afterlife persona. My reading of this culture is indebted to Marc Bousquet’s suggestion that the field of rhetoric and composition has turned towards what he calls “pragmatic philosophies.” The pragmatic philosophies driving composition studies act to manage competing ideological positions and fix the Writing Program Administrator as a medium between the interests of administration and the interests of graduate assistants. Bousquet argues that the “debunking of critical theory and cultural studies has acquired no traction outside the field of rhetoric and composition” (175). I argue, on the other hand, that this managerial ethos has infiltrated the critical and popular reception of William Blake, delegating his persona to

policing the boundaries between literature and the mass media, identity, and interdisciplinarity. While the management of composition involves the “debunking” of critical theory, I argue that the management of Blake focuses theory around identity positions in conflict and then works to turn that conflict into compromise. William Blake as a managerial persona, in this way, reflects an attempt to control the spectral form of literature.

The first section focuses on a transition in the way Blake’s death is depicted from those characterizing him as an eccentric, mystical figure in obituaries and biographies in the nineteenth century to more recent academic criticism that focuses on his physical body. I suggest that such academic accounts parallel the critical interest in analyzing the material composition of Blake’s illuminated poetry. Both developments are symptomatic of an academic culture employing an interest in the material artifact to manage and balance what is seen as a ruined connection to the literary past. The second section looks at Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s depiction of Blake in *From Hell* (2000) as an allegory for the death of the mystic and the loss of literary meaning. Moore’s inability to fully sympathize with what he sees as Blake’s mysticism forces him to portray the poet policing the boundaries between mystical enthusiasm and ritual violence. To keep William Gull’s ritual violence in check, William Blake captures his enthusiasm in a painting that signifies the darker side of mysticism and encloses Gull’s more violent fantasies. I see Moore and Campbell’s comic in a wider sense, charting and enacting the disciplining of mystical enthusiasm and the creation, in its place, of the international media corporation.²

Blake’s afterlife conspires with literary nostalgia to manage both the fantasies of the killer and the anxieties of the literary academic. As a posthumous celebrity, then, William Blake’s death

² I use the terms “comic book,” “comics,” and “comic” instead of “graphic novel” mostly due to Alan Moore’s stated preference of the former over the latter. In a 2000 interview with Barry Kavanagh, Moore stated that graphic novel is “not a term that I’m very comfortable with” due to its tendency to be a “marketing term” that came to mean “expensive comic book.” While many of Alan Moore’s texts are referred to as graphic novels, most of them were first published as a series of comic book issues.

acts as a blank, physical screen upon which the comic artist and the academic can project their anxieties over the demise of mystical thought and the ruin of literary culture.

The Many Deaths of William Blake

How many times has Blake died? One year before his death, William Blake signs in the autograph book of William Upcott “WILLIAM BLAKE one who is very much delighted with being in good company / Born 28 Nov, 1757 in London & has died several times since” (E. 675).³ Most critics have suggested this statement to be part of Blake’s larger critique of modern subjectivity. Wayne Glausser places the autograph in the larger Blakean motif of self-annihilation, arguing that Blake engaged in a Foucauldian critique of selfhood and biopolitics. Kathleen Lundeen sees the autograph as part of Blake’s critique of origins and approaches it in her Derridean reading of “Tyger,” suggesting that the animal’s origins are forever obscured by its many births. And Jeremy Tambling sets the autograph against the Nietzschean proclamation of the posthumous self: authors who write from the belief that they are already dead.⁴ In each account, the question of Blake’s many deaths figures prominently as a hermeneutic device engaged in fixing Blake’s mystique as a writer whose reflections about death inform his work.

The writing surrounding Blake’s biological death, however, remains a much smaller topic for critical discussion. In this section, I argue that depictions of Blake’s death reflect the status of literature as first a discourse of mysticism and revelation and then as a discourse of identity, physicality, and disciplinarity. Soon after Blake’s death, these depictions focused on his mystical identity as reasons for incorporating him into the canon of literary authors. More recently,

³ Unless otherwise stated, all references to Blake’s poetry comes from David Erdman’s *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, hereafter referred to in parenthetical citations as “E.”

⁴ See Glausser’s *Locke and Blake: A Conversation Across the Eighteenth Century*, Lundeen’s *Knight of the Living Dead: William Blake and the Problem of Ontology*, and Tambling’s *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies* respectively for these arguments.

Blake's physical body has displaced interest in his mystical identity. Two broad interests dominate the discourse surrounding Blake's death. The first celebrates his death as ascension to a higher plane where Blake emerges as a prophet whose eccentric personality suggests connections with life after death. The second, characterized most dramatically with the publication of "Blake's Death" by Lane Robison and Joseph Viscomi, medicalizes his final days and treats the poet's death as a physical event. In the beginning of *Radical Blake*, Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker briefly note this contrast between mythology and materialism as an example of the "proliferate" nature of Blake's vision. Blake inspires both the materialist and the mythographer just as he inspires the "lone mystic as well as the gregarious revolutionary" (13). My account, on the other hand, articulates how the many deaths of Blake constitute him as both a mystical figure, in that his notoriety is based on his mystical eccentricity, and a figure for the postmodern English Department, as his numerous identities are made to manage disciplinary borders. Blake's many deaths, in other words, serve to balance and reflect the many identity positions held by his increasingly interdisciplinary cultural critics. The survival of William Blake as a relevant literary figure, here, is dependent upon his ability to occupy several different disciplinary positions simultaneously.

Blake's autograph regarding his many deaths is reported by an obituary in one of the first notices about the poet's passing in the September 1827 issue of *The Monthly Magazine*. The obituary ends its notice with an autograph, punctuating the sentence with three exclamation marks suggesting Blake's eccentric audacity. It is this audacity, the author of the obituary claims, that secures Blake's fame and greatness. The death notice functions primarily as posthumous publicity for the now dead poet, suggesting that he is "one of those ingenious persons which every age has produced, whose eccentricities were still more remarkable than their professional

abilities, the memory of which extra circumstances have largely contributed to the perpetuation of their fame” (BR 351).⁵ The statement made by Blake that he died several deaths and that he talked to dead spirits is taken as evidence of his eccentricity. The author of the obituary admits that he cannot agree with Blake’s belief in supernatural spirits, but suggests that this extraordinary and seemingly impossible intuition makes his art worthy of critical attention. Astonishingly, the obituary goes on, Blake was neither a raving lunatic nor was he the only one who believed he saw the dead. Appreciating Blake’s art, according to this obituary, lends the possibility of connecting with an extraordinary mind that saw the world of the dead.⁶

The promise of a connection with the supernatural drives the author of the obituary to excitement and hyperbole that eventually takes over the earlier somber tone of the notice. The author mentions the composition of what he calls Blake’s “The Man Flea” (named “Ghost of a Flea” by Blake). The author describes The Man Flea as tracing the line between the sublime and the ridiculous. The flea apparition begins speaking to Blake, describing how initially it was designed to be as large as a human being, but soon the designer was worried, “I should have been

⁵ Two texts that are invaluable in this study are G. E. Bentley’s *Blake Records*, which include many of the obituaries I cite here and Joseph Wittreich’s *Nineteenth-Century Accounts of William Blake*. Bentley’s texts will hereafter be cited with the initials BR, while Wittreich’s will be referenced with his name. See also Suzanne Hoover’s groundbreaking essay “William Blake in the Wilderness: A Closer Look at his Reputation, 1827-1863,” for a good reading of his reception in the nineteenth century.

⁶ See Joseph Viscomi’s argument that Blake was essentially stylized as an “artist’s artist” available only to a few due to the small amounts of prints that were made of his “visionary heads” and sketches between 1827 and 1863. For Viscomi, “the nature and aesthetic of his new reproductive process affected the kinds of work selected and excluded for reproduction, the result of which was to emphasize Blake the printmaker and poet rather than the painter” (“Blake after” 215). See also Crabb Robinson’s letter to Dorothy Wordsworth in which he had hoped to introduce Blake’s work. Robinson states that Blake is, like Jacob Boheme and Swedenborg, a visionary who lives:

in a world of his own, enjoying constant intercourse with the world of spirits. He receives visits from Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Voltaire, etc. etc. etc., and has given me repeatedly their very words in their conversations. His paintings are copies of what he saw in his Visions. His books (and his MSS. are immense in quality) are dictated from the spirits. He told me yesterday that when he writes it is for the spirits only; he sees the words fly about the room the moment he has put them on paper, and his book is then published. (Wittreich 273-4)

a too mighty destroyer; it was determined to make me—no bigger than I am” (BR 352). As one of Blake’s “visionary heads,” the flea’s story reinforces the author’s belief in Blake’s astounding eccentricity. The author then suggests that the image “is indubitably the most ingenious, and able personification of a devil, or a malignant and powerful *fiend*, that ever emanated from the inventive pencil of a painter” (BR 253). The author displaces the question of Blake’s madness to one of aesthetic genius, translates the flea’s soliloquy into moralistic language denoting evil, and suggests that the dead poet’s works—with the possibility that they are connected to the realm of the dead—can give us insight into his profound abilities. Blake is transformed from a simple eccentric individual to the icon of a poet by ignoring his madness and focusing on the aesthetic impact of his work.

Many of the other obituaries juxtaposed Blake’s eccentricity with his artistic ability. The 18 August 1827 edition of the *Literary Gazette* addressed its obituary with the words “[t]o those few who have sympathies for the idea and (comparatively speaking) the intellectual in art.” It then immediately speaks out against Blake’s marginalization, angered that the artist “has been allowed to exist in a penury which most artists—beings necessarily of a sensitive temperament-- would deem intolerable” (BR 348-9). The artist is both poor and extraordinarily sensitive. *The Monthly Magazine* notes, “William Blake, born about the year 1761, was a very remarkable, and a very eccentric character” (BR 354). The genius of Blake is based on his marginalized status and his eccentricity. The focus on Blake’s oddity permeates most of the first mentions of his name after his death. The 1 November 1827 edition of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* says that Blake was “an excellent, but eccentric artist;” Charles Lamb called the language of the new edition of John Bunyan published in 1828 “Blake’s ravings made genteel”; and John Varley’s *Zodiacal Physiognomy* (1828) characterizes Blake as “so much of an enthusiast, that he could

call up from the vasty deep any spirits or corporeal or other forms desired for the nonce” (BR 372). From the beginning, arguments focused on Blake’s eccentricity as a determinant of his fame. Some saw his eccentricity as an unfortunate affliction of an otherwise important artist. Other saw it either as essential to his worthy but limited fame or as evidence that he would never achieve literary notoriety.

Frederic Tatham uses these elements of eccentricity and Blake’s connection to the supernatural in his celebrated depiction of the poet’s death. Tatham’s account of Blake vacillates between representing him in unearthly pain and depicting him as an angel moving to the next world. Blake’s final moments are seen as a sublime movement from the earthly plane into heaven. Tatham depicts Blake looking over a colored print of the *Ancient of Days* as he experiences his final attack. He places the print down, saying that he’s done all he can to the piece. Blake then draws Catherine’s portrait, finishes it, and

Began to sing Hallelujahs & songs of joy & Triumph which Mrs. Blake described as being truly sublime in music & in Verse. He sang loudly & with true extatic[sic] energy and seemed too happy that he had finished his course. [...] His bursts of gladness made the room peal again. The Walls rang & resounded with the beatific Symphony. (BR 527-8)

For Tatham, Blake’s unearthly and sublime music bridges life and death. Blake’s “spirit departed like the sigh of a gentle breeze & he slept in company with the mighty ancestors he had formerly depicted” (BR 528). Tatham transforms the lowly painter and poet into a visionary capable of using language and song to transcend the pain of death. Blake’s final scene here characterizes him as a poet and a mystic of the highest order. Catherine says that the music Blake sings is sublime and that the verses suggested Blake’s joy in ending his earthly existence. The walls are physically transformed by the sublimity of Blake’s song, becoming like instruments in a giant orchestra and echoing his unearthly melody. If Blake was poor on Earth, Tatham suggests that

death has made him into a poet of eternity whose words can literally transform the material of Earthly existence.

For Alexander Gilchrist, the transcendent rhetoric of Tatham's account marked Blake as a poet who was marginalized because of his ability to connect with the sublime worlds of Heaven. Gilchrist begins his biography on Blake and describes him as the "one name [that] has been hitherto perseveringly exiled" (1). The hyperbole singles out Blake as an object remembered by Gilchrist because the mainstream literary community has forgotten him. Gilchrist recounts Tatham's story of a Blake that died silently with his wife, but also includes a short "posthumous" section that details the burying of Blake in an unmarked grave without a head stone. This fact gives Gilchrist a strangely satisfied but also frustrated tone in the conclusion of Blake's biography—Blake is made into a mythological being who is destined to be unknown. Gilchrist depicts a dead Blake wandering aimlessly and "lonely around that drear, sordid Golgotha" and "dejected in that squalid Hades" (408). Blake's Hades and Golgotha are Bunhill Fields, his cemetery, where the lack of a gravestone marker for his body constitutes the space as a horrid Purgatory. The poet's spirit lacks meaning and direction. Gilchrist sees Blake's true message, and his true self, still obscured by his marginality. It is this mystery, marginalization, and absence of a mark for Blake's body that contributes to Gilchrist's sense of Blake's singularity and his call for readers to attend to Blake's work.

The belief in a distinct individuality maintained by Blake's eccentricity continues in his posthumous Victorian notoriety. Algernon Swinburne calls Blake "[t]he greatest English poet except Collins who had the fortune or misfortune to be born into a century far greater in progress than in poetry" (v). Blake's marginality, for Swinburne, is due to a low state of English poetry and a public who does not have the intellectual capability to properly appreciate his art. Dante

Gabriel Rossetti found it almost impossible to place Blake's poetry within a tradition because Blake is so removed from ordinary ideas "that it will be impossible to attribute to them any decided place among the impulses which have directed the extraordinary mass of poetry, displaying power of one or another kind, which has been brought before us, from his day to our own" (454). For Rossetti, it is this eccentric personality that makes Blake unique and argues for a literary status above the extraordinary mass of British poetry. Shirley Dent has shown that Swinburne and Rossetti, along with many other readers of Blake during the Victorian period, suggested the idea of a special reader or singular individual who alone was able to read Blake's poetry. Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites, she argues, were central in representing Blake as particularly suited to artists and intellectuals. Nineteenth-century readers of Blake pointed to his eccentricity as evidence of a special status in literary culture. Blake's singular status as a poet who talked to the dead should be celebrated. However it requires a particular type of reader to do so.

Dent's work on Blake also, reveals a symptom that characterizes more contemporary academic texts addressing the poet's death. Dent not only decries the elitism of figures like Swinburne and Rossetti and their theory of a special reader, but also finds it difficult to propose an alternative, since she feels that to portray Blake as a popular poet risks not respecting his complexity. Her suggestion is that Blake should be available to everyone, and "isn't our Blake, in either the popular or any other sense. No art that is truly great can remain 'ours' for very long: it is its greatness that transcends time and place [...] that makes it universal. Great art is for everyman, not just art heritage lovers. Blake is there for the taking" (68). Dent's article suggests that, now, Blake is there to be taken. By being available to everyone, Blake is made a passive object defined by the desires of others or the vaguely defined "everyman." Dent also enacts an

ideological shift in the appreciation of Blake's literary status. Whereas his nineteenth-century critics emphasized Blake's eccentricity and difficulty as evidence of his worth to a literary circle, Dent's account suggests a need to characterize Blake as a figure of availability. Blake is positioned as a pragmatic medium between the literary world and the popular world. Once he is available to everyone, his poetry can reflect the identity and interests of his now limitless audience.

Other critics, like David Baulch, also see Blake as operating in a pragmatic space that is available to a multitude of audiences. In a review of Julia Wright's *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*, Baulch praises Wright's book for "writing within both theoretical and historical approaches to its subject" and contributing to the "attempts to more fully theorize history and appropriately historicize theory." In Baulch's view the balancing of history and theory provides the appropriate pragmatic compromise between two otherwise conflicting disciplinary approaches. In a similar pragmatic vein, the introduction to Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker's *Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture* argues that, "[i]n terms of his reception, Blake can be thought of as a self-constituting and individualist Romantic imagination or as a composite product of intersecting discourses" (7). The authors argue that the two ways of thinking about Blake "are by no means exclusive" and conclude that they must be thought together (7). Unwilling to let go of Blake's literary status, the theory surrounding late twentieth-century approaches to literary criticism, historicism, or Blake's identity as an individualist imagination, these texts conjoin seemingly incompatible approaches to literary criticism as a pragmatic compromise to the conflicts of the past. Instead of arguing over the appropriateness of William Blake as a literary figure, these texts use Blake to reflect their own compromises over disciplinary identity and critical method.

Walter Benn Michaels argues that this language of conflict management characterizes the contemporary pragmatic culture of what he calls posthistoricism. Abandoning the argument over interpretation and ideology and embracing instead the language of identity and belief, pragmatist readers end up favoring what Michaels calls response over interpretation. Criticism abandons arguments over meaning and manages conflicts between identity:

The way to defend those beliefs that seem to you true is to give your reasons for believing in them. [...] But just as the point of redescribing your beliefs as your feelings (your interpretations as your responses) is to make arguing for them both irrelevant and impossible. It's impossible because you can't give any reasons that justify your feelings (the most you can do is explain why you have them); it's irrelevant because you don't need any reasons to justify your feelings. You're entitled to them without having to justify them. (77)

The culture of identity and belief is, furthermore, connected to the more widespread interest in the material or physical features of literary texts—which also privileges individual experience.

[A]nyone who thinks the text consists of its physical features (of what Derrida calls its marks) will be required also to think that the meaning of the text is crucially determined by the experience of its readers, and so the question of who the reader is—and the commitment to the primacy of identity as such—is built into the commitment to the materiality of the signifier. (13)

In this sense, an interest in the management of academic identity is figured in the shift from considering Blake a mystical eccentric whose meaning is decipherable only by a select class, to considering Blake as a mediator between classes, disciplines and critical methods.⁷

Indeed, the attention to the material features of Blake's texts has formed a fundamental part of Blake criticism for at least the past twenty years. The Santa Cruz Blake Study Group, for instance, criticized David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* in 1984 for its

⁷ Michaels is vague about when posthistoricism began, though his subtitle "1967 to the end of history" suggests that 1967 was a pivotal year. In fact, Michaels's historical argument is the weakest part of the book. This is despite the book's stated intention to chart a historical disciplinary shift. While I find Michaels's book relies too much on false dichotomies (we either embrace identity politics and materiality or we return to ideology and meaning, for example), I also find his commitment to understanding the ideological roots of identity politics important to my analysis of Blake's status as a poet who can be made available to different identity groups.

lack of attention to the spatial form of Blake's poems. Joseph Viscomi's massive 1993 work, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, extended this critique. It explains in detail, the technical process by which Blake's material texts came into being. As Blake is made to mediate between different identity positions, scholars become increasingly interested in the material text as a site for criticism. Justin Van Kleek spends an entire article in the Summer 2005 edition of *Blake: an Illustrated Quarterly* analyzing the mark above "Zoas" on the title page of Blake's poem *Vala or the Four Zoas*. According to Van Kleek, the mark resembles an apostrophe and should be discussed in newer editions of his collected works. He mentions that he believes the mark to be intentional, but only provides suggestions for its possible meaning. Material form is treated as an institutional fetish for the academic scholar to have some physical connection to a William Blake who has been, otherwise, framed and reframed by the conflict between individual and disciplinary belief.

The treatment of Blake's death in these more contemporary academic accounts is, likewise, interested only in the physical body. They also attempt to manage the dispute between mythological accounts of Blake disappearing gently into the night and the more physical accounts of Blake dying in horrible pain. Aileen Ward, a proponent of the physical version of Blake's death, suggests that the poet died of a ruptured gall bladder with peritonitis, an infection caused by excess bile spilling into the abdomen. She critiques the mystical accounts of Blake's death for suggesting that Blake could accomplish any work during the last stages of his life (15). The call for a more complete, biological and medical account of Blake's death by Ward reverses the desire to see Blake as a mystical figure, and attempts to open the secrets of his body and reveal them to be simply a set of physical processes. Blake is seen, not as an extraordinary figure with ties to the supernatural, but as a physical body with processes that match other physical

bodies. This normal individual might have written interesting poems and produced beautiful prints, but nevertheless was (at his core) a physical body with physical ailments that eventually brought about Blake's completely physical death.

Lane Robinson and Joseph Viscomi's essay "Blake's Death" uses its diagnosis, sclerosing cholangitis with periods of remission and relapse, to provide a compromise between Ward's account and the description of Blake's quiet death provided by Tatham. They reinforce Tatham's belief in a quiet death, but explain that quiet death in entirely physical terms and consider the death a physical event. I consider their essay in detail not only because it is a foundational contemporary text describing the death, but also because the commitment of the authors to the medical conditions surrounding Blake's demise is, I argue, symptomatic of the treatment of Blake as a physical and materialist body.

Their essay begins with an epigraph from plate 14 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* depicting the iconoclastic method Blake used to produce his illuminated books. Blake says "But first the notion that man has a distinct body from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away and displaying the infinite which was hid" (qtd. on 36). The epigraph is ironic on two levels. First, Viscomi and Robinson's account seeks to physicalize Blake's earlier more spiritual and mystical death scenes. Second, the authors argue that Blake's sclerosing cholangitis was brought on by chronic copper intoxication caused by years of relief etching in his print studio. The corrosives, then, literally ate away at Blake's health as they aesthetically merged his spiritual beliefs with this artistic practice. If the corrosive acids are medicinal, they are also most certainly harmful. Robinson and Viscomi seek to demystify the mystical accounts of Blake's death that suggest he was singing hymns when he died and that, as Tatham reports, he

looked more like an angel than a man. The authors see Blake as a demystified body stripped of spiritual pretensions, and they suggest the proper critical stance is largely clinical and reconciles all of the extant symptomatological evidence.

Robinson and Viscomi begin their analysis of Blake's illness by noting several features that are common in individuals who suffer from Irritable Bowel Disease, a chronic autoimmune condition that can frequently lead to sclerosing cholangitis. Blake is said to have first developed the symptoms of IBD during his youth, a claim the authors back up with diary entries referring to the stomach flus he experienced as a young boy. The final stages of his disease, in the Robinson/Viscomi account, take place about 29 months before his death. During this time, shivering fits and fevers send Blake into an accelerated pattern of remission and relapse. These symptoms compare with the development of hemorrhoids caused by many sufferers of biliary cirrhosis, or an untreatable form of gradual liver failure caused by the constriction of blood flow. Biliary cirrhosis is sometimes cited as a complication of sclerosing cholangitis.

These conditions, the authors argue, combine to show a steady pattern of decline for the last two years of Blake's life. While he was declining, however, Blake would still experience periods of relative health, explaining the completion of several commissioned works in the years before his death. The pattern of decline mixed with remission and relapse suggests for Robinson and Viscomi that Ward's account of pain and Catherine Blake's belief that her husband died an angel "are probably both correct, though they are of different stages of the illness" (43). The authors mention that Blake probably developed pulmonary edema, which would leave Blake in a semi-comatose state for his final two days. The authors explain Blake's physical condition using Catherine's words and suggest that

it is unlikely that he awoke in his last hours with the energy to color, draw, sing and talk. Far more likely, he entered "his eternal rest like an infant to its sleep," and while asleep,

experienced “a calm and painless withdrawal of breath.” A believable scenario is that Blake went to sleep, his breathing slowed, an episode of apnea developed, and he never woke again. Alternately, Blake went to sleep, his breathing slowed, his blood oxygen level decreased, he experienced a heart attack, and he never woke up. (44)

Robinson and Viscomi treat Blake’s body as a physical object and suggest, in purely physical terms, that Blake could never sing or draw on the day of his death. However their account also attempts to reconcile the claims that Blake’s life reflected his artistic melancholic persona with those that claim Blake’s death to have been a steep descent into deepening pain. The pattern of relapse and remission caused by IBD allows Blake to experience both periods of pain and periods of health. And their account allows for a final melancholic irony. What better cause for Blake’s death than the copper fumes arising from corrosive acids that created his illuminated books and reflected his iconoclastic persona? While Blake’s body remains an object of medical speculation, the body also acts to reflect a Romantic melancholy. Blake never wakes up and merely sinks into his slowly dying body. While providing a compromise between the depictions of pain and those of quiet death, Robinson and Viscomi nevertheless see themselves stripping away the mystical layers of Blake’s death and showing us the physicality of Blake’s body as it dies.

The interest in the material properties of Blake’s illuminated texts is, thus, reflected in Robinson and Viscomi’s account by an interest in the physical properties of his body. This physical body is, likewise, seen as a site of reconciliation between Blake’s disciplinary identities. In Robinson and Viscomi, Blake is a poet tied to the iconoclasm of his infernal printing method and a physical body tied to the medical conditions preceding his death. Describing the minute physical processes surrounding his death is analogous, here, to Walter Benn Michaels’s argument on the posthistorical attachment to the material text. This interest in a physical Blake

representable by critical discourse is, I argue, symptomatic of an attachment to a body that is now seen as a space of disciplinary conflict and individual belief.

In this way, Francis Bacon's painting of Blake's life mask should be seen as emblematic of the pragmatist approach to Blake (Figure 2-1). Bacon created a series of paintings on the mask. The second version, however, is the most interesting for my purposes. The life mask presents the head as a curved surface, representing the precise contours of the face and suggesting a lost physical object. As Lene Østermark-Johansen has shown, Blake hated the process of making the mask, as it pulled out several strands of his hair. It is nevertheless still seen as a popular relic of the dead poet, selling for "the bargain price of a mere £95" at the National Portrait Gallery (157-62). Nevertheless, Bacon did not have much interest in Blake's visions, nor did he care all that much about the mask as a relic of a mystical poet. In an interview with Michael Archimbaud, Bacon says that he "loathes the mystical side of him [Blake]" and that the painting "wasn't a homage to the work of Blake, because his work doesn't really mean anything to me at all" (121). Bacon saw in Blake's features a physical body, a pure physical surface. He created at least five different paintings of the life mask, each representing the mask from a different perspective, yet he also took pains to flatten the mask's features. Strokes of Bacon's brush combine with the eyes and the nose (which are positioned lower on the painting than on the mask) to pull the eye downward, flattening the surface and transforming it into a smooth piece of flesh incapable of housing a person we might call Blake. This flattening of Blake's image caused Gilles Deleuze to remark that Bacon's Blake is "not a death mask, it is a block of firm flesh that has been separated from the bone" (18). In a similar tone, Michael Peppiatt comments that the paintings of Blake's head "float against the void like unearthly sculptures, impalpable yet expressive of a force as concentrated as a clenched fist" (165). The relic-like properties of Blake's life mask, so

important to customers who buy it at the National Portrait Gallery, are erased entirely in Bacon's treatment of the mask. All that remains, in this sense, is the firm flesh stripped from the bone and a force that has little to do with either William Blake's life or his death. This force lies in a blunt, white physicality that contrasts forcefully with the dark void behind the mask. Blake's character is distilled from the mask, and all that remains is unearthly flesh, force, and a painted slab of physicality that ceases to be, represent or, signify Blake.

The death mask allegorizes the physical and material Blake as a ruined relic of a literary past that has lost its relevance. These relics maintain a physical, if empty, connection with the past. They become like Bacon's rendering of Blake's flesh: a pure physical trace suggesting nothing but individual inflection. Blake's death, for his first obituaries, signified the mysticism that made him into a figure for mythology and poetic revelation. This mysticism is translated, by a culture more interested in the impact of Blake's persona on more contemporary disciplinary issues, into an issue of access and availability.

The physical properties of Blake's body and Blake's texts signify a fading material connection with a literary past that must be balanced with the political concerns of identity politics. The discourse of balance celebrates Blake's many deaths as proof of his continuing relevance as a poet of multiplicity and iconoclasm, one whose attention to political radicalism matches—more or less—the political positions of the contemporary English Department. Blake's death is proof, then, not of his exemplary status as a singular individual with links to the theoretical insights of more contemporary thinkers, but of the ease with which identity politics appropriates the Blakean multitude for their concerns. These deaths are numbered by the disciplinary identities Blake is made to inhabit. For nineteenth-century writers, Blake's death marks his ascendancy into relevance by crafting a discourse of eccentricity. For more recent

academic writers, death becomes another opportunity to prove disciplinary relevance by managing the past. Blake's death is seen as a discourse of ruin and death made applicable to contemporary life by making the body available to anyone who can use it to occupy a sanctioned identity position. I now suggest that this image of a managerial Blake can be applied to a reading of William Blake's death in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*, where the poet is made into a symbol of a mystical past that must be disciplined before it gives in to its more enthusiastic and violent tendencies.

Serial Blake

Alan Moore, who decries the managerial culture of the modern office space in *From Hell* as lifeless, likewise figures mysticism and literature around death.⁸ Literary symbolism is linked to mysticism and characterized in the comic as an older and almost extinct mode of knowledge, differing from those practiced by the medical establishment and the news media. Yet it is only in the past, and with the dead, that mysticism can stage a resistance to the spectacle of murder conjured by the serial killer. Blake is already dead when William Gull, the alter ego of Jack the Ripper in Moore and Campbell's comic, appears to him in a vision. The Whitechapel murders occur more than 60 years after the end of Blake's life. Furthermore, the few literary figures who do appear in *From Hell* are always accompanied by the foreshadowing of their deaths. While Moore and Campbell seem to valorize Blake and his ties to mysticism and literature, the literary is still seen as contributing a weak resistance to the media juggernaut born during the Ripper murders.

⁸ I refer to the 2000 collected edition of *From Hell* in this chapter. *From Hell* has a complicated publishing history due to its appearance in several now defunct publishing houses. The first publication of the story in a serial comic did not contain either the footnotes or the coda that are central to my argument. For a detailed account of *From Hell*'s publishing history, see Eddie Campbell's "Comics on the Main Street of Culture."

William Blake, in *From Hell*, presents a world of mystical depth that is unavailable to media depictions of the dead body. As I argued in “Panelling Parallax: The Fearful Symmetry of William Blake and Alan Moore,” Moore appeals to Blake’s uncompromising spirit as a counterpoint to the contemporary ubiquity of mass media. Blake symbolizes a mystical connection to depth that has otherwise been drowned out by spectacle. In the essay, I argued that Moore adapts Blake’s concept of “fearful symmetry” in *Watchmen* (1987) to comment on the postmodern desire for a deep meaning underlying seemingly chaotic events. That deep meaning, I attempted to show, existed only on the most superficial of levels: the purely formal layout of comic panels arranged by Moore and Gibbons in a symmetrical pattern. Moore uses Blake to show the vacillation between the desire for deep meaning and the possibility that the only answer for such a desire is on a formal surface forever obscured to those characters inhabiting the comic’s diegetic space.

Blake’s status as a literary figure implicates him in Moore’s explorations of depth and close reading. In this section, I argue that *From Hell* depicts Blake after death to mourn the death of literature as a genre of depth. *From Hell* characterizes Blake as part of a mystical tradition whose cultural importance is being slowly displaced by the newspaper scandal of the Ripper murders. The comic charts the transformation of the dead into a symbol of the state and an image exploited by the mass media. My analysis demonstrates the comic’s preoccupation with a literary tradition by focusing on its interest on a mystical past where meaning is seen as accessible through the use of symbols. Moore’s tale depicts the loss of the literary and the triumph of New Media and the annihilation of mystic meaning in favor of spectacle.

Alan Moore is widely known for his interest in combining literature with the comic book genre, and giving the latter the cultural importance of the former. As he commented in a 1988

interview with Vincent Eno and El Csawza, *Watchmen* was an attempt to create “a superhero Moby Dick; something that had that sort of weight, that sort of density.” Literature is seen, here, giving the flimsy comic book more sturdiness and more cultural weight. *V for Vendetta* (1982) appeals to literature as a politically radical alternative to the oppression of a fascist government that rose to power in England after a small nuclear exchange. The literary provides not only a reminder of a democratic past, but enables the anarchic characters in the novel to retain portions of their humanity. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2002) includes characters from nineteenth-century British adventure novels including: Alan Quartermain, the Invisible Man, Captain Nemo, Mina Harker from *Dracula*, and Mr. Hyde. Literary settings and events are reinterpreted to show the politics of imperialist Britain. For example, the mysterious bacterial infection that stopped the Martians from invading in the climax to H.G. Wells’s novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) is explained in the second volume of *League* as a biological weapon designed by Dr. Moreau (another Wells character) and deployed in South London. The government is shown caring little for the thousands of poor people eliminated with the biological agent, and the League dissolves in the controversy. Literature provides Moore with a palate for his serial stories, yet his comics also reveal an anxiety surrounding their status as a literary form.⁹

The category of literature is particularly important to *From Hell*, a comic that uses literary allusion, quotation, and history to argue for the literary possibilities of the comic book. The footnotes, in particular, reveal Moore’s struggle with historical verisimilitude and realism. He admits as much in an interview with Dave Sim in which he calls the footnotes and their self-deprecating tone “a gruff apology for having done such a fucking sloppy and unprofessional job.

⁹ See Josh Heuman and Richard Burt’s “Suggested for Mature Readers?: Deconstructing Shakespearean Value in Comic Books” for a discussion of a similar anxiety over the sophistication of comic books.

[...] And the fact that something hasn't been done in comics before is really no excuse for doing a sloppy job" (310). The footnotes act as commentary on Moore's anxiety over accuracy and chart his struggle to construct a realist literary epic. These anxieties over literary reputability are hardly Moore's alone. Comics are seen as a marginalized form, a reality that is reflected in many academic accounts of comic books arguing for their status as acceptable objects for literary criticism.¹⁰ Charles Hatfield's *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* appeals to the countercultural roots of independent and alternative comics as evidence of their literary appeal. Rocco Versaci's *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* has an entire chapter, subtitled "Comics vs. 'Real' Literature," focusing on the way comics transform the category of literature by causing readers to "look beyond labels," while reinforcing the definition of literature as embodying "art that brings new understanding and insight" (189). The apologetic tone of Moore, Hatfield, and Versaci suggest that—for comic books—literature is the standard by which comics aspire to gain acceptance, yet literature is also what must be surpassed in order for comics to be considered a worthy object of analysis.

From Hell's depiction of the dead articulates this literary complex by aligning literature with a mystic past figured as an unreachable ideal, which is nevertheless being devoured by the emerging technologies of mass media. The figure of the dead body in the comic serves to

¹⁰ See Donald Ault's "In the Trenches, Taking the Heat: Confessions of a Comics Professor," for a personal history of the difficulties incorporating comic studies into English curriculum. See especially, his conjunction of Carl Barks and William Blake in teach-ins at Bearkley in the late 60s:

Voluntary 'teach-ins' by faculty had become a staple of campus life, and there was a great demand for me to lead sessions on William Blake, who was predictably seen as a prophet of radical political activism, mystical vision, and psychedelic consciousness (rumor had it that Blake's body automatically produced LSD). It was in the context of this social turbulence when normal academic activities began to break down that I seized the opportunity and began to incorporate *Donald Duck* comics (which I considered to be every bit as radical as Blake's works) into my teach-ins. (242)

allegorize the place of literature and mysticism both as sources of mystery and objects of trash. *From Hell*'s beginning and ending scenes, which focus on the carcass of a dead bird, suggest a vacillation between mystical veneration and spectacle. In the prologue, the dead bird occupies the entire first panel. Its shape sprawls across the width of the page (Figure 2-1).

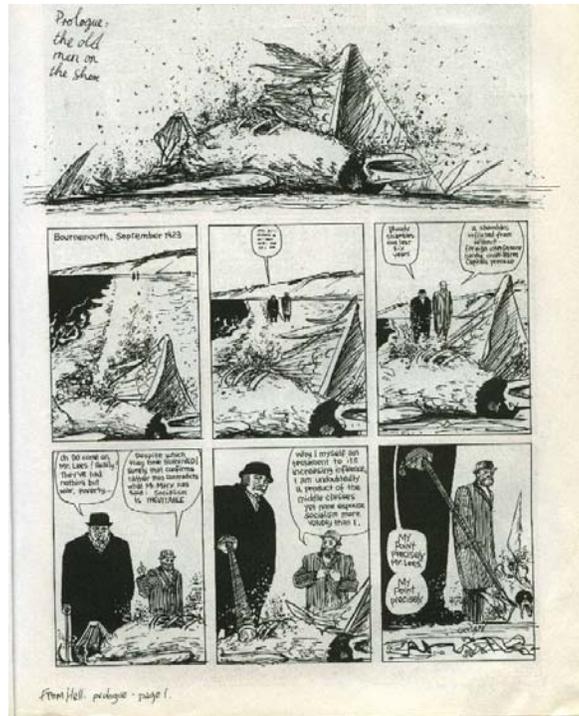


Figure 2-1. The dead bird (Pro:1). *From Hell* © Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell. Reprinted with permission.

Artist Eddie Campbell's harsh and rough realism reveals even the most minute of details: the bones edging ever so slightly from the bird's breast, the open mouth welcoming the many flies and organisms feeding off its corpse, and the limp leg and wings curling ever so slightly and withering in the sun. Its form encompasses the foreground for most of the first page, acting as the audience's perspective, when two of the principal investigators of the Ripper murders—Inspector Abberline and Mr. Lees—approach from the background. The dead bird centers the audience's point of view in the first scene. From its place in the first several panels, close to the audience in

the extreme foreground of the images, the dead bird is central in forming our first impressions of a world in which the events encompassing the Ripper murders take place.

But it is also clear that the dead bird is completely accidental to the comic's narrative. Abberline only half consciously picks at the bird's carcass as he talks to Lees. He uses his cane to briefly pick at the dead body, then, to shove it aside as the two men continue on their walk. The carcass disappears entirely by the second page. Although we are made to identify completely with the bird on the first page, we see the wounds of its decomposition and can imagine being made uncomfortable by the stench and the stillness of the dead body. Campbell and Moore quickly move us from this image by treating the dead bird as trash to be thrown to the side and quickly forgotten. Once the panel penetrates the dead bird, and reveals that there is nothing to fascinate besides the revulsion tied to viewing dead bodies, the dead bird disappears completely. In this way, the dead bird sets up a tension that is carried throughout the comic and is tied to a fundamental shift in the attitude toward the dead. The dead are objects of mystical veneration in the eyes of characters like William Gull. To the majority of the characters, however, the dead act merely as inert objects tied to murder and spectacle. The dead body, as a locus of spectacle, loses its ties to the deep meaning of the mystic and is, instead, opened completely to reveal its now superficial recesses.

The dead bird shows up two other times in *From Hell*. The first is tied to William Gull's initiation ceremony in the second chapter. As Gull kneels to be sworn into the brotherhood, he states that, should he ever reveal the secrets of the Freemasons, his penalty would be "that my throat be cut across, my tongue torn out by the root, and that I be buried in sand a cable's length from the shore where the tide regularly flows twice in twenty four hours" (2:9).¹¹ Moore and

¹¹ Parenthetical citations to *From Hell* refer to chapter and page number respectively. This reflects the first collected edition's method of dividing the numbering among issues of the comic. If the reference is a footnote, I use the

Campbell then cut to the beach scene in the beginning, with the mangled bird carcass in the foreground and the aging Abberline and Lees fading into the background. The tide is about to come in, presumably to take away the dead bird into the sea. The epilogue portrays the bird once more, this time in a scene occurring directly before the image Gull has in his vision. As Abberline looks away, Lees picks up the dead bird, quickly inspects it, and then drops it onto the beach. The final shot shows the dead bird on the beach at dusk, its open mouth facing the ground, its decomposing wing jutting to the top of the panel, and its guts exposed to the night sky (Figure 2-2).

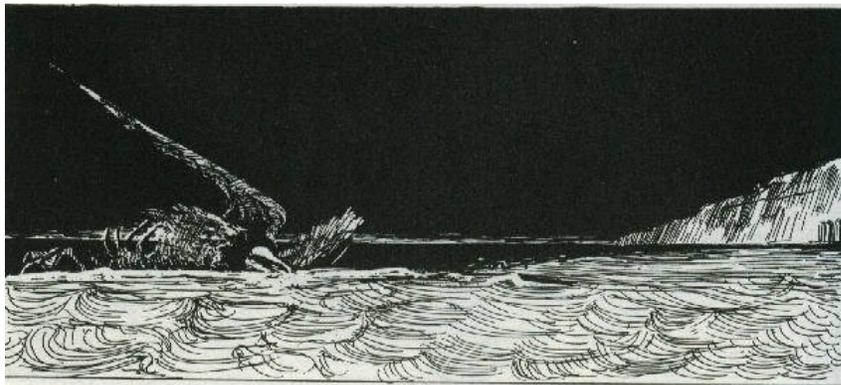


Figure 2-2. Dead Again (Ep:10). *From Hell* © Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell. Reprinted with permission.

Why William Gull sees a scene occurring after the final panel thirty years before the events occurring in the epilogue is not clear. Does he have a unique power to see the future, or does the dead bird exist as Gull's double? This question is not answered by the text. Yet the way Moore's comic links the dead body to both interpretive frames—that of a mystical or aesthetic object being closely inspected as meaningful and that of a piece of trash thrown to the side of the frame—suggests that the survival of the mystical tradition is tied to the veneration of objects as aesthetic or literary, and not the treatment of the dead corpse as a spectacle.

abbreviation "App1" to refer to appendix 1. If the reference is either the prologue or the epilogue, I use the abbreviations "Pro" and "Ep" respectively.

Alan Moore treats his massive meditation on the Ripper murders as an autopsy. He fantasizes on the back cover about “cutting into and examining the still-warm corpse of history itself.” And, on the epigraph page of the prologue, he links autopsy to the “[d]issection and examination of a dead body to determine the cause of death,” “[a]n eye witness observation,” and “[a]ny critical analysis.” He notes, perhaps more provocatively, that autopsy comes “from the Greek *autos*, self+*opsis*, sight,” suggesting autopsy to be “the act of seeing with one’s own eyes.” Embodied in Moore’s autopsy meditation is a larger discourse spanning vision, mutilation, and the use of the dead body in constructing knowledge of the past. Barish Ali suggests as much when he argues that the word autopsy connects the Ripper slayings to the larger and perhaps more culturally acceptable world where authors and critics alike do violence by dissecting history (613-14). Moore’s story suggests a haunted relationship between the writer and the murderer: by entering the discourse of history, both do damage to the body and consequently the lives of their subjects. Further, by connecting the killer with the writer, Moore suggests that it is the autopsy and the analysis (or even more starkly writing itself) that constitutes death as an event.

As writing constitutes death, the act of analysis in *From Hell* kills and dismembers the literary author. Literary figures in the text are portrayed as ruined; their bodies literally become ruins. Blake’s appearances occur only at his graveside or in hallucinatory visions about the past. The literary figure is made, in Moore and Campbell’s narrative, into a dead figure who is seen in mystical visions. W. B. Yeats’s appearance is also tied to his death, although this death occurs several years after the events of the comic. In issue 9, William Gull chides Yeats and his Order of the Golden Dawn during a visit at the British Library, where the poet was studying Blake.

Gull tells Yeats that his bones “shall never rest easy” (9:15). In a footnote, Moore suggests that Gull’s words are prophetic:

Yeats died in France and was interred at an ossuary, where his bones are stored according to the type of bone in question rather than according to whom they originally belonged to, so that there will be a room of skulls, a room of femurs and so on. Imagine the embarrassment of the French authorities, then, when Yeats’s family requested that his remains be returned to Ireland, the land of his birth. A skeleton was hurriedly assembled and shipped to Ireland for burial with honors, but it was, in all likelihood, a frankensteinian effort composed from a dozen separate donors. (App1:31)

The encounter with Gull foreshadows Yeats’s literal dismemberment. His body is torn apart, analyzed and catalogued for the purpose of study. This footnote underscores the status of the literary in Moore and Campbell’s comic. Literature is held together by veneration: a knowledge that respects the unity and mystery of its object. Spectacle tears the body apart; it studies distinct portions and discards the rest.

The representation of William Blake in Moore’s text underscores the competition between veneration and spectacle. In *From Hell*, Blake is treated as a symbol of an older way of thinking, one that prizes vision above logic and imagination above reason. Blake is first mentioned in the fourth chapter of *From Hell*, when William Gull, and his driver Netley, tour London architectural sites. Gull mentions that Blake saw visions of Old Testament prophets. Netley responds that such experiences “sound [...] barny” (4:11). To which Gull responds:

Possibly. And yet, as Alexander Gilchrist, Blake’s biographer, suggests, ‘Tis but comparatively recently that seeing visions would call into question a person’s sanity. [...] In Gilchrist’s words, Blake spiritually belonged to earlier ages of the world, since when, as Hazlitt has remarked, ‘the heavens have done further off.’ Our lunatics were prophets once, and had a prophet power. Never forget that, Netley. (4:11)

Blake belongs to a past whose values and power have faded and acts, in this scene, as a figure of mourning and a symbol of what had once been possible. He represents a mystical golden age, where symbols and language were not necessary to elevate the individual to an ecstatic or mystical state. Gull places emphasis on the directness of the mystical experience in ages past. He

notes that Roman diaries contained frequent references to visionary experiences. Charges surrounding Blake's lunacy only act as evidence that he serves as a transitional figure in Gull's history. Belonging to a world that has now passed into oblivion, Blake is treated as insane.

Blake's status as a figure of mourning is reinforced on the next page, where Gull shows Netley Blake's grave in Bunhill Fields. Gull points out the irony that Blake, a druid who was known for his hatred of the sun, is placed next to the grave of Daniel Defoe whose memorial includes an obelisk that is "styled upon stones consecrated to the Sun God Atum, raised at Heliopolis in ancient Egypt" (4:12). He cackles at the fact that Defoe's grave casts a shadow on Blake's at dusk, suggesting that the shadow of the sun will forever chain the poet's insanity to the gravestone.

Gull's suggestion here implicates Blake in a larger occult history surrounding the struggle between imagination and reason. In an earlier portion of the chapter, Gull argues that the earliest symbols were used by men to understand the mysteries of birth, and consequently to rebel against matriarchal forms of rule. The origin of written language, for Gull, sought to use reason for enlightenment rather than dwell on the mysteries of life. The creation of the symbol appropriates the remains of the dead to control and discipline the living. Gull mentions the transformation of the Goddess Tiamat from a mere chimera into a demon, and the replacement of the Goddess Diana with the masculine deity Herne. Symbols empowered magicians to restrict the mysteries of women, signify their power with reason, and replace their deities with masculine Gods of the sun.

The politics surrounding the dead William Blake works in much the same manner. The act of being eclipsed by Defoe's grave both chains Blake's mysterious power to the earth and symbolizes him in order to be placed into a narrative of the past. Moore's footnotes exacerbate

this process by explaining visionary experiences with history and biology. Citing Roman military logs, Moore recounts a story where a column of troops follow the god Pan across a river that was earlier seen by the group to be too deep to cross. Moore suggests that such a vision was the effect of a brain whose corpus callosum (“the strand of neural gristle that connects the twin lobes of the brain”) was not as developed as it is today (App1:12). The vision of Pan is explained away by Moore as an unconscious projection of a mind that was too primitive to work out the crossing of a river without plugging in ancient deities. As an explanatory device, Moore’s footnotes place Blake firmly into the past and suggest a physiological source for the visionary experiences he recounts in his poetry:

Since from all available evidence it would appear that such visions were more common in ancient times than they are today, it seemed fitting that I should connect this with Gilchrist’s comments that Blake saw visions because he “spiritually belonged to [an] earlier age of the world,” the implication being that those we call prophets or visionaries simply have a different relationship with their subconscious mind to that enjoyed by the great majority. (App 1:12)

It would seem odd that Alan Moore, a self-described magician, would go to such lengths to place Blake’s visions in a medical context. Yet the work performed by *From Hell* to understand Blake’s mysticism is hardly different from the transformation of the memory of literary figures into symbols that can be appropriated into a larger historical narrative of domination. Much like the dead bird at the beginning, Blake’s memory is appropriated by the comic as a site of extraction: his poems are used as archival evidence of a different way of looking at the world. Blake’s memory is also tied to the replacement of mystical sympathy with historical realism. Since Moore places Blake’s mysticism in the past, Moore can distance himself from a deep connection with Blake’s insanity while at the same time claiming to adopt a realist understanding of the world.

Moore is involved in a series of intellectual dances that at one point move closer to a communion with the dead, and at another point move away from the dead. In the issue where Gull kills and mutilates Marie Kelly, Moore spends 34 pages investigating every detail. We are shown Gull's mutilation of the victim's face, his deep cuts made to her abdomen, the extraction of bodily organs, and the scalding of her heart in the fireside kettle. Gull takes the burnt heart, crushes it in his handkerchief, and scatters the ashes to the winds. On two facing pages, Gull's murderous reverie is focalized on the smallest details of the victim's body. Campbell's sketchy style is replaced with clear lines and dark contrasts suggesting photorealistic microscopic shots of the body. His illustrations zoom in on Gull's knife as it cuts into the victim's corpse, focusing first on the knife, then on the bit of flesh being cut by the knife, then on the blood vessels on the side of the flesh, and then into the structures of these blood vessels (Figure 2-3).

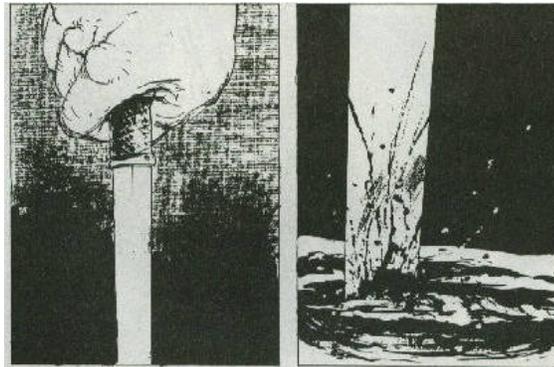


Figure 2-3. Cutting into the Sublime. (10:11). *From Hell* © Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell. Reprinted with permission.

Finally, Campbell shows us the inside of one of the blood vessels as a huge underground cavern, blood settled at the bottom (Figure 2-4). The close-ups of the organs in these panels are so extreme that they seem to become geological spaces. The intensity of seeing the body reveal its secrets leads only to further secrets, suggesting that the serial killer cuts into what could be called the “arterial sublime.” The body, in the hands of the visionary killer, becomes pure

physicality. Campbell's close ups then proceed to the blood itself, then cuts to a close up of Gull's eye and back to Gull standing in front of his mutilated corpse.

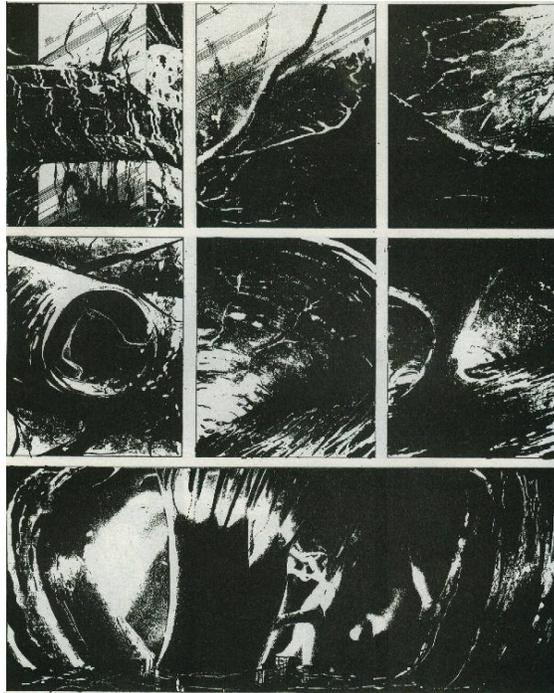


Figure 2-4. The Body as Cavern (10:12). *From Hell* © Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell.
Reprinted with permission.

Lisa Coppin has suggested that these scenes pull Gull optically into the uncanny nature of vision by overloading the eye with an “excess of information.” The intensity of Gull’s dissections, in other words, leads both the reader and the killer into the same uncanny experience where seeing visions of the future and the past is possible. While Moore seems interested in using the body as a nexus of sublimity and the uncanny, he also backs away from the very visions he depicts. In a footnote to the final murder scene, Moore cites Stan Brakhage’s short movie *The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes*—a particularly graphic film detailing three autopsies. Moore notes that seeing Brakhage’s film produces an initial revulsion that “soon gave way to a kind of fascinated awe at the magnificence and intricacy of our inner workings” (App1:35). Moore’s viewing of the film translates the body into a site for revelation, a space where revulsion opens up to the

visionary state of awe. Yet when discussing his theory that Gull was motivated by a similar awe of the body when dissecting his victims, Moore pulls away from identifying too closely with the murderer. He suggests, quite rightly, that no one can really know what happened in the room during the murder of Marie Kelly but that:

it seems to me that, at least on the level of the killer's emotional reality, some kind of an Apocalypse transpired. Human experience went to the very edge, there in that sordid little flat, then stepped beyond. The depiction here is as close as I can get to the portrayal of what might have happened on that night. In that room. In that mind. To be absolutely honest, it's as close as I want to get. (App1:35)

Depth and intimacy figure here as limit points for what Moore calls "human experience." On the one hand, depth can transform the shape of human experience by overloading the senses. On the other hand, too much depth can lead to apocalypse, annihilation, insanity, and perhaps even death itself. It is Gull's pursuit of depth that leads him to murder and dissect his victims. Autopsy and analysis lead to sublimity, for Moore and Campbell, but might also lead to murder.

Moore distances himself from death and the more terrifying aspects of mystical depth by medicalizing Blake's visionary experiences and by separating himself off from the apocalypse occurring in Marie Kelly's bedroom. Moore wants neither the mystical insanity of William Gull nor the soulless rationalism of the twentieth century. During his mutilation of the final victim, Gull is transported to the contemporary office building. He sees disinterested workers plodding away at their computers. He calls the sight "dazzle, but not yet divinity," suggesting that modernity is "an apocalypse of cockatoos [...] Morose, barbaric children playing joylessly with their unfathomable toys" (10:21). He then turns and embraces the mutilated body of his final victim. Gull suggests that he saved the body from annihilation: "I have made you safe from time and we are wed in legend, inextricable within eternity" (10:21). In this moment, it becomes clear that Moore at least half-identifies with both Blake and Gull, without identifying too closely with either of them. The office building, with its emphasis on the management of the workday and the

alienation of lifeless employees, is seen as the alternative to Gull and Blake's connection with tradition and meaning.

Moore's difficulty in completely identifying with either Blake or Gull stems from a common problem plaguing the profiling of serial killers and their crimes. I'd like to take a short detour through the relationship between Blake and the serial killer before showing how this relationship impacts *From Hell*. As Mark Seltzer argues, the emergence of the serial killer parallels the domination of modern forms of identification and the rise of the mass media in the late nineteenth century. The serial killer is the product of the pathologization of murder, the historical shift from considering killing an act to attempting to understand the essential characteristics that make up the killer. Seltzer sees the serial killer as a subject "flooded by the social and its collective fantasies," as copycats evacuated of interiority and made to become that which they perceive (128). Popular representations of serial killing characterize profilers, on the other hand, as those who empathize with killers and are consequently in danger of becoming killers themselves.

Brett Ratner's movie version of Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon* (2002), for example, features Edward Norton playing Will Graham, an FBI agent working to arrest Francis Dolorhyde. Dolorhyde is a serial killer who has tattooed a portion of William Blake's *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun* on his back and believes that he is slowly becoming the dragon. Graham, meanwhile, is portrayed using intuition to track his killer. He visits the local University library where he views a copy of Blake's illuminated poetry to study up. The literary mystic who closely identifies with the characters in Blake's poetry is set against the literary forensic who must track the killer using Blake's artifacts. Graham also visits Hannibal Lecter: a fellow serial killer who enjoys psychologically tormenting profilers who

come to him asking for advice. The scenes with Graham and Lecter revolve around their similarities. Lecter is a killer, but he is also a former physician and an intellectual on par with Graham. The profiler and the psychotic are doubles, separated only by the latter's penchant for killing. The danger that the profiler could become the serial killer is always acute, with Graham consistently attempting to place boundaries between himself and Lecter. In the novel version of Harris's *Hannibal* (2000), that distinction is severed completely as Clarice Starling (Graham's replacement) is shown being seduced, brainwashed, and made into a cannibal by Lecter. The novel ends with Starling leaving the FBI and following Lecter around the world. Harris's novels and films portray the serial killer as a figure who threatens to possess the innocent public with murderous desires. Could it be that, for Moore, merely displaying the inner apocalypses of William Gull and the prophetic visions of William Blake could cause the comic book author to become a mystic and a killer?

A chain of referents contests the distinction between serial killing and Blake, threatening to collapse one in on the other. Academics and comic artists alike attempt to reinscribe and manage those distinctions, feeling a similar threat: to align Blake with the serial killer would truly unveil literary mysticism as a discourse leading potentially to murder. Jason Whittaker, for instance, suggests that Gull seeks Blake as a "druidic master," and that his murders are a horrible misinterpretation of Blake's true visionary power (202-3). Seltzer, himself, points out several instances of Blake's appearance in serial killer narratives, among them the Harris novels and Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995), but does not note their consequence to our understanding of mystical revelation and its ties to literature and the mass media. He recounts an episode in which Robert Ressler, the FBI agent who coined the term "serial killer" and who is the archetype for Harris's profiler in *The Silence of the Lambs*, writes a non-fiction book on the development of

the FBI's Behavior Science Unit (BSU). The frontispiece of Ressler's book reproduces Blake's Red Dragon print. William Blake's place in this anecdote is telling. The Romantic poet, filled with visions of another world, serves not only as a template for the serial killer, but also the poet's artwork is made emblematic for serial killing in general.

Dead Man, likewise, uses Blake as a template for serial killing. In the film, a Cleveland banker named William Blake becomes a serial killer after meeting a Native American who believes he is the reincarnation of the British poet and prophesizes that his new poetry will consist in the killing of Europeans. William Blake, in Jarmusch's film, is played by Johnny Depp who acts in a number of roles as the typical Romantic author flirting with annihilation. In *Don Juan DeMarco* (1995), Depp plays the titular character of Byron's narrative poem. *The Libertine* (2004), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), and *Sweeney Todd* (2007) all feature Depp as either an iconoclastic writer verging on insanity and drug addiction or as a serial killer. And, in the film version of Moore and Campbell's *From Hell* (2001), Depp stars as Inspector Abberline.

Depp's *From Hell*, however, transforms Abberline from the fat, working class, and mostly inept character in Moore's comic into a slim, sexy, psychic detective who achieves visions with the help of laudanum. Depp's character matches the grim world of Gull's insanity with his own opium-induced explorations of the borders of consciousness. Abberline dies soon after the last murder from a drug overdose, an event that reflects neither the Moore and Campbell's comic nor the historical reality of Abberline's life. While references to William Blake are removed entirely from the film version of *From Hell* and replaced with half-hearted allusions to Shakespeare, Depp's performance retains a trace of the interconnections between the Romantic poet, Blake, and the serial killer that suggests all are copycats of one another.¹²

¹² Tom Cohen makes a distinction between the detective and the serial killer when he analyzes the film *From Hell*'s citation of Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1927). In the epilogue to the first volume of *Hitchcock's Cryptonomies*, Cohen

Perhaps this is what lies behind Moore's reluctance to fully embrace either the mystic Blake or the serial killer. The discourse of symbolism and imagination has been so thoroughly pathologized in the discourse surrounding the serial killer that it threatens to turn the good mystic poet, William Blake, into the bad ritualistic killer William Gull. The threat of possession by the serial killer characterizes the final confrontation between Blake and Gull and also forces Moore and Campbell to distinguish between Blake and Gull. They do so by putting Blake in the role of a police detective, who can stop Gull from infecting the twentieth century with his madness. *From Hell's* fourteenth chapter, titled "Gull ascending," chronicles the serial killer's dissemination into the fabric of the twentieth century. Moore's overarching thesis in *From Hell* theorizes the Ripper murders as giving birth to the twentieth century: in terms of its fascination with murder and genocide, the rise of the serial killer as celebrity, and the spread of media technologies to document every facet of the public fascination with murder. In one scene, Gull is shown possessing a rain of blood that plagued Mediterranean fishing boats in the summer of 1888, the same summer as the murders. While falling on the astonished fishers, Gull muses on a poem read to him by his father when he was young. After laboring for years, God showed a dying scientist his final reward: "[t]he universe and all of space and time were his laboratory, wherein to be about his work, his measurements and tests" (14:7). Gull, who is made omnipresent by his murders that are seen as a sacrifice to the Freemason God, is given all of space and time and becomes "an invisible curve, rising through the centuries" (14:9).

Gull materializes only to certain people in the final chapter. Netley, for instance, sees Gull's face in 1903 before dying at the Clarence Gate of Regent's Park. Robert Louis Stevenson

identifies the doubling occurring between the mutilation of the Ripper victims and their dehumanization by cinema and photography in the 20th century. He suggests that there are two sides to cinema: one that serves the state by creating technologies of identification and one which shifts to alternative modes of sensing and being. The visionary aspects of cinema are distinguished from those that identify, catalogue and chart the body. Yet, Cohen also finds Depp's Abberline the nexus of these two cinemas: as a detective who is addicted to his cinematic visions.

sees Gull in a nightmare that inspired the writing of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Ian Brady, the Scottish serial killer responsible for the Moors Murders of the 60s, is shown seeing Gull's head as a child. While Gull is invisible to most of the public, he is visible to those who can perceive the invisible: the artist and the killer. Gull appears to Blake twice in the chapter. The first time, Blake is shown in his Lambeth home while Moore and Campbell depict Gull's hands growing scaly—like a lizard or a dragon. Gull is astonished by the fact that Blake can see him. But, after Blake notices Gull's hands, he exclaims, “Am I now but a thing of mind, and coloured by the minds that view me?” (14:10). His interiority vanishes completely. Gull embodies the perceptions of others and is made “wholly concept” (14:10). The serial killer abandons all interiority and is given over to a ghostly exteriority.

The second time Blake sees Gull occurs soon after, during a visit by John Varley. Blake recounts his earlier experiences, notices Gull, and decides to draw his form. The sketch, according to Moore, becomes Blake's famous *Ghost of a Flea*. Eddie Campbell reproduces Blake's painting in minute detail (Figure 2-5).

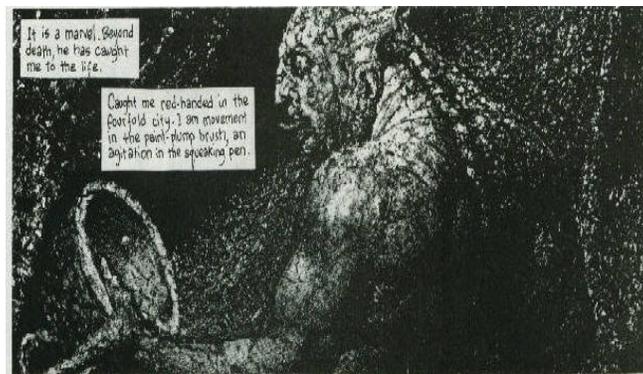


Figure 2-5. Eddie Campbell's *Ghost of a Flea* (14:17). *From Hell* © Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell. Reprinted with permission.

Both Blake and Gull use a discourse of capture when discussing Blake's visionary representation of the serial killer as a flea. Blake says “Almost. I think I almost have him” (14:16). And Gull replies in his ghostly monologue, “[i]t is a marvel. Beyond death he has caught me to the life.

Caught me red-handed in the fourfold city. I am movement in the paint-plump brush, an agitation in the squeaking pen” (14:17). By placing the discourse surrounding representation and vision into the larger language that focuses on capturing, having, and catching, Moore and Campbell figure Blake as Gull’s afterlife profiler. They reinscribe the difference between the good mystic (Blake) and the bad mystic (Gull). The good mystic provides Moore and Campbell an access to meaning, visions, and art. The bad mystic infects the world with murderous thoughts and searches for the sublime in the death of victims. Blake’s work, as the product of the good mystic, becomes the disciplinary tool to catch and reveal the monstrosity of the serial killer. Just as Eddie Campbell has “captured” Blake’s painting reproducing it almost exactly (albeit in black and white), Blake has used his visionary capabilities to incarcerate Gull in his visionary work. Blake, mocked by Gull as “England’s greatest holy Fool,” is made to displace the anxiety over the murderous possibilities of Gull’s mysticism by capturing and identifying the bad mystic.

Blake’s literary persona ends up managing the boundary between the good mystical poet and the bad mystical killer. Blake is made to control the murderous subject by identifying Gull and sketching a visionary picture of the killer’s face. The mystical literary tradition embodied by Blake in Moore and Campbell’s comic is valorized above both the soulless tradition of spectacle and the dark personality of the serial killer. Literature shifts with Blake in Moore’s comic from being a discourse associated with a mystical meaning to one almost in league with the serial killer to a power capable of containing and managing Gull’s more radical, magical purposes. Despite Moore’s anger toward media spectacle and the management of the office building, he ends up using William Blake to capture Gull’s ghost and keep the enthusiasm of the bad mystic from infecting the twentieth century. In the hands of Alan Moore, the mystic is made into the

manager, and Blake polices the boundaries between the mysticism associated with artistic invention and the mysticism associated with serial killing.

Spectacular Death

I have argued that Blake's death has fixed the poet in a discourse of management: between the conflicting disciplines of the English Department and between the poetry of the good mystic and the serial killing of the bad mystic. For Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell, Blake polices a boundary between the close reading of mystical symbols and media spectacle. Academic scholars, however, have also used William Blake's work to create a pathway for the acceptance of New Media in English Departments and have suggested that close reading is enabled by the electronic dissemination of texts. In what follows, I would like to see how New Media critics attend to the material characteristics of Blake's texts and what it means for the disciplinary subjectivity of William Blake. The online *William Blake Archive* creates a media driven space for the close reading of Blake's illuminated manuscripts. N. Katherine Hayles notes that the attention to each copy and its material particularities simulates the experience of going to numerous libraries across the globe and viewing the originals (264). William Blake, with the help of the Archive, can be made more popular than ever before, and critics are now able to read his texts with unprecedented levels of access and accuracy.

But what does close reading mean in this context? And, perhaps more importantly, what is the object of close reading? Hayles suggests that the Archive's very existence dramatically transforms the notion of what constitutes the material text into a medium specific enterprise. What determines a "close reading" now changes based on the medium we use to view the literary object. Yet other scholars aren't so sure. J. Hillis-Miller ends his essay on "Digital Blake" with ambivalence. He suggests that Blake's belief in the power of poetry cannot be detached from the material texts that embody his prophecies; yet he also argues that the digitalization of Blake's

work embodies what he—after Werner Hamacher and Walter Benjamin—call “pure mediacy.” Blake’s mediacy, for Miller, extends the power of his work beyond its manifestation in the medium of the illuminated manuscript and even beyond the “performative ego of the poet.”

The question of the literary archive, according to Miller, is a question of death. And it is in this sense of the death of Blake that we should consider the preservation of his work. It would not be hard to extend Miller’s “Digital Blake” and imagine the digitalization of the Blakean body in some strange science fiction future: every inch of his face catalogued: his brain weighed, his relative blood pressure recorded, and his weight and height documented. Blake could, perhaps, be manifested in flesh simulated to match his skin tone, with eyes that held his visions, and a mouth that would utter them. Even recreating Blake in this way would be, in Hayles’s terms, a translation and an interruption. What would we be digitalizing or archiving but pure mediacy? What ruined rough beast would materialize in front of us?

Miller’s and Hayles’s emphasis on mediacy could perhaps be better stated, or translated, as management. As the identity of William Blake becomes disciplinary, his materiality refers to that blank space upon which academics can project their ideological fantasies and anxieties. These fantasies in Blake criticism are often interdisciplinary in nature, focusing on Blake’s relevance to the schools of thought that appropriate them for their ends. If digitalizing Blake could reproduce him in front of us as a physical being, would it be long before multiple Blakes are born: one for a march on Washington in favor of gay marriage, another to conduct psychological assessments in a clinical practice, and yet another to unionize graduate students? Literature and mass media, in this example, combine to create a circuit of mourning and exhilaration that manage academic thought and action. The machine can create a William Blake for everyone, but the content of these Blakes are still mediated by the memory of a single figure named William Blake and the

subjectivities articulated to the academic by the disciplinary market. Everyone has their Blakean institutional profile, composed of the ruins the academic continues to mourn.

CHAPTER 3
BYRON'S CORPSE: ACADEMIC NECROPHILIA AND J. M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

Cultural critics hold the figure of Byron in an ambivalent mixture of admiration and condemnation. He is seen by some as a radical iconoclastic activist whose poetry critiques nationalism, and whose personality forms a dramatic contrast to the facile morality of bourgeois England.¹³ Others find his “Oriental Tales” central in the nineteenth-century expansion of the British Empire, his political stances ineffectual, and his private life a testament to misogyny.¹⁴ Byron's identity as political radical, sexual deviant, and cosmopolitan idealist reflects many of the contradictions that define the political and social ideals held by critics wishing to use literary studies to critique culture and affect political change. Byron's ambivalent place in cultural studies is, therefore, symptomatic of the contradictory role of English Departments released from their institutional role as purveyors of culture. As critics of ideology and culture, academics share Byron's dedication to democratic and cosmopolitan ideals. As teachers holding onto survey courses corresponding, more or less, to the established canon, Romantic scholars search for a reason to continue to teach Byron's poetry.

As a critic of the postcolonial academy, J. M. Coetzee's depiction of the academic embodies a similar contradiction. Coetzee's academic is an adolescent relic of European imperialism. His portrayals of academia simultaneously critique the narcissistic political aims of cultural critics and the aesthetic fantasies of older professors. In *Elizabeth Costello* (2004) an

¹³ See, for example, Jonathan David Gross's argument that Byron's “cosmopolitanism is a type of internationalism” that expressed “liberalism by actively persuing both erotic and political freedom” (4;8).

¹⁴ See Saree Makdisi's *Romantic Imperialism* which characterizes Byron's *Childe Harold* as an “imaginary map of [...] contemporary Oriental space” (126). See also Malcom Miles Kelsall's *Byron's Politics*, where he argues that Byron “achieved nothing for reform, and was the determined opponent of the very radical forces who selectively misread his poetry to support their cause. The life of Byron is of no political significance” (2). For an account of Byron's early misogyny, see McGann's “‘My brain is feminine’: Byron and the Poetry of Deception,” which charts his early poetry enacting a misogynistic inversion of poetic sentimentalism by portraying women constantly breaking the contract of love in *Childe Harold*.

aging novelist who, is bombarded with the political ambitions of literary critics discussing her work, refuses to give an account of what her art does. The final chapter takes place in a purgatory afterlife. This afterlife is taken and parodied from Kafka's "Before the Law," where Costello's assertion that writers have no beliefs keeps her from passing the gates into the beyond. Coetzee's literary writer wastes away in the middle space between two worlds; her refusal to subscribe to a particular ideology holds her in a nihilistic border-town mocking her ideals. The academic in Coetzee's novels fares no better. *Age of Iron* (1998) contrasts the insurrections occurring in the late 1980s against apartheid with an aging classics professor dying of cancer. Political progress happens in the corpse of the dying academic past, and Coetzee suggests that the only way to move into the future is to abandon the smoldering ruins of literature. The academic is unable to do this and is depicted holding on compulsively to literary fetters and figures from the past.

Coetzee's academic addresses an institutional symptom of the English Department whose pathology directly reflects the Romantic obsession with literary celebrity. The figure of Byron is perhaps the best example of this obsession; his afterlife, embodied in the literary tradition secured by its institutionalization in the English Department, promises intimacy with cultural authenticity after death. For the scholar, literary intimacy takes the form of what I call academic necrophilia: a tendency on the part of literary academics to approach the corporate institutionalization of literary studies by claiming intimacy with dead literary celebrities. To explore academic necrophilia, I first turn to accounts of viewing Byron's corpse to illustrate the tension between claiming intimacy with the literary celebrity and the separation of the community from the corpse. A series of accounts of Byron's corpse show the complex play of intimacy and alienation toward the material actuality of the celebrity corpse. I then turn to J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999) and the main character's obsession with Byron to investigate

the incorporation of the literary celebrity in the body of the academic-fan. Coetzee's character patterns his life after Byron and, in a rite of aesthetic resurrection, attempts to recreate him in fiction and in his classes.

The claim to intimacy made by literary scholars (whether achieved through a performative recreation of the celebrity's meaning in the environment of the literature classroom, or the reconstruction of her life by writing historical criticism aimed at mimetically recreating the historical environment of the author) depends upon establishing a closeness to death and the corpse. I combine attention to the historical construction of the celebrity corpse during the Romantic period with an awareness of how academics, living off of the celebrity corpse, transform the meaning of celebrity to buttress their academic identity.

Intimate Relations with Byron's Corpse

Byron's death enacted a crisis in European Romantic celebrity culture. As a celebrity, Byron captured the whole of Europe by performing the figure of the cosmopolitan aristocrat engaged in international adventures. In this sense, "Byron" signified much more than a writer of books. His life transformed the category of Romantic authorship into a figure whose work signified an essential personality. When Byron died, his fans attempted to use his body and his literary remains to reconstruct that essential personality to make Byron appear—lively and authentic—in their imagination. I argue that the desire on the part of fans to reconstruct Byron's life through his remains, both literal and literary, reflected their necrophilic attachment to the intimacy his celebrity promised. Byron's corpus, in other words, reconstructed the corpse as a site of libidinal attachment.

As Tom Mole has argued, Byron's Romantic Celebrity played off of the intimacy many fans felt when reading his poetry. Much of Byron's poetry was designed to provide the sense that his readers were entering the private thoughts of a unique mind, capable of traveling beyond the

British Isles and transgressing the economic and social limitations of his middle and upper class readers. The inspiration of a sense of intimacy led to a series of reading practices meant to supplement the physical absence of the poet, including

buying and looking at portraits of Byron, or illustrations in which the Byronic hero was represented as the poet, soliciting introductions to Byron, writing to him, dressing in Byronic fashion, reading newspapers, cartoons or reviews, and falling in love, either with the noble lord or violently, passionately and hopelessly, as his characters were wont to do. (Mole 25)

Both acquiring various artifacts of Byron's personality and imitating that personality gave readers the impression that they had a personal secret—kept from everyone else—that was key to the inner life of the celebrity. Andrew Elfenbein demonstrates this effect when he argues that Byron's poems were marketed as “more than poems [offering] an invisible commodity lying beneath more tangible ones,” focused around the personality of Byron himself (49). The desire, on the part of readers, to keep reading Byron was directly related to their belief that continuing to read would give a better understanding of the poet's soul and would allow them to act as if they knew Byron in life.

The market personality Byron developed during his life also helped preserve his celebrity after death. Byron's posthumous reception, in particular, attempted to use the promise of intimacy to overcome the alienation of the nineteenth century community from the corpse. As Thomas Lacquer argues, the newfound attention to public health in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was due, in part, to a transformation in the attitude toward the dead. During the Middle Ages cemeteries were generally kept alongside churches, and the dead were seen as part of the living religious community. The smell of dead bodies acted as a sign of the perfection of the afterlife and the corruption of earthly existence. As the amount of dead individuals threatened to overwhelm these small cemeteries, Lacquer recounts, health officials began to complain about the danger of rotting bodies to the public health and suggested moving cemeteries away from

churches. The body, according to Lacquer, “no longer pointed to the next life or something transcendental but to a shortened life here on earth” (24). The corpse, and its smell, was divorced from a community that no longer wanted to be reminded of the short length of its life.

Cemeteries were made into an entirely separate sphere, and this separation haunted Romantic writers who now saw the immediate need to construct an afterlife in literature.¹⁵ The separation of the corpse from the community acted as an incentive for writers to create a celebrity persona that could outlast the life of the author. The literary afterlife, in other words, relieved anxieties surrounding the separation of the dead from the community imaginary.

Necrophilia emerges, in the same way, as a response to the death of the literary celebrity and the construction of a literary afterlife. *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first English use of the word in 1892 with the work of psychologist R. von Krafft-Ebing. Krafft-Ebbing notes, in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, that the sexual desire for the dead corpse “satisfies an abnormal desire, in that the object of desire is seen to be capable of absolute subjugation, without the possibility of resistance” (100). The necrophiliac takes pleasure in the fact that the desired sexual object cannot consent to the act. Krafft-Ebbing suggests that this attraction to passivity is part of a larger sadistic tendency delighting in the domination of other people. Less literal forms of necrophilia also engage an intimacy that does not depend upon consent. Necrophilia, as Dany Nobus suggests, is part of a reaction to the death of lovers and sovereigns. He further notes that and public interest in the condition peaked due to the popularity of gothic novels portraying

¹⁵ Lacquer quotes William Hazlitt to illustrate the newfound fear of dying. For Hazlitt, People walk along the streets the day of our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in manner to exist only for us. [...] But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more of us than it did in our lifetime” (qtd. in 168).

vampirism, grave robbing, and ghosts.¹⁶ The attachment to the corpse was a sign of pathological mourning, which used the remains of the dead as a physical connection to an intimacy that was now lost. For readers reacting to the death of their favorite author, the contest to determine who was the better fan continued on after death. As writers crafted a personality that could survive the death of their body to secure their memory within the community, readers became necrophiliacs in order to dominate that memory and perpetuate their intimacy with a life that was now absent.

I argue that necrophilia is an inseparable element of the reaction to Byron's death and the rise of literary celebrity in Britain in general. Reacting to the loss of one who signified authenticity and allowed the lower classes to participate imaginatively in an aristocratic life, readers of Byron's poetry found a need to reinforce all the literary qualities contributing to their intimacy with the poet. The desire for intimacy turned onto the corpse who, in the absence of Byron's living voice, became the repository for Byron's celebrity personality. Byron's body became the material battleground for the mourners who attempted to prove their proximity and intimacy to the literary celebrity by visiting his corpse and using their accounts of his physical remains to unveil the truth of his personality.

The process whereby Byron's relics came to stand for his authentic personality combines the fetishization of his body with the remnants surviving after his death. These relics became substitutes for the physicality of his body, and acted to keep his mourners in contact with the authenticity his personality signified. Ghislain McDayter has argued that, for his mourners in the nineteenth century and his contemporary critics, Byron's body "becomes the screen upon which we project our own fantasies, anxieties and desires," and is "the phantasmatic embodiment of our own desire" (133). Byron's body signifies a potency and an authenticity that reflects the desire of

¹⁶ See Nobus's article "Over my Dead Body: On the Histories and Cultures of Necrophilia" for the early research on necrophilia.

his audiences. McDayter suggests that accounts of Byron's corpse treat it like a fetish, where Byron's image as a figure of potency is a stand-in for the lack of potency in his audiences. I suggest that this logic of substitution is also linked to the problems of authenticity and intimacy. Byron's corpse is a substitution for a substitution, or a fetish for his fetishized potency. If his audience cannot have intimacy with a living poet, the desire for intimacy is then transferred to his poetry, his portraits, and any of the texts that are substitutes for his physical presence. Since this physical presence is already a screen for the desires of his audience, the remnant emerges as a trace of a desire that can never be fully embodied or realized. The contest for intimacy turns into a compulsive and pathological search for remnants of Byron's body that reflect the decaying remains of the audience's intimacy. This search reveals the desire for Byron, and the desire for the Romantic celebrity in general, to be fundamentally necrophilic.

The search for remains of the dead celebrity, from relics that touched the hand of Byron to publishing lost words from his diary, characterized this contest of necrophilic intimacy. Byron's funeral made the personal intimacy that each individual reader felt a public event comprised of mourners who all believed they knew the dead poet best. Alfred Tennyson claimed that on the day of Byron's death "the whole world seemed to be darkened for him" and carved "Byron is dead" on a rock (qtd. in H. Tennyson I; 4). Thomas Carlyle felt as if he had "lost a Brother" (III; 68). Everyone wanted to claim intimacy with the corpse. Many, in fact, wanted to see the corpse for themselves and offered to pay money for a brief glimpse of Byron's body. John Hobhouse's diary recounts a "young man" who "prayed hard to see the body," and after viewing it, the young man "took up a bit of the cotton in which it [Byron's body] has been wrapped and carefully put it in his pocket<book>" (July 5, 1824).¹⁷ The attention paid by the young man to recovering part of

¹⁷ Since Hobhouse's diaries are online, I have decided to cite individual entries with the date they were written. I cite the URL in the References section.

the burial shroud as a relic underlines the desire to reconstruct some semblance of the intense presence Byron conjured in his poetry. In all of these accounts, the death of a poetic figure whose personality was desired by readers across Britain caused these readers to assert ever more forcefully their claims to intimacy. Death brought Byron even closer to his readers than he had been in life.

Claims to intimacy with the dead Byron took on bizarre contours when people reported looking at the corpse and repeatedly focused on the state of decomposition. John Hobhouse, after refusing to view the body and claiming that he would have “dropped down dead” if he actually saw it, found himself “drawn by an irresistible inclination” to see his dead friend (July 6, 1824). After his first refusal, Hobhouse eventually decided to open Byron’s coffin and view the corpse. He notes, chillingly, that the corpse

did not bear the slightest resemblance to my dear friend. The mouth was distorted and half open, showing those teeth, in which, poor fellow, he once so prided himself, quite discoloured by the spirits. His upper lip was shaded with red mustachios which gave a totally new colour to his face, his cheeks were long and bagged over the jaw, his nose was quite prominent at the ridge, and sunk in between the eyes, perhaps from the extraction of the brain. His eyebrows shaggy and lowering. His forehead, marked with leech-marks probably, his eyelids closed and sunken – I presume the eyeballs having been removed when he was embalmed. His skin was like dull yellow parchment. So complete was the change that I was not affected as I thought I should be. It did not seem to be Byron. I was not moved so much scarcely as at the sight of his handwriting, or anything that I know to be his. (July 6, 1824)

The transformations made to Byron’s body as a result of the embalming process become, for Hobhouse, a corporeal commentary not only on his mourning, but also on the very lack of intimacy that he now intensely feels toward whatever is left of Byron. Hobhouse had traveled throughout Europe with Byron, was present at his wedding, and was the last person to see Byron after he left the British Isles in 1816. Now, he reinforces that intimacy by relating the bodily state of the decomposing corpse in extreme detail. He notes the ragged state of Byron’s teeth; the mustasche that Byron had grown in Greece, now quite unkept and probably even more

prominent from the gradual ebb of the dead skin from the hair follicles; the leech marks punctuating his face with blood; and the shrunken state of Byron's once full face. Byron's body had become zombie-like, a shriveled mockery of the beautiful face who adorned portraits in galleries across Britain. In fact, the horror Hobhouse expected to feel when he looked at his dead friend was completely absent. Byron did not resemble himself. He had become something else completely.

This lack of being moved on Hobhouse's part is a reaction to the desire of Byron's fans to preserve remnants from the poet's life. As Benita Eisler notes in her biography of Byron, "[r]elics of the living man acquired sacred properties. From the moment when locks of hair were snipped from the corpse, the organs packed separately, and his belongings docketed for appropriate distribution, any connection with Byron through his possessions acquired an unprecedented mystique" (753). Hobhouse rejects the mystical quality of the body in order to gain control of Byron's reputation from the popular imagination. Hobhouse saw himself entrusted with Byron's good name and memory, a mission he sometimes took to radical extremes. Mere minutes after hearing about Byron's death, Hobhouse decided to burn a good portion of Byron's memoirs, especially those sections he deemed indecent (May 14-15, 1824). These actions were much to the chagrin of Thomas Moore, who had been contracted by John Murray to write the first official biography of Byron. Hobhouse's account of seeing Byron's corpse is designed to establish his ultimate intimacy with the poet, to argue that he is entrusted with the meaning of Byron's memory, and to keep others from contesting his role as guardian.

Hobhouse's account begins the contest for control of the meaning of Byron, or quite literally the material afterlife of what Byron will come to mean for a Britain still coming to terms with his death. The contest over Byron's meaning centered on what the body signified. Without

Byron to sell his market personality to an audience, the audience was forced to connect with Byron in other ways. Hobhouse sees his intimacy with a living Byron passing on into death, and takes control of his memory as a way to keep Byron respectable. He can only make Byron respectable by convincing the public to efface the mystical qualities ascribed to Byron's body, and replace the mystique of the body with his commodified remains—his poetry, his letters, his portraits, and his possessions.

Hobhouse, of course, had little luck convincing the public to abandon their obsession with the celebrity corpse. Since Byron's poetry referred to Byron's personality, and Byron's personality was seen housed within Byron's body, Hobhouse's disinterested reaction to the corpse and his desire to remain fully in control of Byron's memory became quickly dwarfed by the sheer amount of mourners who wanted to be as close to the poet as possible. Byron's body was seen to be the only remnant to the fierce, aristocratic and poetic authenticity he signified. Even the containers that housed his body became relics. The October 19, 1825 edition of *The New York Times* reported that the "tube in which Byron's remains came home was exhibited by the captain of the Rodney for 2s. 6d. a head; afterwards sold to a cooper in Whitechapel; resold to a museum; and finally sold again to a cooper in Middle New Street, who was at that time using it as an advertisement" (qtd. in Lamb 363).¹⁸ Everything that touches Byron's corpse becomes sellable and expresses the celebrity Byron marketed to his fans. The marketing of intimacy by the celebrity figure transforms the everyday object into an expression of Byron's personality and repository of his memory. Merely touching the tube that housed Byron's body becomes a way fans can become intimate with the remains of authenticity. The immediacy of

¹⁸ This anecdote is recounted in a footnote to the 1913 edition of Charles Lamb's poems. The footnote references an epigraph Lamb wrote about Byron, arguing that the latter remained an alcoholic for the rest of his life. "So lordly Juan, d—d to endless fame, / Went out a *pickle*—and comes back the same" (363).

such objects, and their claim to have touched the dead poet's body, became more tantalizing than the sober words of a friend who desired to recuperate Byron's reputation and his personal intimacy with the poet.

Many other accounts of Byron's body rested upon the notion that the corpse signified Byron's celebrity, and that it furthermore materially manifested his essential personality. Clare Clairmont's journal satirizes Byron's body and mocks her former lover's narcissism by suggesting that, during his autopsy, "[h]is heart laid bare, [the doctors] find an immense capital I grown on its surface—and which had begun to pierce the breast" (qtd. in Page 167). The literary play of Clairmont's prose teasingly suggests that his body succumbed to his self-centeredness. Even though her account is satirical and meant to be read allegorically, the actual autopsy follows the same pattern of overlaying Byron's celebrity characteristics onto his body. The doctors noted that Byron's corpse "still preserved the sarcastic haughty expression, which habitually characterized it" (Milligen 142). Byron's body, it would seem, became a prisoner to his celebrity. Pierced by the physical manifestation of his inner narcissism and retaining the characteristics that had famously defined the Byronic hero during his life, Byron's corpse is literally formed out of the commodified traits of his literary figures. In death, Byron physically reflects the personality he marketed.

Edward Trelawny affects this same transformation of Byron into his marketed self. Trelawny, unlike Hobhouse, underscores his intimacy with Byron and—like Clairmont and the autopsy doctor—reinforces Byron's celebrity by making his physical characteristics reflect his famous personality. Trelawny is also the only friend of Byron that publicly disclosed his viewing of Byron's corpse. Trelawny claims to have visited Byron's corpse mere days after his death. He sees the corpse as "more beautiful even in death than in life. The contraction of the skin and

muscles had effaced every line traced by time or passion; few marble busts could have matched its stainless white, the harmony of its proportions, and its perfect finish” (225). Here we see Byron’s body becoming a Greek statue. Every muscle is seen, in death, to reveal the true beauty that Byron could only display when his skin ceases to move and, by not emoting, preserve the smooth texture found in Byron’s portraits. Byron’s skin becomes statuesque, its wrinkles smoothed out by the effect of rigor mortis and its surface shined to a perfect finish. Trelawny’s description reflects earlier comments by Walter Scott that Byron’s beauty caused a brother poet to compare it to “the sculpture of a beautiful alabaster vase, lighted up from within” (152). For Scott’s brother poet, Byron’s pale skin imitated the color and texture of the vase, and the light from his eyes revealed a beautiful soul engaged in high thoughts. Death causes the body to embody Scott’s desire, a perfect representation of the apotheosis of European art--the artist embodying the work of art. This conjunction of the Greek art with Byron’s corpse is also a focal point of Joseph-Denis Odevaere’s painting “Lord Byron on his Death-bed,” which portrays Byron’s corpse as a perfectly preserved statue, resting lightly on his bed and surrounded by pen, sword, and lyre.

Trelawny implicitly argues in this description that to appreciate Byron’s art and his personality one should view his body. Byron’s corpse had now become a perfect reflection of the intense aristocratic hero he portrayed in his poetry. By viewing the corpse, Trelawny bypasses the poetry and stares directly at the authenticity materialized by the material proximity of Byron’s body.¹⁹

¹⁹ Trelawny’s description changes when Byron’s servant leaves the room, and he fearlessly “uncover(s) the pilgrim’s feet [...] both feet were clubbed, and the legs withered to the knee: the form and face of an Apollo, with the feet and legs of a sylvan satyr” (225). The irony of this last passage reflects a long controversy over the state of Byron’s legs after his death. One of the many controversies of Byron’s death involved whether one, two or none of his feet were clubbed. The excavation of Byron’s corpse in 1938 “establish[ed] the fact that his lameness had been

Hobhouse, Clairmont, Milligen, and Trelawny each used their intimacy with Byron to prepare a place for his memory after he died. Trelawny, especially, used his description to communicate the meaning of Byron's afterlife to his fans and to secure Byron's celebrity as a poet of beauty and aristocracy. Despite Hobhouse's quest to rescue Byron from scandal and secure his afterlife as a British poet of respectability, other accounts bank upon the promise of intimacy encoded within Byron's poetry to entice the interests of a fan-base who had collectively experienced the trauma of Byron's death. The focus on Byron's corpse as a repository for Byron's personality reacted against the trauma of his corporeal separation from the community; it assured readers and mourners alike that Byron had not disappeared, that the personality contained within his poetry literally reflected material realities etched on his body. Byron's market personality secured the body against the corpse's muteness, and it reflected the poet's expression of authenticity and poetic truth. The desire for poetic truth is signified directly by Byron's corpse. To be a true fan of Byron during the years surrounding his death meant substituting the materiality of the corpse for the celebrity body, it meant becoming—quite literally—a necrophiliac.

Byron and the Death of the Postmodern Academic

But there are other people to do these things—the animal welfare thing, the social rehabilitation thing, even the Byron thing. He saves the honor of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it.

--David Lurie in *Disgrace*

As he thinks these lines toward the end of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, David Lurie is loading the corpses of dogs onto a conveyor belt that will dump them into a large incinerator. Lurie honors these animal corpses; he keeps their limbs from being broken by the workmen

of the right foot" (qtd. in MacCarthy 574). The legs represented for both Byron and his readers an ironic deformity cutting across the image of the perfect British aristocrat.

operating the incinerator. He notices that it is his stupidity that keeps him attached to the corpses, no one else will give them a final dignity. He recognizes the immediate, material need for someone to keep watch over the dead remains. And while the weighty bodies of stray dogs pile up at the euthanist where Lurie volunteers, the need to preserve Byron's cultural memory remains largely immaterial in comparison—a compulsion on the academic's part to maintain a cultural attachment to the literary celebrity after the death of its body. Lurie's care for the dead is a product of a stubborn stupidity, a compulsive necrophilia unable to detach itself from the dead libidinal object.

The necrophilic attachment to Byron's cultural memory, I argue, largely informs Coetzee's critique of academia in *Disgrace*. Byron has neither body nor corpse in the novel. There is no physical manifestation of Byron anywhere, and yet his absence is felt keenly. Byron's seductive promises of intimacy are lost on Lurie's students. His lectures on Byron and Wordsworth are met with silence and ignorance. Lurie regards his students as “[p]ost-Christain, posthistorical, postliterate,” without any care for the transcendental experiences of poets living in the past (32). The intimacy promised by the Byronic celebrity, and the desire that promise inspired, disappear along with the deteriorating corpse. David Lurie invokes Byron in his half-hearted seduction of his student Melanie, who pauses and mentions poetry only with a passing interest. When asked if she writes poetry, Melanie responds, “I did when I was at school. I wasn't very good. I haven't got the time now” (13). Lurie himself gradually shifts attention away from Byron who is initially the subject of a planned scholarly work, then becomes the central character in an opera he decides to compose on the poet's time in Italy, then disappears completely from the work that now focuses on Teresa Guiccoli's mourning for the deceased and absent Byron. *Disgrace* dissolves the intimate material claim of Byron's corpse into the vagaries of an irrelevant and

politically problematic cultural memory and a poetic corpus whose existence has only a fading archival value. By focusing on the dissolution of the celebrity's corpse into absence and irrelevance, Coetzee highlights the loss of intimacy in the University and the necrophilic attempts of displaced academics to reconnect with the literary celebrity.

The inner workings of Byron's cultural memory in the novel are highly complex as it presents truths that are, in Linda Seidel's words, "limited, contradictory, exasperating" (1). Coetzee seems to relish in the afterglow of artistic creation, allowing David Lurie one brief moment of sublimity while composing *Byron in Italy*. On the other hand, the outlook of Romanticism's optimism about the human spirit does not translate well into Coetzee's harsh South African landscape. David Lurie's Byron is seen, at best, as a misguided revolutionary unaware of the limitations of his European brand of cosmopolitanism. The critique of Romanticism leveled through the figure of Byron in the novel is read quite compellingly by Jerome McGann as a parable of its limitations in the post-colonial novel. McGann, in fact, leaves the Romantic scholar with the depressing and ghastly task to "go on with [their] memorial activities, as classical scholars have long since done with works even more unbelievable than our own romantic works" ("Is Romanticism Finished?"). The Romantic scholar is told, in an almost Voltairian fashion, to tend to the memorial garden of the Romantic period and give up the ghost.

McGann's suggestion that Romantic scholars should start acting like classics professors reveals more than he seemingly intended. Bill Readings makes the same comparison when mourning the fate of liberal arts education. The English department, according to Readings, will suffer the same fate as classics departments. Their emphasis on a subject of culture that legitimates nationalism is no longer needed in the contemporary University. Classical texts

will continue to be read, but the assumptions that necessitated a department of classics for this purpose (the need to prove that Pericles and Bismark were the same kind of men) no

longer hold, so there is no longer a need to employ a massive institutional apparatus designed to make ancient Greeks into ideal Etonians or Young Americans *avant la lettre*. (33)

Readings sketches a portrait of the classics department separated from its traditional role as a disseminator of culture shaping the national subject. Nationalism used classical education to legitimate the present political climate and to provide a set of heroic examples for young people to emulate. Readings argues that, in the wane of nationalism and the nationalist subject, the need for classics departments likewise diminishes. The appearance of “Cultural Studies,” and its attendant critique of nationalist and colonial ideology are symptomatic of the wane of culture as a central concern in the University, when it “ceases to mean anything vital for the University as a whole” (91). Cultural Studies can only exist when culture is a dead topic. The centrality of Cultural Studies in the English Department and its focus on ideological critique signifies, for Readings, are the last gasps of a body that has already outlasted its own life and persists despite already being dead.

In interviews and essays, Coetzee has voiced similar observations about the current state of the University. In an article responding to Andre du Toit, Coetzee calls the modern intellectual impossible without an idealism that is related to Romanticism. He, nevertheless, calls upon intellectuals to confront the current issues of what he calls “intellectual colonization” that inhabits the body of students in “their speech, the rhythm of their bodies, their affective behavior including their sexual behavior, their modes of thinking” (111). Instead of hunting down the ghosts of the nineteenth century, in the form of racism or colonialism, Coetzee argues that we should really be confronting neoliberalism and globalization. In this corporate University operating in the wake of globalization, the bodies of students and professors are possessed by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism co-opts the ghosts of the past to inhabit the body of the contemporary, corporate academic. The University, as a corpse for cultural studies, destroys the

critical capability of the English Department by materializing and exorcising its ghosts. These ghosts take on the form of the professor who is made to professionally inhabit a subject position that is an abstracted, processed and institutionalized form of the literary afterlife. Coetzee's critique of the corporate University reflects the anxieties of David Lurie and contributes to the depiction of the professor's ruined institution.

Coetzee sees the academic entrenched in a corporate landscape of familiar ghosts and abstractions feeding the engine of professionalism. In an interview with David Atwell, Coetzee distinguishes between the writing of fiction and the function of the critic who develops abstract—and commodifiable—knowledge. He points out the

inherent tension between on the one hand the artist, to whom we can call “the question of ones life” or “the question of how, in ones own case, to live” may be the source of a drama that plays itself out over time, with many ups and downs, and on the other hand the critic or observer or reader who wants to package and label the artist and his particular question and move on elsewhere.

Coetzee's valorization of the artist centers on the use of the aesthetic in developing a life, over the course of one's life. The questions encountered while living life are played out in artistic experimentation and can take on difference valences throughout life. The critic, on the other hand, isolates these questions in a particular context, identifies that context, and packages and labels it with the intention of imitating and controlling the life of the literary celebrity. The tension between the life of the artist is contrasted with the elsewhere of the critic. Where, we might ask Coetzee, does the critic go? Where is the elsewhere that defines the critic's departure from the life of the artist? Coetzee never answers this question in the interview. But his lack of an answer recalls the image of the postmodern academic stranded in a landscape of corporate ghosts. Coetzee's elsewhere signals a lack of life, a space occupied by abstractions that have little relevance to the living realm of the artist. There, in a space that is both possessed by the material ghosts of the past and abstracted by the departure of criticism from the life of the artist,

the academic's role is to create a professional subjectivity tied intimately to a life that can be captured with a label. By knowing the intimate and unchanging secrets of the literary celebrity's life, necrophilic academics secure their position as the ones who are most intimate with the universally desired figure. What can academics and scholars do in Coetzee's elsewhere, but engage in critical memorial activities to honor corpses that no one else will?

The need to preserve cultural memory despite its lack of an ideological purpose alienates Coetzee's academic from the larger community that no longer shares his concerns. David Lurie is no longer a professor of Modern Languages, but is instead unmoored from a specific department. He teaches one section of Romantic literature and two sections of Communications 101, a class whose premise Lurie finds preposterous: "Human society has created language in order that we may communicate our thoughts, feelings, and intentions to one another" (3-4). Lurie's unexpressed counterargument, that language has its origins in "song" and "the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul," has no place in the University because its claim fails to resound in a system dedicated to what Mark Sanders calls instrumentation (4).²⁰ Lurie sees his school as a "transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning" and his fellow teachers as "clerks in a post-religious age" reduced to "correcting lapses in punctuation, spelling and usage, interrogating weak arguments, [and] appending to each paper a brief, considered critique" (4-5). Lurie minds his business, performs his instrumental role, and passively accepts his marginal status.

The desire for intimacy with the celebrity in *Disgrace* is also translated into a larger problem of intimacy within the collegiate community. Instead of offering communal intimacy,

²⁰ Sander's essay argues that *Disgrace* is about "the capacity of language to alter itself and its speakers long after losing articulateness for those who have claimed privileged ownership of it" (372). Sanders contrasts Lurie's use of the perfective in his classes with the stress on completion imposed by his academic institution.

Lurie's corporate campus emphasizes individual professional development and the isolation of the scholar from his peers. As the University professor becomes more isolated, he attempts to form intimate connections with his students. Lurie's relationships to his idolized Romantic celebrities are staged as a relief from the intense alienation Lurie feels from his students, his profession, and his craft. Teaching is an obligation to the state, performed only to make money and to maintain some semblance of a connection with the world. Lurie "continues to teach because it provides him with a livelihood; also because it teaches him humility, brings home to him who he is in the world. The irony does not escape him: that the one who comes to teach learns the keenest of lessons, while those who come to learn learn nothing" (6). Lurie holds to an older, Platonic ideal of teaching in order to bring enlightenment to those who know little or nothing. But ensconced within an age without the desire to reach moments of revelation, he can do little but ape the same tired platitudes from the same anthologies. The only thing he learns from his experience with his students is alienation that reinforces his belief that he is doing nothing of importance in Cape Town, and that academic life offers nothing but isolation and meaninglessness.

Lurie's only access to anything he considers intimate comes in the form of brief flings he has with other members of his department and his students. Even these flings provide little excitement. Lurie's affair with Melanie serves as the apotheosis of his failed attempt to fuse teaching with his more poetic inclinations to break through the cloud of disinterest he feels in his everyday life. He mentions to Melanie that "poetry speaks to you either at first sight or not at all. A flash of revelation and a flash of response. Like lightning. Like falling in love" (13). Poetry supplements intimacy for Lurie, it ignites an immediate feeling of connection that fuses one to the secret thoughts of the author. For Melanie, the words seem only half-sincere, completely cut

off from the reality of her life. Melanie's passivity in the early chapters of the book not only reflect her separation from the older academic, but also underscore the disavowed consequences of Lurie's attempt to regain intimacy with his students. Lucy Graham suggests that the initial encounter between Melanie and David is best read as a rape scene. The free indirect perspective of the novel plays upon Melanie's silence to expose Lurie as part of an unexpressed tradition of "the college novel, a genre that often masks the inequalities, gender harassments and incidents of rape reported in campus life" (438). Rape becomes the dark underside of Lurie's search for intimacy at the University. Its silent presence in the novel is the obverse of Byron's absence.

The discourse surrounding the possible rape of Melaine by her teacher suggests the necrophilic character of Lurie's libidinal attachment to the ghosts in the past and his students at the University. Necrophiliacs, as I argued earlier, derive pleasure from their domination over the corpse. The corpse cannot fight against sexual advances, nor can it consent to those advances. All love for the necrophiliac is, in essence, a rape.²¹ Similarly, Lurie's attachment to Byron suggests another kind of rape that is connected to the search for poetic authenticity. The celebrity cannot fully consent to the love offered by either the fan or the academic critic. This love is always, of necessity, one-sided; it is predicated upon a distance between the celebrity and the fan that contributes to the celebrity's popularity. As a figure plagued with distance and isolation, not only believing in the authenticity offered by Byron but also holding onto a Romantic idealization of love, Lurie cannot help but to be a necrophiliac and a rapist. His search for intimacy connects a necrophilic longing for an object that cannot consent to a pedagogical style that attempts to reignite love in a corporate University space that is seen as abstracted and dead.

²¹ I am indebted to John Leavey for suggesting this line of inquiry.

Lurie searches for intimacy with his students on a pedagogical level by rhetorically including them in his desire to be with Byron when the poet experiences aesthetic transcendence. He mentions to his students that the famous Mount Blanc is like “Drakensberg, or on a smaller scale Table Mountain, which we climb in the wake of the poets, hoping for one of those revelatory, Wordsworthian moments we have all heard about” (23). Here Lurie transports European landscape and pastes it onto South Africa. Lurie stages his lectures as Romantic dramas of revelation. He keeps close to the demands of departmental curricula and the historical arguments of people in his field, while hoping that miming the insights of poets in his class will lead to the same authentic experiences of Byron and Wordsworth. He uses the memory of Byron, his famous claim to authenticity, as a personal and professional archetype. By teaching him in class, David Lurie becomes Byron, inhabits his voices, and speaks his maxims, all in the hope that his students would share the intimacy Lurie feels when writing about the poet.

Lurie’s imitation of Byron in the classroom is a desperate attempt to reclaim the intimacy promised by Byron as well as the authenticity he signified as a Romantic artist from the academic’s growing sense of marginality. In his lecture, Byron not only signifies Lurie’s guilt over seducing Melanie. He also serves to provide a separate sphere of intimacy for the academic. By allying and identifying himself with Byron, Lurie is able to condemn his students for their separation from the past and applaud himself for remaining authentically Romantic. In the classroom, Lurie makes distinct connections between Byron’s life and his own. As he begins his lecture, Lurie quotes from Byron’s poem “Lara” describing an individual who is a “stranger,” a “thing of dark imaginings, that shaped/By choice the perils he by chance escaped” (qtd. in Coetzee 32). The relationship to Lurie’s life is not lost on the professor who finds, despite his misgivings, that he cannot “evade the poem” (32). As he elaborates the dark personality of

Byron's characters, mentioning Lucifer in Byron's *Cain* as a figure who provokes sympathy but is ultimately condemned to solitude, Lurie takes the poem to be a direct commentary on his life. Lurie, too, provokes sympathy but this sympathy only proves how isolated he is from the university community.

The professor takes on the personality of the dead poet to combat his growing sense of alienation. He ingests and incorporates Byron's memory into his body. As much as he recognizes the many parallels between Byron's life and his own, there are several that Lurie never seems to notice. Lurie's scandal and exile from the University mirror Byron's departure from England after the public condemned his relationship to half-sister Augusta Leigh. His inability to connect with daughter Lucy reflects Byron's virtual neglect of his daughters, as he sent one to a convent to die and never knew the other. Byron's cosmopolitanism and attraction to the Orient is problematized by the very setting of the novel, in a South Africa attempting to find an identity after apartheid.²² If Byron's life is an archetype for Lurie's, the setting has changed dramatically. The intense, authentic, even heroic personality of the poet is transformed into a quiet, pathetic personality of an academic fighting against aging and nihilism.

The aristocratic, aesthetic, sexual aspects of Byron are molded into the figure of the disgraced academic. For Coetzee, the academic replaces the question of life with the imitation of the literary celebrity who provides intimacy as a replacement for the questions undertaken by the writer for his life work. Lurie's character is famously self-deluded by his Romantic fantasies throughout the entire novel. He never fully admits the problematic character of his relationship with Melanie. He only slightly understands Lucy's reason for not leaving her farm in South

²² Jerome McGann mentions several parallels between Byron's life and Lurie's story in his essay on Byron and Coetzee. He also mentions Byron's famous love of dogs and the violent treatment of dogs as a response to their being a symbol of white dominance.

Africa. His reflections on the many complex political events he experiences are always filtered through a simplistic, nostalgic yearning for the Romantic past or a lament for the loss of youth. Lurie's composition of *Byron in Italy*, designed to relieve the academic of prose, implicates artistic creation in the same mourning ritual for a lost Romantic connection with the ghosts of the past. Lurie initially planned on having the opera focus on Byron's final years in Italy. However, he decided instead to focus on mourning after Byron's death. Lurie senses that his creative reimagining of Byron's death subtly transforms his relationship with the poet. Instead of creating abstract prose and following the afterlife of the literary celebrity, Lurie imagines himself—however fleetingly—becoming part of the artistic experience itself. As he begins to compose the music to accompany an impossible conversation between Teresa and a Byron who is long dead, Lurie reenacts the mourning process of the academic writing criticism. Lurie, in fact, imagines himself as a ghost who inhabits the conversation. In death, and in the afterlife, Lurie aesthetically inhabits the music of Byron's ghostly language.

Six months ago he had thought his own ghostly place in *Byron in Italy* would be somewhere between Teresa's and Byron's: between a yearning to prolong the summer of his passionate body and a reluctant recall from the long sleep of oblivion. But he was wrong. It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic. He is in the opera neither as Teresa nor as Byron nor even as some blending of the two: he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reigned back, like a fish on a line. (185)

This episode is clearly meant to support Coetzee's valorization of the aesthetic life above its imitation in the abstract thought of the academic. Yet the section also shows how the academic-artist, in his desire to merge with the ghostly voice of the poet, imagines himself as a ghost existing alongside the poet who has a closer relationship to life. If Byron is a ghost, mourned by Teresa, Lurie is even more insubstantial. He is held aloft by their wailing and then slapped back down, caught in the beat of their memory. It is difficult to determine whether Lurie finds this

moment exhilarating or a complete and final degradation that condemns him to the isolation of death. As a fish caught in a line, Lurie's life is sacrificed to feed the memory of the celebrity. His voice is tethered to the whims of his characters, caught in the melody of their concerns. In Lurie's opera, Teresa keeps her letters from Byron as her only remaining claim to immortality, a chest "she calls her *relique*, which her grand-nieces are meant to open after her death and pursue with awe" (181). Death confronts both Lurie and Tessa with the all-encompassing questions of life. It can only do so from the vantage point of the dead celebrity and his relics. Any claim to Lurie's immortality, and he realizes that the opera he composes only offers a slight claim to a short afterlife, is couched in the trace of Byron's corpse. In art, as in criticism, the celebrity corpse remains a potent reminder of the academic's melancholy and a realization that the intimacy promised by the celebrity will never be fulfilled.

Coetzee characterizes the academic as an impotent necrophilic fan, blinded by questions of authenticity and his yearning to remain close to dead literary celebrities. The academic cannot pose an adequate response to the possession and control of bodies by globalist corporations because the corporate bodies of the literary celebrity possess him. Unanchored from their purpose as disseminators of imperialist culture, academics compulsively return to their corpses and attempt to resurrect the memory of literary celebrity using their own bodies as repositories of nostalgia. Coetzee's academic short-circuits important questions of authenticity, ethics, and politics by referencing Byron's values. Even when he seems to get rid of Byron, and removes him entirely from his opera, Lurie's necrophilia lives on in his characterization of Teresa who wants to bequeath her memories of loving the celebrity to her children. Lurie wishes to leave something as well, something aesthetic and authentic. But, stifled underneath his own commitment to Byron, he can only produce another piece of fan-fiction tied to a series of songs

that are not even composed by him. The focus on authenticity by the academic uses the promise of intimacy to bypass anxieties surrounding isolation, loneliness, and finally death.

Symptomatically, the corpse returns as a reflection of the academic's invisibility and marginality, somehow convincing the academic that this marginality is itself worth preserving.

George Gordon Byron, Postmodern Ph.D.

In the introduction, I argued that Coetzee's critique transforms the academic into a corpse of contemporary life. Coetzee's fiction depicts the academic as a cultural sacrifice to the demands of political progress. I also argued that Byron's ambivalent place in cultural studies emerges from his cosmopolitan ambitions, which I compared with the political ambitions of the academic. I want to take up this question of political efficacy and present the figure of Byron as a way to imagine the difficulties of sketching a literary future for the postmodern University.

Byron is an essential figure for Coetzee because he, perhaps more than any other artist operating during the age of British Romanticism, highlights the contradictions of the imperialist but still liberal and radical ambitions of literary education. The institutional existence of liberal education cannot be understood outside of this contradiction. And, at the same time, it is the place of postcolonialism within the English Department—the very place where one would expect to find critical consideration of J. M. Coetzee's work—that this contradiction is the most palpable. As an institution within the postmodern University, postcolonialism inhabits Byron's contradictions and compulsively returns to the corpse of the Romantic author to stage its critiques.

A good example of this contradiction is Gayatri Spivak's meditation on the future of literary studies aptly entitled *Death of a Discipline*. Spivak's book attempts to find a new purpose for literary studies in an age where nationalist boundaries are dissolving and where the practice of Comparative Literature nevertheless continues to explore what she calls "Europe and the extracurricular Orient" (6). She suggests redefining the study of comparative literature,

pulling it away from area studies, focusing on the more complicated issue of border crossing, and perhaps most surprisingly transforming the identitarian category of the globe with the natural and environmental figure of the planet. Her utopian tone throughout the book is toned down with a list of her institutional limitations. Toward the end of the book, Spivak admits that:

Cultural studies is heavily invested in New Immigrant groups. It seems to me that a planetary Comparative Literature must attempt to move away from this base. What I write in closing will give some indication of the way out, as far as a nonexpert can imagine it. These words are no more than scattered speculations, to mark the limits of my rather conventional U.S. Comparative Literature training: English, French, German poetry and literary theory, romantic and modernist. (84)

Spivak's scattered speculations mark literature as a boundary of possibility for the literary academic, suggesting that the study of postcolonial literature figures an internal contradiction that cannot be resolved between the identity of immigrant groups and the need to find a new literary genre that can represent transnational, extracurricular experiences. Spivak picks at the corpse of her Comparative Literature training, providing a series of readings that prove her intimacy with literary authors in order to sketch out a vision of the institutional future. Her apology marks an institutional reluctance to move away from the form of exegesis and attempt to find some other way to understand and appreciate the global circulation of literature. Literary scholarship is still made to touch the boundaries of its extracurricular Orientalist possibilities.

Spivak's postcolonial academic becomes the postmodern cosmopolitan, enlightening the reader who is trapped within older, nationalist structures of thought and reclaiming literature from its imperialist past. The academic can both support an essentially progressive function for literature and train the imagination to think beyond the strictures of nationalism. Spivak's role for literature is still Romantic. By highlighting a traditionalist mode of literary interpretation grounded in the exceptional figure, Spivak marks comparative literature as still an essentially European, Romantic, even Byronic activity. Byron's poetry, after all, provided many British

subjects their first literary glimpse of the exotic Other and sketched out the subjectivity of the enlightened, cosmopolitan reader. Spivak's literary limitations show just how difficult it is to move past the model of celebrity that is so entrenched in the literature department. Far from moving past imperialism, literary discourse circles around the strictures of Byronic Orientalism.

The Byronic corpse becomes a bridge for the academic attempting to think the Other. Byron conjoined the intimacy of the celebrity with the excitement of travel and the attraction of intellectualism with liberal politics. As a nexus for critical, humanistic thought, Byron's corpse signifies both that which academics wish to leave behind and that which they, secretly, always wished to be: privileged, yet critical; beautiful, yet iconoclastic; poetic, yet popular. Byron's afterlife in popular fiction obscures his afterlife in the figure, perhaps even the very body, of the postmodern academic. Clinging to the material artifacts of the literary celebrity, proclaiming the necessity for understanding the real historical situation in which Byron lived, attempting to argue for the ultimate idealism of Byron against his detractors, Byron scholars look very much like those intimates who fought over control of his physical remains.

Perhaps what Spivak's example shows us is that the true professor of the postmodern University, with its attendant freedoms and limitations, should be Byron. As students of Romantic thought, we should neither proclaim the death of Romanticism nor dwell on the problematic ideologies of men who shared the prejudices and ideological assumptions of the early nineteenth century. Literary education is, therefore, not an exercise in training oneself to think differently, as such an education merely reinscribes the market imperative to produce new commodities. It also, however, cannot simply reflect on a past whose corpses are pilfered for new histories. As Coetzee implies in *Disgrace*, Byron is a figure through which the contradictory—often oppressive—realities of misunderstanding the colonial Other can be

thought. The postmodern academic continues to be part of that misunderstanding. By analyzing Byron's reception as a repressed, disavowed desire for poetic, aristocratic and academic authenticity, we can begin to understand the cultural impact of his corpse upon a globalizing University.

CHAPTER 4
THE STILLBORN PAST: ACADEMIC REALISM, THE HAUNTED SUMMER OF 1816
AND KEN RUSSELL'S *GOTHIC*

Despite the fact that the haunted summer of 1816 is one of the most dramatic and perplexing historical events occurring during the Romantic period, few academics choose to write historical criticism about it. James Rieger's powerful and memorable 1967 argument that the "received history of the contest in writing ghost stories at the Villa Diodati" is almost entirely fictional has kept most literary historians from touching the subject (461). Yet academics consume fictional, biographical, filmic, and theatrical recreations of the event and present them in their classes. In 2001 Ron Broglio and Eric Sonstroem incorporated elements from the Diodati myth into their *FrankenMOO*: an online teaching environment that allowed users to pick up Byron's famous skull cups, observe the decaying portraits of Byron's family, and become characters from Mary Shelley's novel.²³ Texts like Anne Edwards's novel *Haunted Summer* (1989), Howard Brenton's play *Bloody Poetry* (1989), Paul West's *Lord Byron's Doctor* (1989), and Gonzalo Suarez's film *Remando al viento* (1988) are frequently found in Romantic period surveys. Even while questioning the historical validity of the events at Diodati, academics continue to use these fictional recreations as pedagogical instruments to introduce students to Lord Byron, the Shelleys, and John Polodori.

This contradictory attitude towards the events at Diodati strikes at the very heart of academic subjectivity in literary studies and the degree to which such identity depends upon the mourning of the dead literary celebrity. Stephen Greenblatt's presidential address to the MLA in 2002 defined literature as, at least in one context, the "triumph over death," and criticism as an

²³ See Sonstroem "Do you really want a revolution?: CyberTheory meets real-life pedagogical practice in FrankenMOO and the conventional literature classroom" for more information about his collaboration with Broglio on the *FrankenMOO*.

act to “keep alive and to circulate what might otherwise be silenced forever” (420, 423). The academic, according to Greenblatt, preserves the memory of the past against its annihilation. He suggests that the University is a “special community [...] constituted by the ability that each of us has to be seized with the conviction that someone we do not know is addressing us personally and with eloquence” (418). Furthermore, this moment of being contacted from the beyond is a “silent moment, constantly renewed,” acting as the essence of academic professional life (419). He links this intense absorption to his childhood, where the books in Greenblatt’s home inspired an interest in reading that would later culminate in his academic identity.

Greenblatt’s theory of a special connection between the literary academic and the dead, renewed not only through the production of new critical work but also through inspiring new generations of academic critics, I call “academic realism.” Academic realism seeks a relationship between the academic critic and a voice from the past that the critic is trying to contact. It also seeks to renew that connection by inspiring students in the classroom and introducing them to this special connection. Realists attempt to make the voices of the dead present by codifying and memorializing these voices in critical discourse. While the feeling of connection motivates Greenblatt’s academic, he never argues that connections between the academic and the past or the future are successful.

In fact, the unsuccessful or bad connections between literary critics, their progeny, and the dead interest me in this chapter. These bad connections made by the academic give rise to an uncontrollable process of phantasmic doubling in the discourse surrounding the Haunted Summer. By analyzing biographical retellings of the Villa Diodati event along with Ken Russell’s reviled film *Gothic* (1987), I explore the complexities of academic realism and reveal the gothic elements underpinning its special connection to the dead. I first turn to the role

biography plays in the dissemination of the Diodati tale. The intrusion of the gothic into biography complicates realism by including uncanny and occult experiences in literary history, and by invoking a mass readership that is part of the gothic novel's history. Then, I turn to Russell's film to illustrate how he appropriates the Diodati story to comment on film and historical realism by linking the gothic form with the desire to penetrate Byron's home. I show how Russell's film frustrates the connection to the past through its framing, the casting of its main characters, and the intrusion of painting into its *mise en scène*. The uncertain place of the *Haunted Summer* in literary history is exposed by the symptomatic rhetoric surrounding its retelling in literary biographies and the frenzied depiction of the event in Russell's film. This chapter uses Russell's film and biographies surrounding the *Haunted Summer* of 1816 to analyze the boundaries of academic realism as a series of interrupted, uncanny connections infiltrating the special relationship between the academic and the dead.

Death, Realism, and the Academic Politics of Biography

Biography holds a central place in the construction of literary history. This point is especially so in studies of the Romantic period where literary history is still influenced by the personalities of its writers.²⁴ Biography is also frequently cited in historical criticism. Both Fiona MacCarthy's biography of Byron and Jonathan Bate's biography of John Claire are widely used in historical treatments of the poets.²⁵ Despite the dependence of historical criticism on Romantic

²⁴ See David Chandler's essay " 'One Consciousness', Historical Criticism and the Romantic Canon" for a particularly interesting reading of the relationship between New Historicism and the canon. Chandler suggests that two historicisms emerged out of the 80s: one that challenged the canon and one that did not. A large strain of criticism held onto the canon, according to Chandler, to produce a relevant and provocative challenge to orthodox Romantic studies. Despite their emphasis on marginalized figures, new historicists still focus on personality to prove the importance, and thus the due celebrity, of previously unrecognized figures.

²⁵ See Minta's "Lord Byron and Mavrokordatos," and Claire Knowles's "Poetry, Fame, Scandal: The Cases of Byron and Landon." for criticism citing MacCarthy's biography. See Sarah Houghton's "John Claire and Revaluation," and Michelle Faulbert's "Cure, Classification, and John Claire" for criticism citing Bate's biography. Jonathan Bate actually contributed to the *Romantic Biography* collection and was praised by its editors.

biography, many academics are reluctant to align themselves with the popular form. Christopher Rovee, in a review of a collection of essays titled *Romantic Biography*, called biography the “mass consumable form of literary scholarship” that, like film, straddled a dangerous line between popular and academic audiences (737). The separation of academics from the “dangerous” forms of film and Romantic biography highlights the fear that a good portion of academics still have toward being identified completely with popular audiences.²⁶ Academia uses the biography as a source material for criticism, yet Rovee suggests that academics must also separate themselves from what he considers a popular form.

For the editors of *Romantic Biography*, history provides the separation between academia and the uninformed popular masses. Romantic biographies, Rawes and Bradley argue, traditionally focus on transcendental genius, are “neo-conservative,” and fail “to get to grips with the social, political and philosophical radicalism of the Romantics themselves” (xiii). As such, Romantic biography acts to disseminate mythology rather than real history. Academics, say Rawes and Bradley, are too serious to buy into the suggestions of biographers, many of whom overdramatize the lives of their subjects for popular audiences. The editors cite Francis Wheen’s biography of Marx in which the author “informs us that, while working to destroy western capitalism, the philosopher used to go on drunken pub-crawls in Soho” (xiii-xiv). The editors reject such lurid details for the more sober work that stresses the proper historical contexts for Romantic writers.

²⁶ It is important to mention that many academics do not mind being identified as fans. Constance Penley, Andrew Ross and Henry Jenkins are widely known as academics who identify with the fan community. In fact, Richard Burt has argued that academic-fans want to “occupy all positions, be the virtuoso, the one who can cross over, do it all” (15). Henry Jenkins has responded to this critique by arguing that theory emerges both within and without the academy, and that academic theory production is “simply one subcultural or institutional practice among many” (13). My argument is more focused on an institutional reluctance by the academic who, as academic, refuses to be identified with a mass readership. The subjectivity of the academic is bound—culturally, economically, and institutionally—to reinforce the boundary that Jenkins dismisses between themselves and the fan. As Burt argues with reference to Penley and Ross, the academic wants to keep the boundary “at least faintly” in place (15).

The dichotomy between sober history and lurid biography sublimates an anxiety with mass readership that structures Rawes and Bradley's approach to literary scholarship. This anxiety appropriates realism, supported by the authority of the academic institution, as a means to exclude mass audiences. The practice of appropriating biography for critical work remains dangerous for these academics because it exposes scholars to the racy details of the literary past and could turn them from more sober and serious historical work. The racy details surrounding the writing of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) provide a useful example to understand what I call a gothic intrusion of lurid enthusiasm into the discourse of sober history. As a case in celebrity and history, the Haunted Summer of 1816 offers what few other literary events do. 1816 can be seen as one of the first celebrity events. And, its status as a celebrity event is related to the production of literature. The featured personalities are a list of some of the most prominent British writers during the time including Byron, Mary and Percy Shelley, and John Polodori. The event itself gives birth to two of the most enduring legends of horror: Frankenstein and the modern Vampire. Diodati during the summer of 1816 acts as a kind of nexus for Romantic celebrity.

Another way to consider the summer of 1816 is to show how its legend is disseminated, repeated, and produced by popular accounts of Romantic history. Studying the lurid details of the Haunted Summer can help us to explore the more gothic aspects involved in the production of history. As James Chandler provocatively argues in *England in 1819*, the historicism of 80s and 90s criticism acts as a repetition of the Romantic interest in history. He sees

the interest in cultural chronology, rather than being explained away as an anachronistic cultural projection from the present onto the late-Romantic period, could be understood instead, or in addition, as a suppressed residue from the earlier period still operative in the contemporary practice of literary and cultural history. (33)

Chandler characterizes historicism from the position of doubling and repetition, suggesting that the elements making history so attractive during the Romantic period emerge again in 80s and 90s English Department as a newfound interest in historicism. For me, the emphasis on residue and repetition also argues for the reemergence of older debates in new forms. If the Romantic interest in history emerges in newer forms of criticism, perhaps other questions related to history can also be explained as repetitions of older debates emerging once again.

The tension between racy and sober history could, I suggest, be seen as a repetition of the nineteenth-century contest between the gothic and realist novel in Britain. Bradford K. Mudge contextualizes the debate between the gothic and realism in terms of gender. He also suggests that the reduction of the gothic to the more popular and less radical horror genre had its origin in the need to redefine class roles due to the rise of a middle-class readership. The novel, according to Mudge, became legitimate to literary circles by rejecting its imaginative excesses. The depiction of magic, specters, demons, and ghosts in a form which did not relegate them to the status of mythology but instead revealed in the possibility of their existence threatened the emerging middle-class of female readers and could not offer what Mudge illustrates was the selling point of realism: “the real artistic experience, that unsullied intercourse between authorial genius and readerly taste” (98). Nineteenth-century realism offered a proper and sober intercourse between reader and writer. It controlled the imaginative excesses of the gothic novel, provided protection to its feminine readers, and “normalized female sexuality along middle class lines” (94). The discourse surrounding the rejection of the gothic novel and the ascension of realism involved concerns over normative sexuality and a desire to connect directly and properly with the voices of the past.

Following the work of Chandler and Mudge, I argue that repetition, haunting, and doubling intrudes upon and complicates the connection between the dead and the academic reader. Biographical accounts of the Diodati event repeat the commonplaces of Mary Shelley's novel, providing a picture of Romantic history that reawakens the imaginative excesses associated with the threat of the gothic novel. The Diodati myth, rather than being a moment exclusively relayed to contemporary audiences through sober realism, is punctuated by lurid references to ghosts, curses, and uncanny coincidences. These references threaten the proper intercourse between reader and writer with racy details, wild speculation, and tempting digressions. This section argues that the gothic elements embedded in the Haunted Summer of 1816 emerge as uncanny doubles of academic realism.

In the context of the Diodati story, lurid and sober history supplement one another: one is inextricable from the other. As we will see, the Diodati story included gothic and uncanny details from the beginning and used the desire for a historical explanation of *Frankenstein* to sell the third edition of the novel. Since uncovering the fictional roots of Mary's introduction, sober historicists have separated themselves from the myth. Most often they leave the telling of Shelley's story to historical fiction writers, biographers, and filmmakers. The reluctance to tell the story of Diodati, or to investigate its historical impact on the popularity of *Frankenstein*, marks an uneasy relationship with the more gothic elements of Mary Shelley's introduction and an anxiety with the ghosts that populate the boundaries between the writing of literary history, historical fiction, and literary biography. "There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts," Derrida says in *Specters of Marx* (11). The scholar's uneasy relationship with the Haunted Summer of 1816 reflects uneasiness with the repressed ghosts of mass culture lurking within the celebrated connection between the academic and the dead.

These ghosts of mass culture inhabit Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, which was produced by the author to satisfy fans who desired an explanation for the creation of the story. Mass culture inspired Mary's story, and it also gave Mary the incentive to exaggerate some of its aspects in order to reproduce the excitement of reading *Frankenstein* for the first time. The story of the novel's production had to be as horrifying as Shelley's novel. Shelley relocates the dark laboratories of Geneva to Byron's Villa Diodati and a horrible rainstorm that forced the writers to find shelter. Victor's experiments in animating dead matter are given real-life counterparts in the discussions between Byron and Shelley over the famous scientist Erasmus Darwin and the claims of galvanism. Mary relates her tale as part of an effort to explain "How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?" (5). Instead of sketching a woman singularly obsessed with images and ideas that are unworthy of a young girl and highlighting her oddity, Mary locates the origin of her story in a series of extraordinary yet relatable elements that culminate in a horrible dream.

The introduction begins with a dream in which Mary's imagination "unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie" (9). The form of the dream allows Mary to revel in its imagery without carrying that imagery into her waking life, except in the form of a possession that suggests she had little agency in writing the novel. The dream also convinces her audience that she is not ordinarily engaged in such ghastly thoughts as reanimating the dead. The focus of the story originates in the realm of dream: a common image frequently employed by Percy Shelley to explain the fantastic images occurring in his own poetry. If the events in the novel seem too imaginative for a young woman, Mary's introduction argues that they can be explained by reference to the ideas discussed by her prominent masculine friends, the dark and suggestive

scenery of Byron's Villa, and their impact on her unconscious imagination. These culminate in a dream whose vividness expands the bounds of her experience and spurs her to write the novel. Her dream "so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around" (9). The image of an exchange between her dreaming and waking worlds is particularly important here. By including that economic metaphor, Mary distinguishes between the sobriety of her waking life and the fantastic elements of her dreaming life, which is embodied in her fiction. Mary is not able to "easily get rid of my hideous phantom," until she thinks to use the horror to write her ghost story and "frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night!" (9). Mary's dream becomes tethered by the demands of fiction. She uses fiction to shift from her gothic dream to her proper waking life and back again. Even as they retain the same atmosphere as Shelley's novel, the events recounted by Mary in the introduction serve as an anchor for their more fantastic elements. These events serve, in the introduction of *Frankenstein*, as a double for the events of the novel.

However, the history surrounding the composition of Mary's novel is not as simple as Shelley's introduction suggests. Frances Wilson has shown in a close reading of the diaries of John Polodori, Byron, and the Shelleys, that there was no consensus regarding the events of the haunted summer (170). Polodori's account gets much of the biographical material completely wrong, including Percy Shelley's age and the fact that Claire had a relationship with Byron not with Percy. In each of the accounts, a different group of people engages in the conversation involving the possibility of using electricity to animate dead matter. Mary acutely remembers a conversation between Byron and Shelley. Polodori says that it was between himself and Byron. Claire, meanwhile, asserts that the conversation was between Polodori and Shelley. Wilson even places the originality of Byron's suggestion that they each compose ghost stories under question

by noting the first few pages of *Phantasmagoria*, which tells its readers to “relate a story of ghosts” (167). Instead of being an idea of Byron’s, the famous “ghost story” competition was a double of the events of the novel, and existed rhetorically as yet another of the series of narrative introductions (including Robert Walton’s letters to his wife and the story of Walton speaking to the dying Victor Frankenstein) to the novel proper. Wilson argues that the haunted summer is, in fact, a ghost story used to frame Frankenstein.

More contemporary biographies recounting the Diodati event perpetuate this fabrication by embedding their stories in clichés that circulate the basic elements of gothic literature. The gothic demands of narrative shape the historical understanding of 1816, yet many books that attempt to reproduce the events of the Haunted Summer are mocked for inaccuracy. Radu Florescu’s attempt to reconstruct the events of Diodati in the 1975 biographical history *In Search of Frankenstein* with help from Alan Barbour and Matei Cazacu was met with mockery by the academic establishment. Jan Perkowski’s piece on the book for the journal *Slavic Review* argues that the biography “holds no professional interest,” suggesting that it “is not a book of literary criticism, history, folklore, or even cinematography; and it is certainly not a detailed psychological analysis of ‘fetus envy.’ Although it contains bits of all these features, it is basically a travelogue, a sentimental journey” (585). Perkowski is most uneasy with the author’s speculative nature, his choice to prove most of his assertions based on circumstantial evidence and what Florescu calls “historical insight” (58). It is the more racy details, the discussion of “eighteenth century androids” and the suggestion that Mary Shelley knew that a Frankenstein family actually lived, which disturbs Perkowski most (58). Florescu uses an intuitive method for constructing literary history, and because much of this history is mired in speculation and “insight,” the serious historian rejects it outright. My point here is not to valorize speculation

above serious research, but to suggest that Florescu's book provides insight on the discursive reception of the Diodati myth and the reaction of the academic to the more fantastic aspects of the myth. In constructing his intuitive history, Florescu injects elements of the gothic into Mary's story.

In a particularly vivid example of the gothic elements operating in the text, Florescu describes the demonic weather occurring in Geneva during the night of the reading of

Phantasmagoria:

Let us imagine the evening of June 16th: outside the rain and wind are pounding against the tall windows overlooking the veranda, lightning is marching over the lake, and thunder echoes in the mountains. At Diodati, everyone huddles in the main living room, around the fireplace—waiting for a cue. (118)

Florescu then describes the juxtaposition between the raging storm outside, the reading of the ghost story, Byron's recitation of Coleridge's *Christabel*, scientific descriptions of galvanism, and the work of Erasmus Darwin. Florescu places these elements into a story whose background is already unusual. The American northwest, New England, and the Canadian Maritimes were covered in ice and snow. Crops froze in the middle of the summer, snowstorms killed several people, a food shortage in Europe resulted in riots, and red and brown snow blanketed Italy and Hungary (118). Such a context lends the physical environment necessary to the composition of a novel of horror, implicitly arguing that even the weather wanted to inspire Mary with visions of terror required for the composition of *Frankenstein*.²⁷

The author uses short dashes for dramatic pause, and then quotes from Polodori's diary that shockingly describes the sudden breakdown of Shelley at the moment of Byron's recitation of *Christabel*. Delighted at the overwhelming imagery of the diary, the author surmises that

²⁷ For more information about the summer of 1816, see Henry and Elizabeth Stommell's *Volcanic Winter: The Story of 1816, the Year Without a Summer*.

Coleridge wrote *Christabel* shortly after Mary Wollstonecraft died. Noting that Coleridge was a friend of the Godwins, Florescu asks “is it to be wondered that Shelley, probably under the influence of laudanum, should have left the room, terror stricken at seeing Mary’s or her mother’s ghost?” (118).

By attempting an intuitive recreation of the events at the Villa Diodati, Florescu ends up suggesting that Mary Wollstonecraft’s ghost haunted Percy. Shrouding that ghost story in the hallucinations of laudanum for the sake of partial realism, Florescu questions how much the Diodati group participated in their own horror story and ends up mimicking the commonplaces of the gothic genre. The scene attempts to invoke a sense of the uncanny, repetition, and doubling. It thereby illustrates that the atmosphere mirrors both the dramatic scenery of *Christabel* and the not yet written *Frankenstein*. Shelley’s novel acts as a ghostly retelling of an event that, according to the authors, really happened. Conversely, this event performs an act of prophecy and dark foreboding. The subsequent chapter “A Summer’s End,” quickly turns to the dramatic suicide of Polodori, the deaths of Mary’s sister Fanny, the drowning of Percy’s former wife Harriet, the passing of all Mary and Percy’s children save Percy Florence, and finally the deaths of Percy and Byron themselves. Florescu’s treatment of the haunted summer argues that the writing of *Frankenstein* is not only reflective of the events experienced by Mary Shelley, but also suggests that the novel’s gothic inspiration might be responsible for the deaths of many in the group. We are left to wonder how much the haunted summer prophesized the downfall of the Diodati group and if, more horrifyingly, it did not cause their deaths. In Florescu’s hands, biography becomes a ghost story serving as a spectral double for *Frankenstein* by incorporating the same gothic narrative elements as the novel. Gothic and uncanny elements frame the archival

evidence in the biography, creating a narrative in which history exists as a phantasmagoria of coincidence and uncanny repetitions.

The Diodati event inspires phantasmic speculation, where supernatural forces do not explain historical events, but their influence is not entirely ruled out. This method of analysis blurs the line between fiction and history, indirectly suggesting that the uncanny influences the production of scholarly and popular histories regarding the Diodati event. The uncanny is, therefore, not simply a theoretical category but rather a repressed form of historical analysis that emerges like the return of the repressed (if only due to the racy, intuitive nature of Florescu's work). By repressing the gothic elements of this history, the academic can give up the ghost, ontologize the remains of the past, and publish them as serious, sober, realist history.

The repressed form of historical analysis embodied in popular biography returns in Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler's *The Monsters: Mary Shelley and the Curse of Frankenstein*. The narrative of the book uses historical sources but constantly slips into a gothic mode, where, like Florescu's work, the whole of the Diodati circle's biography marches inexorably towards death and destruction. The first sentence of the biography emphasizes the collision of the gothic and history by arguing, "[i]t actually was a dark and stormy night" (3). The Hooblers move then to fill out the individual reputations of each figure and sketch out the gothic evening. "Flickering candles and burning logs in the fireplace provided the only light, other than the flashes of lightning that abruptly illuminated the windows" (5). The Hooblers are so comfortable with the gothic as a narrative device that it quickly takes over the biography. The introduction culminates in the gothic intention of the biographers:

A dark star hung over all the brilliant young people who listened to Byron reading horror stories that night. Though their futures seemed limitless, early deaths or stunted lives awaited each of them. It almost might be said that the writing of *Frankenstein* placed a curse on the lives of those who were present at its birth (5-6)

The Hooblers place the supernatural elements firmly in the realm of the “as if.” In the process, they highlight the uncanny elements of the biography. The Hoobler biography assumes the role of historian, yet this historian also employs curses and prophecy to explain events. The parade of qualifiers in the final sentence of the material quoted above (“almost might be said”) underline the biographer’s role as historian while reconstituting the slight possibility for supernatural elements to infect the historian’s purpose. While the history of the Diodati event is recovered through documents and first hand accounts in *The Monsters*, the theatricality of the prose and its spectacular invocation of dark spirits, evil stars, curses, and monsters highlights the occult expectations of those who read a gothic tragedy starring their favorite literary celebrities.

The mechanisms governing the Hooblers’s narrative work portray their characters’ history with gothic elements that parallel *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley is portrayed as the product of a doomed marriage between her parents Mary Wollestonecraft and William Godwin. Wollestonecraft dies giving birth to Mary Shelley. This fact shapes Shelley’s life and, according to the Hooblers, constantly reminds her that her own life began in death. She was “aware from childhood that her birth was responsible for the death of her mother. This trauma and guilt would be one of the central factors in her life, and would find an outlet in *Frankenstein*” (37). Mary’s horrifying beginnings force her towards her fate as an author. The Hooblers begin the biography with a sense of fatalism, focused around the inevitable publication of *Frankenstein* and the sense that Mary cannot help but be the focus of tragedy. She was born from tragedy, shaped by the sense that she caused her own mother’s death, and seemed fated for further misfortune. From the beginning Mary is primed to be the main character of a gothic tragedy, as the Hooblers sketch out the deaths of her children, her friends, and her family.

The short biographies of Percy Shelley, Clairemont, Byron, and Polodori set each of them up as secondary characters in Mary's gothic romance. Percy is the dashing lover who is more adventurous than faithful and whose inability to swim portends his final fate. Claire is the anxious lover who quite probably had children with both Byron and Shelley. Byron is the aristocrat whose desire to become the adventurous characters he portrayed in his poems forces him to seek glory in the Greek fight for independence. His fear of losing his reputation as an adventurer forces him to stay there, catch sick, and die. Finally Polodori is the jealous pseudo-writer who, never able to finish his own works and shamed by his inability to become a famous writer, dies by his own hand. The Hooblers finish his story by depicting a séance performed by Polodori's nephew William Rossetti years after his life. After determining the identity of the ghost, Rossetti asks the ghost "Are you happy?" The only response is two raps on the table, which Rossetti interprets as "not exactly" (235). Polodori's final scene depicts him as a dissipated apparition still loitering with his sorrow. Spiritualism, furthermore, becomes the way to celebrate Polodori's contribution to literary history, as it gives Rossetti the ability to understand the inner secrets of his uncle's relationship with Byron, the composition of *The Vampyre*, and his most private thoughts after death.

The Monsters highlights a tension between the afterlife and celebrity by focusing on the remnants of its primary characters after their death and linking those remnants with the mourning of those they left behind. The Hooblers achieve this tension most when they recount the postmortem reconstruction of Percy Shelley's literary estate by his wife. They set this story around the claims made by various members of the Diodati group for Shelley's body-parts after his cremation. Byron, according to the Hooblers, had wished to retain Shelley's skull after his death. Edward Trelawny, however, remembers Byron's habit of drinking wine out of skulls and

so allows the head to be consumed by fire. Leigh Hunt had claimed Percy's heart, even though Mary also wanted the heart. He gave it up only after Mary pleaded with him for a long period of time. Mary keeps the heart in her writing desk for the rest of her life. By invoking this image of a bereaved wife keeping the body parts of her deceased husband and wrestling them from the iconoclastic hands of Byron and Hunt, the Hooblers demonstrate the degree to which Mary's mourning for Percy reflects the desires and obsessions shared by Victor Frankenstein.

While the Hooblers do not simply accept the curse *Frankenstein* as historical reality, analyzing the curse nevertheless provides a narrative that bridges the many events described in the biographies of the Shelleys, Byron, and Polodori and also acts to explain a set of uncanny experiences. The Hoobler biography traces literary history as the history of a curse. It appropriates gothic commonplaces and the persistent myth of the curse to transform the uncanny events of the haunted summer into a ghost story that acts as a double of the novel *Frankenstein*. The story surrounding the creation of *Frankenstein*, for the Hooblers, focuses on "the mystery of creation and its consequences, something that concerned—even, at times, tormented—all five of the people at Villa Diodati. In their outsized passions, their remarkable talents, their distorted personal lives, their never-satisfied yearning for love—they were all monsters" (323). By making this connection between literature and biography, *The Monsters* highlights the uncanny resonances between writing and life. It is the hyperbolic existence of the Diodati group that transforms their memory—and their history—into a group of monstrous occurrences. The Hoobler biography functions to produce that history, a history of hyperbole, into a gothic tale of monsters and ghosts. To explore the mysteries of creation, the Hooblers—perhaps unintentionally—emphasize the more mythic aspects of celebrity: the birth of *Frankenstein* out of an unnatural summer and a haunting dream, tragedies surrounding Mary's conception that

characterize the overall tenor of her life, and the obsessions of Byron, Polodori and Percy leading them fatefully to their deaths. The Hooblers portray literary celebrities as mythical creatures of tragedy prone to phatasmagorias and tied to prophecy.

The Monsters and *In Search for Frankenstein* foreground the part the uncanny plays in the creation of the literary past. The gothic elements in Florescu's intuitive treatment of the haunted summer use phantasmic association to provide a bridge between the more unrealistic aspects in Mary Shelley's introductory story and the historical artifacts that prove something in fact happened in 1816. The Hoobler biography appropriates the same historical artifacts and diary entries to trace a genealogy of the novel's curse upon its authors. In the hands of the biographer, mourning becomes part of the act of reading and writing history. The biographies use repetition, foreshadowing and doubling to suggest historical causation.

The strict separation between racy and sober history, by scholars interested in analyzing the contexts out of which literature emerged, reinforces the academic's uneasiness with the more uncanny aspects of exploring the past. While serious history rejects racy details in favor of the more serious artifacts populating academic research, it does so by favoring an ideology of academic productivity. It is the job of the literary historian to translate individual acts of mourning into statements that can heighten their individual level of prestige and perpetuate an industry filled with those interested in disseminating a productive academic conversation over literary studies. Professors tend to their graduate student flock by making sure their research is productive. Fans also reproduce, but this reproduction produces nothing but undisciplined enthusiasm (in the eyes of academics who are used to published articles and scholarly books as markers of a more scholarly productivity). The normalized productivity of the literary academic is contrasted, in this way, to the undisciplined enthusiasm of the fan interested in knowing the

racy details of their favorite celebrities. By dividing racy from sober academic history, and the serious historian from the one merely interested in lurid details, academics tell their fan-doubles to keep the hideous progeny of their intercourse in the closet.

Ken Russell and the Ghosts of Celebrity

Ken Russell's underappreciated 1987 film *Gothic* provides a useful example of a film straddling the line between sober and racy history. While heavily utilizing historical details to tell its story, Russell nevertheless crafts a tale more suited to the horror genre than proper literary history. The Diodati group is depicted as not constructing stories but conjuring monsters, contributing to the history of the occult rather than the history of letters. *Gothic* is campy, and overacted. Its juxtaposition of gothic elements onto historical fact verges on the sublime and the grotesque. Russell's film deconstructs the line separating gothic, racy memorialization and sober history, leaving its audiences—fan and academic alike—confused about the history surrounding the summer of 1816.

It is not difficult, in this context, to see why neither film critics nor Romanticists know what to do with Russell's campy invocation of the British Romantic period. Rick Albright's short review of the film written first for the NASSR listserv then published on the online journal *Romantic Circles*, not only condemns the film for its "twisted vision" that "does more than a little violence to the events of that fateful summer," but notes that to write a review of the film at all risks "being driven off the list." Albright's comment was probably tongue-in-cheek, but it also signals the amount of vitriol many Romanticists associate with Russell's film. Film critics were baffled by it. Donald J. Levitt called the film "talky without saying anything, unconvincing, and even lacking the self-indulgent filmmaker's usual energy." Levitt lambasted the film for its

historical inaccuracies, cheap soundtrack, and complete oversimplification of the reason Mary Shelley began work on *Frankenstein*.²⁸

The rejection of *Gothic* by Romanticists and film critics signal the investment both have in a sober theory of history and the proper representation of iconic literary figures. Russell's film oeuvre, in general, rejects both historical realism and proper representation. In a 2005 interview with John Tibbetts, Russell explains that it is the artistic side of the biopic that interests him. For Russell, the majority of biopics

seemed like nothing more than nonsense to me. I didn't associate them with art or music. You hear the word 'biopic' used a lot these days. It's become a clichéd term. I think some filmmakers think it's an easy thing to do, but it's not. Too often you never get a sense of the art, just people in costumes doddering around. I'm not so interested in the physicality of it all, but the spiritual, and poetic, and creative side of the subject. (40)

Russell has demonstrated his preference of the artistic side of the biopic over the historical and the physical in several of his features. In *The Devils* (1971), for example, Russell's use of Derek Jarman's starkly ahistorical sets emphasizes the entombment felt by the inhabitants of Loudun. Jarman and Russell forsake historical accuracy for providing a visceral sense of the mania surrounding the execution of Urbain Grandier. Russell's *Mahler* (1974) likewise foregoes historical realism and focuses instead on an allegorical and musical interpretation of the composer's life—structuring his biography around the themes of his music. *Lisztomania* (1975) chronicles the life of its titular character in a series of scenes that are akin to rock videos, and

²⁸ While the filmmaker is not entirely devoid of attention, recent criticism of Ken Russell is scarce. Notable exceptions include the work of John Tibbetts, about whom I will talk later, Barry Keith Grant's article "The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s," and Anna Powell's *Deleuze, Altered States, and Film*. Grant reads Russell's work in the 80s as a response to Thatcherism that "both embraces [...] and resists" its neo-conservatism" (183). Powell uses the opening scenes of Russell's film *Altered States* (1980) to explore Deleuze's film theory and articulate the experience of the cinematic as an alteration of consciousness. Russell was covered in a number of works from the 1970s including John Baxter's *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell*, Colin Wilson's *Ken Russell: A Director in Search of a Hero*, Joseph Gomez's *Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator*, a collection of essays edited by Thomas R. Atkins titled simply *Ken Russell*, Diane Rosenfeldt's *Ken Russell: a guide to references and resources*, Gene Philips's *Ken Russell*, and Ken Hanke's *Ken Russell's Films*. Joseph Lanza has completed a new biography of Russell called *Phallic Frenzy: Ken Russell and his Films* which provides little criticism of individual movies, while providing interesting insight into their production.

climaxes in a vision of its virtuous rock star Liszt dive-bombing the vampiric anti-Semitic Wagner into oblivion with his angelic fighter plane powered by the harmonious melodies of past lovers.

Tibbetts has shown that such eccentric visions of the artistic possibilities of the documentary and biopic genres caused strife in Russell's early career at the BBC. For a documentary on *Prokofiev* (1961), Russell wanted to use a real dancer to illustrate the power of the composer's music. While the BBC allowed Russell to take scenes from Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1927) to add to the film, they refused to have a living actor in the documentary. Later on, Tibbetts recounts, an actor was allowed to portray the aging composer Bartok in a documentary with the same name. The actor, however, could not voice any lines. It wasn't until 1965's *The Debussy Film* that Russell was allowed to use an actor to indirectly portray the composer Claude Debussy. In order to get around the BBC's reticence to use actors, Tibbetts notes, Russell used Oliver Reed to portray an actor portraying Debussy (167-8). By making a film about film, Russell injects the fictional into the historical, but does so to protect his film from the BBC's injunctions against using fiction in documentary features. *The Debussy Film* replaces the haunted voice of the dead composer with Oliver Reed's voice, splitting the past from its source and highlighting the dependence of performance on the construction of historical narratives.

Gothic merges Russell's interest in artistry with his concern about the filmic production of history, but does so in a way that provides a critique of historical realism. Russell's film links the compulsive pathology of mimetically reconstructing the past—embraced by both the fan and the scholar—with the mourning of the celebrity poet. It also deploys the uncanny to provide a critique of literary reproduction: the sense that producing literary works will secure the perpetual

memory of the author. By analyzing the relationship between the image of the literary celebrity, tourism, and memory, the film illustrates the place of mythology in the construction of history. By meditating on the uncanny nature of celebrity painting and portraiture, Russell suggests that the dissemination of the celebrity's haunted image invades the historical foundation of any realist representation of the past. Rather than being an expose of the haunted summer of 1816 as a historical event, *Gothic* analyzes the desire to enter the private lives of literary celebrities and gain control of their afterlives.

Russell doubles accepted histories by framing his film neither with academics discussing the importance of the haunted summer to the publication of *Frankenstein*, nor with the authors themselves, but instead with tourists fantasizing about what could have happened in Byron's home in 1816. The framing of Russell's film around tourism allows him to place the entire film in the realm of fantasy and desire, demonstrating how both impact the construction of literary history. The first scene focuses on a series of overlapping gazes moving from a house rented by Byron's fans, to the Villa Diodati and back onto a lake surrounding the villa. The quick shots produce a rhythm of gaze, expectation, and the unknown that frames its analysis of mourning and desire. Initially, we are met with Byron's fans dressed in drab, monotonous clothing. Their only source of excitement stems from the chance to see Byron emerging from his home. Russell's first shot focuses on a small group of fans with their tour guide. Before long, Russell cuts away to a second story of the house, showing that there are many more who long to see and to be intimate with Byron. The fans are extremely important to *Gothic*, and they show up in several of the scenes as an almost invisible background to the events happening inside. Russell's use of costume in this first scene emphasizes the lack of individuality among the fans. The fans

search for this individuality in Byron who, as we move further into the film, is always portrayed in colors contrasting sharply with the background.

Russell's first few shots align the audience with the desires and the frustrations of the fans. While Russell returns to the first establishing shot again and again, portraying the fans taking turns looking into the telescope, he suggests that the true gaze depicted in the film is that of the audience itself. This audience is locked into the shot by Russell's use of iris shots to simulate the experience of looking into the telescope. Russell's use of the two iris shots allows the audience to identify themselves with the tourists at the beginning. These shots, along with the seeming vacuity of the tourists and their drab clothing, make it quite apparent that their only place in the film is to serve as a stand-in for the film audience. While the substance of the story focuses on the Diodati group, it is always framed by the inconsequentiality of the fans. In a later scene, Polodori briefly mentions the fans and puts two champagne glasses to his eyes to suggest their telescopes. Shelley remarks that they should not be "wicked," due to the fact that the group is being watched. Byron replies that they should, on the contrary, "blind them with their wickedness." The presence of the fans in the first scene actually impacts the events at Diodati, and the reality of what happened in Byron's house is inextricable from its existence as an object of the fan's gaze. The tension between the central story and its framing device serves as a backbone to the events of the film.

This tension has several consequences in this first scene. As Russell locks the audience's gaze with the iris shots, he also provides us with a shot of one of the fans looking through the telescope. The telescope juts into an extreme close up, with its shaft protruding back into the eye of one of the fans (Figure 4-1).



Figure 4-1. Erecting the Telescope (2:35).

The phallic nature of the telescope is hardly difficult to notice. It is just off center in the shot, and the two-thirds profile highlights its length and its erect position. A particularly desperate tour guide takes advantage of the sexually charged situation by placing his hand onto one of the fans and lightly grazing her breast. He says “bedroom, top right,” rolling the final “r,” and licks his lips as the female fan looks for Byron. The telescope pierces the Byron home and leads us, via a cut from the shot of the fans, to the bedroom. As the audience is aligned with the iris shot, the fan with a sexual desire to pierce the Byron bedroom, and the tour-guide with a desperate desire to leech off of the mania of the fan, Russell shows us that the desire to understand Byron’s inner life is related to a desire to penetrate him. The celebrity is made into a passive recipient of the fan’s sexual energy, its ultimate desire being to physicalize the largely image-mediated experience of Byron. The fans want to make Byron flesh and dominate him with their phallic gaze.

While we do not see the fans again until the final scene of the film (this time in their twentieth-century incarnation), the first scene provides the audience with a disjunction between the image-like phantom of Byron available for commercial consumption and the “reality” of

Byron as an ultimately inaccessible figure. Byron's very inaccessibility focalizes the rest of the film and titillates the desire of the fans to truly know Byron. The gaze impacts the actions of the Diodati group later on in the film, yet it can never adequately fix the authors. Gazing gives the audience nothing but a string of automatons, actors, and stand-ins for Byron himself.

The second iris shot features a figure in the window of Byron's bedroom that acts as his first stand-in (Figure 4-2). Presumably, this figure is Byron.



Figure 4-2. Byron?! (2:40).

Anyone who sees the rest of the film, however, knows it is actually John Polodori: Byron's doctor and biographer. Russell replaces Byron with Polodori in this shot to place the tour-guide's knowledge of the poet in doubt. For all his posturing, the tour guide (like us) does not really know who Byron is. Russell's iris shots of Byron's bedroom also suggest that the window is a portal to Byron's world. Deborah Lutz has suggested that Byron acts culturally as an unbounded subjectivity "containing everything" and thus "can decimate all of it, hence dwelling in and interiorizing nothingness in all its vastness" (57).²⁹ The expectation of seeing Byron eclipses

²⁹ Lutz refers, specifically, to the structure of the *Giaour*, and to the sense that the Byronic hero fails to encounter otherness as a traveler without interiorizing that otherness.

everything for the fans in the first scene. Byron acts to exteriorize the self, to transform the world into “Byron,” and to thus destroy otherness by focusing all desire upon himself. By replacing Byron in this first glimpse into the bedroom, Russell transforms the power of his cultural aura into a flat image that can be inhabited by anyone—including Polodori. The lack of knowledge about Byron’s appearance furthermore throws the truth of the entire film into doubt, and buttresses Russell’s interest in artistic flamboyancy as a tool to investigate history rather than be bound by the cultural power of Byron’s celebrity biography.

The disjunction between Byron and his image is repeated in the next shot. The camera focuses on a close-up of a figure’s back looking outside the portal/window, with a dark high contrast between the inside of Diodati and the lake outside (Figure 4-3). The confusion of the



Figure 4-3. Byron’s back? (2:44).

earlier shot is heightened by a strange voice who says “Oh look Polly, what a pleasant surprise! Unexpected visitors.” While Polly could refer to the parrot sitting by the mysterious figure, it could also refer to “Polodori.” “Polly” was a common nickname for the doctor and is frequently used by Byrne’s Byron in the film. Yet the voice sounds like neither Polodori nor Byron. The camera fixes on this mysterious figure, with a more mysterious voice, and then zooms toward a

boat on the lake. This boat contains the other central characters of the story: Claire Clairmont and Percy and Mary Shelley. It is the figure's monocle that acts as a zoom lens, providing a diegetic complement to Russell's camera.

The lens, in this first scene, mediates knowledge of the events occurring inside Diodati. This scene transforms historical knowledge into spectacle, literary celebrities into images pierced and then consumed by telescopic lenses, and the substance of history into an imagistic phantom whose reality is fueled by fantasy. Getting to the central events of the story involves moving through a set of gazes. By utilizing the confusion of these gazes, the first scene radically questions the realism of all events occurring in the movie and presents the knowledge of Diodati by the fans as always indirect and incomplete.

The final scene inverts some of the assumptions of the first scene, but nevertheless recuperates the emphasis on incomplete knowledge that frames Russell's film. The visual fantasies of the first scene are replaced with tourists whose identities are unknown, who listen to a bodiless voice, and who shuffle easily into and out of Byron's home. While the fans of the first scene travel from Britain to see Byron and to be close to his celebrity, the tourists of the final scene visit Diodati as an empty tomb. The fantasy of making Byron flesh is replaced with an overwhelming sense of mourning that hollows out Diodati as a space of fantasy. The fan yearns for Byron's presence, while the tourist memorializes his lost presence. Before moving to the present day, Russell presents us with a final, pensive, mid close-up shot of the Diodati group. The mock happiness of the group contrasts with Mary's visions of their deaths in an earlier scene. Byron assures Mary, naively, that "ghosts do not come out in the day." Fading in the transition between scenes and becoming the very ghosts that Byron represses with his delusional happiness, the image of the Diodati group gives way to a modern day version of the same shot.

Russell replaces the figures of the poets with those of tourists visiting the villa in the late twentieth century. He also uses a continuity shot to bridge the past with the present, and to seemingly erase all of the phantasmic problems he introduced in the first scene.

The final shots present the same problems as the first scene. This time, the tourists are largely invisible and the scene meditates on the disappearance of the poets. Instead of iris shots, Russell shoots several points of view moving between a ship floating on the lake surrounding Byron's home and the fields in front of the villa. In each one of these shots, we are separated from the identities of the tourists inhabiting the scene. The first shot of the tourists shows them from the back as they move toward Byron's home. Russell's second shot of the tourists views them from the side as they take photographs of the scene. The third and final shot depicts the tourists from the first shot turning around and waving at the ship. These figures are, however, so far in the background of Russell's shot that their faces are completely obscured. Instead of an unknown object of fantasy viewed by subjects who are completely known, Russell's final scene depicts a Diodati that has been completely opened and saturated by the tourist fantasies of the first scene. These fantasies are made available to faceless tourists who approach its history as a speech delivered by a bodiless voice.

The megaphone acts as the mediating object in this final scene, emphasizing the vacuity of the historical knowledge it relays. The sense of visual alienation experienced in the first scene by the tourists acting as living spectators is replaced by a machine whose voice tells history as a story ready for quick consumption by the tourists. It delivers this history in a quaky voice-over that summarizes the fates of the Diodati group:

Three years after that fateful night, Mary's son William was dead. Two more of the Shelley children later died at birth. Shelley himself drowned at the gulf of Spezia in 1822. That same year Allegra, Claire's daughter by Byron, also died. Byron survived her by two years, dying of fever in the Greek war. His biographer, Dr. Polodori, committed suicide in

London. Eight years after the night at Diodati, only Claire and Mary remained alive. But something created that night 170 years ago lives on, still haunting us to this day: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The simple, almost parodic voice listlessly names off a series of traumatic events, gliding over the horror of death with a disconcerting apathy.

As the voice valorizes Mary Shelley's novel, the camera cuts away from the tour ship onto a mid-close up shot of a dead baby floating under the lake surrounding Byron's home. This is Mary's stillborn William, a figure appearing visually or alluded to several times in the movie. The camera lingers on the dead baby, and then zooms in for a final shot (Figure 4-4).



Figure 4-4. The corpse never decays (1:24:00).

The stillborn baby represents a kind of death passed over by the majority of proclamations about death in the movie and by the distracted tourist culture whose variety of gazes cannot look directly at the baby. Interestingly, Russell's invocation of the stillborn child is historically inaccurate. Mary had no stillborn child. Her first child, as Anne Mellor points out in her

biography, was born two months premature (31). She survived a little under a month. It is this child Mary refers to in the introduction of *Frankenstein*.

However, the inaccuracy of Russell's use of the stillborn baby has larger implications for the film's questions about literary persistence and survival after death. The voice-over by the disembodied tour-guide suggests that the monster in the novel persisted despite the deaths of the Diodati group. This reference to persistence mocks the faith both Percy and Byron express about the immortality afforded to poets through their writing. In the dinner scene at the beginning of the film, Byron mentions his obsession with imagining the changes death would make on the faces of his lovers. Russell then cuts to a close-up of Claire with Byron in the background. Byron squeezes Claire's cheeks, forcing the noodles she had previously been eating to spew out of her mouth (Figure 4-5).



Figure 4-5. Immortality in Putrefaction (10:01).

The noodles reflect the leeches and the worms whose presence signals death throughout the film. Worms are crawling on the face of the dead knight feared by Mary in her imagination during the reading of *Phantasmagoria*. Polodori replaces the rice in Byron's late night snack with leeches, much to the horror of the poet. And in the final scene Mary has a vision of Byron's death,

leeches used to bleed him crawling all over his body. The worm and the leech threaten the poet's pristine account of immortality. The Byronic poet feeds upon the health and beauty of the young and transforms their features of health into those of death and decay. "Immortality is for poets," Byron proclaims, looking at Percy in an unvoiced moment of literary solidarity.

Russell's choice to close the movie with the still dead, but perpetually preserved, baby forces its powerful image into this discourse of survival. The baby signals the flotsam of literary creation, the remains of the dead author haunting the discourse of immortality voiced by Byron in the past, and the literary tourism of the present. The dead baby is the refuse of literary creation. As an inert object, the baby complicates many of the hermeneutics of memory presented in the film. In the opening scene, memory is a product of the gaze, film, and, tangentially, photography. In the closing scene, memory is mediated by the monological voice of the bodiless tour guide. The preserved corpse floating at the end of the film weighs memory down and anchors it to the stillness of death. The perfect immortality promised as the product of literary creation has turned to its uncanny opposite: a being who dies at the moment of birth, whose death is its birth. The child, as the stillborn offspring of Mary, is revealed as the repressed double of literary culture. To create the most reproductive book in literary history, Mary's first child had to be stillborn and encrypted into the characters and sentences making up the novel. While the tourists seek a passing knowledge of the literary past, the stillborn baby is passed over as the effluvia of literary culture: the unencountered undead excess of literary writing.

It is the confrontation with this excess, or repressions of that confrontation, that structures the logic of Russell's attitude toward historical realism in the film. As he interpenetrates biography and history, Russell also transforms the telescope and the painted portrait into the photograph and the film camera by suggesting that the canny aspects of painting become the

uncanny aspects of film and vice versa. Russell portrays the camera as an extension of nineteenth-century portraiture, linking the dissemination of celebrity during the Romantic period with its manifestation in the film celebrity of the twentieth-century.³⁰ By focusing so much on the juxtaposition of painted image with that of film, Russell is able to displace *Gothic* from claims to historical accuracy and focus instead on the visual production of celebrity and its ties to death and mourning.

According to Laura Mulvey, the invention of film and photography was closely linked to the rise of spiritualism and the popularity of the stage magician in the late 19th century. Photography provided people with the opportunity to view loved ones after their death, which profoundly defied the laws of nature and suggested to some people that the dead could persist after their demise:

The uncanny and other of the phantasmagorias, in which technology and lingering superstition had been so closely entwined, was recast in rather different terms. The photograph actually preserved, mechanically, a moment of life stopped and then held in perpetuity. [...] [T]he photograph was the descendent of the 'natural magic' shows of Kircher's and della Porta's camera obscura. (45-6)

Photography and film both conspired to provide an illusion of life where life had ceased to be. While the realism of the photographic image allowed it to give the impression of life, the photograph also produced—as Kojin Karatani has argued—a fundamental split in the image produced by the photograph and the sense of a self-image existing independently of its representation.³¹ Photography divided life and its image from themselves in the act of preservation.

³⁰ For a good consideration of the role portraiture played in the dissemination of celebrity in the nineteenth century, see Tom Mole's account in *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*.

³¹ See Karatani's *Transcritique*, where he uses Kantian terminology to argue that the photograph's claim to objectivity is much more severe than that of either looking at a painted portrait or seeing one's reflection.

The audience's introduction to Byron in Russell's film underscores this splitting of the image from itself, suggesting that painted art has the same power as photography to inspire the sense of doubling. Russell's first shot of Byron places him in front of his own portrait. Byron is doubled, with the painted portrait acting to preserve his image (Figure 4-6).



Figure 4-6. Byron on Byron/Byrne on Byrne (5:14).

The portrait hanging on the wall is, oddly enough for the professional Romanticist, not painted to look like the historical Byron but instead reflects the features of Gabriel Byrne. For audiences who do not know Byron's image intimately—namely those who do not study Byron—the portrait would simply confirm the authenticity of Byrne's portrayal of the poet. It seems, on one level, to heighten the overall realism of the film. For those who already know Byron's many portraits; however, Russell's decision to base the image on Byrne's features only confirms that Byrne looks nothing like Byron. The unveiling of Byrne's image on what would otherwise be considered Byron's portrait, thus divides the audience in two. Those looking for historical

Even though there is always a photographer, his or her subjectivity is less influential than the painter's, for there is an ineradicable, mechanical distance in the photographic image. Strange as it may be, we cannot see our faces (read thing-in-itself), except as an image reflected in the mirror (read phenomenon). And only thanks to the advent of photography, did we learn that fact. (48)

accuracy are, in the first five minutes of the film, disappointed. Those who, on the other hand, are already convinced of its reality as a guide into history, look past the problems and enjoy the movie as a literary fantasy.

The faulty image of Byrne's Byron sketches a history divided and alienated from itself, providing the dark underside of the "ontological conundrums" argued by film theorists such as D.N. Rodowick as a primary locus of photography's uncanniness. Photography, according to Rodowick, is a transcription of history while painting is merely a representation of the past. For him, following a well-worn tradition of scholarship beginning with Roland Barthes, the photograph fixes a duration of time onto a photosensitive plate and, as such, remains a physical and indexical artifact of that duration. The photograph is a direct artifact of the past it depicts (Rodowick 55-6). Russell's disdain for historical realism is expressed, on the other hand, by his utilization of painting as an anchorless archive of a past that perhaps never existed. Detached from its original state of being as history, painting is unmoored by Russell to invade the realms of the living.

Russell depicts the power of painting in the film by forming each of the Diodati group into portrait-like poses and merging painted portraits with several of his shots. The first encounter between the Shelleys and Polodori, shown soon after we see Byron for the first time, displays the latter's awkwardness and his desire to be the subject of a celebrity portrait. Polodori displays an austerity that is quickly juxtaposed by Russell with a goat—one of Byron's animal menagerie—walking in front of the troubled physician. When Percy dies, Russell forms a shot of his cremation that recalls Louis Fournier's 1889 painting "The Funeral of Shelley."



Figure 4-7. Shelley's Cinematic Death. (1:18:55).

The portraits presented in the background of Russell's movie, constructed out of individual shots of the camera, provide a curious conjunction of the diegetic world in which *Gothic* resides and the historical images it continually displays. The fact that the images lead to no better understanding of the history surrounding the events at Diodati show that Russell has little interest in the concerns of living history. The proliferation of portraits, in fact, forces the Diodati group into a confrontation with death and sexuality, deflating the belief of Percy and Byron in an immortality secured by history and transmitted through their literary offspring. Russell's parade of aesthetic doubles suggests that these pictures might not produce any history at all. Literary portraits are sterile in the film, and literary history a parade of discarded remains signifying nothing.

The scene involving Mary's confrontation with Fuseli's *The Nightmare* is the visual apotheosis of Russell's merging of photography with painting. As Maryanne Ward argues, the themes of Fuseli's painting have analogues in *Frankenstein* and served to inspire Elizabeth's death scene in the novel. Russell, however, abandons this historical information entirely and introduces Mary to the painting when she arrives at Byron's villa. Several scenes are shot with the Fuseli painting hanging harmlessly in the background, completely separate from the events occurring to the Diodati group. Yet only when Mary confronts Byron's libertine sexuality does it become central to the film's narrative. The Fuseli painting penetrates the diegetic boundaries of Russell's film and threatens to dominate the orderly unfolding of filmic temporality with a completely unproductive sexuality suggesting a threat both to Mary's conservative attitude toward lovemaking and the promise of immortality through the literary work as autographic offspring.

Russell begins the scene with Mary attending to her sister, who had been overcome in a séance. The camera cuts to a close-up of Mary flipping through a book of erotica. Thunder crashes in the background, and Russell employs sinister music to suggest Mary's growing sense of unease. The film then cuts to an extreme close-up of a sketch of Byron, inserted into the book. Mary focuses on the Byron sketch for a moment, then removes the drawing to reveal the lurid, erotic picture of a man pleasuring a woman by fondling her (Figure 4-8). The woman is stretched out on the bed and the man towers over her. She gently caresses Byron's picture, then quickly shuts the book.



Figure 4-8. Byron as Fuseli (40:04).

Russell shifts between close-ups of an uneasy Mary and a long shot of Fuseli's painting, slowing zooming into a closer shot of the image (Figure 4-9). Curiously enough, the Fuseli image is not the original, but instead a reproduction made for the movie. Even while suggesting the uncanny aura of Fuseli's painting, Russell provides us with a stand-in, a double, a reproduction. The posture of the woman lying prone on a bed, and an imp towering atop her, reflect those in the erotica book. The camera then focuses entirely on the imp before quickly shifting to a shot of Mary lying on the bed in the same position as the woman in Fuseli's painting (Figure 4-9).



Figure 4-9. Painting haunts film in A) Russell's reproduction of Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (40:48). B) Film version of Fuseli in Mary's dream (40:56).

The imp stands in for Byron's sexuality as a seductive force of annihilation. Instead of conceiving a baby from Percy and raising it to adulthood, Mary is overcome by the imp's power, subjected to his whims, and is completely powerless to halt his advances. The imp's power to dominate reflects Byron's power over women, a power Mary felt while reading the erotica book. Furthermore, its demonic and uncanny nature reflects—at least for Mary—Byron's refusal to claim his familial progeny: a dark nothingness at the center of his distinctly unproductive sexuality. Contrasting with Mary's inability to raise a child and her desperate attempt to bring that child back from the dead, Byron is portrayed in the movie actively rejecting the child growing in the pregnant Claire.³² In one particularly intense scene, Byron visits the prone Claire and gives her cunnilingus while Polodori stabs his hand with a nail in an adjoining room. Byron

³² This characterization of the male as transgressive and the female as more conservative is a fairly recurring trope in Russell's films. Even where the female is more transgressive, Russell's films appropriate them into more conservative roles by the end of the film. In *Crimes of Passion* (1984), Kathleen Turner plays a woman who has a prostitute secret identity named China Blue. Yet her transgressive sexuality is clearly outmatched by the Reverend Peter Shayne (played by Anthony Perkins) who is a preacher driven to sexual violence and who carries a sharp metallic vibrator he nicknames "the Superman." In *Lair of the White Worm* (1988), feminine sexuality is focused around a mythological creature named the D'ampton Worm. Hugh Grant plays the masculine aristocrat who is charged with killing the worm. While the worm uses feminine sexuality to charm her victims, Grant's masculinity is forced to destroy the threat to heterosexuality the worm represents.

emerges from pleasuring Claire with blood trickling down his lips, suggesting that he had performed an oral abortion. Both the director and the audience, however, know that Claire is still pregnant. Russell portrays one of Mary's visions focusing on the future Allegra dying in a convent years later. Yet it is the suggestion that Byron cares very little for his biological offspring and is more concerned with his literary reputation that forms the most distinct contrast between him and Mary. Byron represents to Mary a sexuality that is not productive and leads to nothing. Fuseli's painting, as an extension of Byron's nihilistic sexuality, mocks Mary's stillborn child and threatens the heteronormative production of children with nothingness and death.³³

The painting also reduces literary history to pure gothic spectacle, as Mary is forced to enter the fictional, flat and spectacular world of the painting and is held hostage by the composition. The depth of the film's claim to material indexicality and the historian's claim to historical indexicality are both challenged by the now uncanny state of the painting as pure, flat, spectacle. Martin Myrone argues that Fuseli's work became popular in the late eighteenth century due to its ability to instantaneously attract the eye with spectacle reducing "the exercise of aesthetic judgment of a kind of dream-state" which "goes beyond—and potentially undermines—the conventional subjective experience of narrative" (308-10).³⁴ Fuseli's work, according to Myrone, was known to send people into a state similar to those of the incoherent spectacles embodied in the Phantasmagoria. Instead of deep contemplation, Fuseli's painting instantaneously excited the eye with its grotesque creatures and lighting effects reflecting the

³³ In one of the most obviously queer moments of the film, Percy Shelley kisses Lord Byron after defending him from Mary. While heterosexuality is reserved for women, homosexuality in the film is an exclusively male enterprise.

³⁴ Myrone's essay "Henry Fuseli and Gothic Spectacle" also reveals that the artist was frequently referred to as a "wizard" in a cultural climate that feared the reduction of art to pure spectacle. In a particularly interesting episode, Brooke Boothby—a man who owned Fuseli's *The Nightmare*—"organized an elaborate gothic masquerade [...] which involved the Swiss painter's donning a wizard's costume, taking up a wand, and tramping around the woods to participate in a series of carefully planned adventures" (309).

exaggerated, anti-realist scene descriptions in gothic novels (295). In Russell's film, Fuseli's painting suspends both cinematic and historic temporality by collapsing one in the other. Mid-shots of Fuseli's composition mimic the gothic spectacle of *The Nightmare* on film, replacing the painted composition with a filmic take. In a brief moment in Mary's nightmare, it is no longer possible to distinguish the artistic from the historical, dream-state from waking-state, or life from death. Russell's shot recreating Fuseli's composition places the entire film in the realm of horrific spectacle, ignoring the demands of history and realism. Or, rather, the shot reduces film indexicality to just another gothic spectacle.

Russell's sequence of shots in this scene halts the proper experience of cinematic temporality by utilizing Fuseli's painting as a gateway between desire, fantasy, and reproduction. The diegetic universe of *Gothic* tests the desire of Mary to propagate, both physically and literarily, by marginalizing the discourse of both to brief moments in the film. None of the authors mention writing anything until the end of the film, in which Polodori and Mary engage in one tellingly short exchange about what they might write. Before the group decides to use their imagination to conjure a monster in the early scenes of *Gothic*, Byron mentions that he does not want to write a ghost story at all. Polodori says that it is obvious Byron is bored with poetry. Byron quips back, "No sir, I am bored with life." Byron's aggressive response is a tad disingenuous. The entire group, like Russell himself, seems bored with poetry and history. Russell provides no scene of artistic production, no brief shot depicting Byron setting pen to paper. Mary is never shown even jotting down the notes that would later bring *Frankenstein* to life. A film purporting to examine the reasons why Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* depicts no writing occurring at all.

It is in this sense that the fans and the tourists have their revenge on the academic in Russell's film. By placing the story of Diodati in the context of tourism, Russell detaches its discourse from sanctioned academic forms of history, creating a narrative that uncannily exposes the fantasies of an audience that—for all its pretensions to the sobriety of history—still takes pleasure in the racy story of 1816. As an unapologetic double to accepted academic history, *Gothic* threatens the mimetic construction of literary history by questioning its discourses of reproduction. It suggests that the author produces literary offspring and that this fact of reproduction, along with the social and political contexts in which this reproduction occurred, forms literary history as such. Russell provides very little to academics whose fantasies cause them to pursue a more intimate relationship with the lives of dead authors. As a filmmaker all too aware of the limitations imposed upon him by individuals valorizing history in the form of the 1960s BBC documentary films, Russell basks in the drunken Dionysian revelry of biopics and documentaries that signify and produce nothing but enthusiastic mayhem and celebrity spectacle.

The Struggle for Academic Realism

I have argued that academic realism rejects the gothic nature of Russell's film in order to define itself as a productive genre apart from the potent yet sterile chaos of popular and mass connections to the Romantic celebrity. Academic realism is an extension of the literary idealism voiced by Byron in Russell's film: both seek to demonstrate their special connection to literature by entering a discourse of reproduction. Academic realists point to critical productivity as a marker of virility. Literary idealists point to their writing as carrying on their memory and providing for their immortality. Now I examine how the bad academic, the double of the figure demonstrating a special connection to the literary past, threatens the discourse of reproduction and connection embodied in academic realism.

The controversy surrounding John Lauritsen's publication in 2007 of *The Man Who Wrote Frankenstein* challenged the special connection of the literary academic to the dead due to the author's lack of a fundamental post-graduate degree in English. Lauritsen is a maverick in the gay rights community who has suggested that AIDS is not caused by the HIV virus, that AZT is toxic and should not be prescribed to AIDS patients, and that butyl and isobutyl nitrate (known on the street as "poppers") could cause Kaposi's Sarcoma. In his book on *Frankenstein*, Lauritsen is equally provocative, arguing that Percy Shelley wrote the novel. Lauritsen suggests that Mary Shelley could not have written *Frankenstein* due to her young age, her lack of a formal education, and what Lauritsen sees as the inferiority of her other novels.

The truth of Lauritsen's thesis is not important to my study here. The suggestion that Percy Shelley had written *Frankenstein* is not particularly new. Walter Scott, for instance, sensed Percy Shelley's language in the novel when he wrote his review in 1818. It is largely accepted that Percy adopted a marginal role in providing certain phrases to Mary when writing the first draft. Charles Robinson, in a roundtable discussion with Lauritsen and Neil Freistat, said that manuscript evidence suggests that at least "4,000 of the words were Percy Shelley's." Percy is widely accepted amongst Romanticists as a collaborator in Mary's first book. Yet it is also clear, from Robinson's analysis, further literary forensics done by Freistat and the extra-textual statements made by Percy and Lord Byron, that Mary wrote most of the novel.³⁵

More important is the challenge Lauritsen's book poses to the academy's special connection to the ghosts of the past in the form of academic realism and its ability to mold the next generation of scholars. Lauritsen argues in the book that so many academics still assume

³⁵ Charles Robinson says "[t]here are probably two dozen references extra-textually where Byron says it's Mary's novel, Claire Clairmont says it's Mary's novel, Leigh Hunt says it's Mary's novel, Marianne Hunt says it's Mary's novel. So with all of that evidence, the extra-textual, I think it's very hard to argue otherwise that it was written by Percy with only minimal intervention by Mary Shelley."

Frankenstein was written by Mary Shelley because they demonstrate an “inability to read—an inability which, unfortunately, is all too common in academia, even among tenured Professors of English literature” (26). If they open the book at all, Lauritsen suggests, academics do not have the subtlety or the care to read the text as it was originally intended. Camille Paglia, herself a controversial figure in the academic community, called Lauritsen’s book “important not only for its audacious theme but for the devastating portrait it draws of the insularity and turgidity of the academic community.” She added that she hopes the book “will inspire ambitious graduate students and young faculty to strike blows for truth in our mired profession, paralyzed by convention and fear.” Paglia sees *The Man Who wrote Frankenstein* as an opportunity for graduate students to overthrow their overbearing parents. Lauritsen and Paglia emerge from this episode as twin harbingers of academic extinction: one threatens to separate academics from the special connection they have with the past by questioning the authorial voice inhabiting *Frankenstein*, the other from the special connection they have with the future by calling upon graduate students to overthrow their conventional mentors.

The combined threat of Lauritsen and Paglia resulted in vitriolic reactions to *The Man Who Wrote Frankenstein*. Most of these reactions, like Paglia’s review, form their criticisms from the impact such a text might have on the academic community. Germaine Greer is particularly critical when she suggests that Lauritsen really hates radical feminists for silencing the discourse of gay literature. For Greer, the idea that feminism displaces gay literature “is an odd interpretation of the fact that women’s studies is now gender studies and that queer theory is on every syllabus, but some people are never satisfied.” Academia one-ups its challenge from Lauritsen by the very fact of its institutional being. Since queer theory exists, and queer theory appropriates everything from feminism to gay literature, then Lauritsen is now less politically

progressive and less relevant than his doubles in academia because he hasn't adopted queer theory over and above gay literature studies. Gay literature studies interrupts an academic conversation that has already moved past whatever concerns Lauritsen may have over the representation of gay authors in literary studies.

Jonathan Gross's review from *The Common Reader* engages in a more detailed textual argument against Lauritsen, but he nevertheless frames his critique around the question of Lauritsen's credentials and from the perspective of revisiting the dead. Paglia, after all, got a degree from Yale and Greer from Cambridge. They are

in a different league than Lauritsen, whose profession is market research. After attacking AIDS researchers, he has now lighted upon college professors. So he beats the dead horse of literary attribution, turning his attention to the morally dubious task of disseminating (or is it marketing?) faulty information. (9)

Lauritsen, according to Gross, injects the specter of marketing into the pristine environment of academic scholarship. By linking marketing to faulty information, Gross suggests that Lauritsen's background in market research threatens the objectivity of academic scholarship with the corrupting influence of capitalism. Lauritsen is, furthermore, occupied with topics that are dead to Gross. Gross's review characterizes Lauritsen as, again, interrupting an ongoing academic conversation with an outdated topic. This time the figure of the dead horse injects a more gothic element into Lauritsen's challenge. As an image of interruption, the faulty information bound up in the dead horse haunts an ongoing academic conversation over the meaning of Mary Shelley's novel. To beat a dead horse is to bring back the dead academic past, to uncover buried topics and dead subjects and to challenge a separation between what is accepted as productive literary scholarship and what is considered the decaying corpse of a once relevant conversation entombed in the past.

I do not mean to suggest that academics should take Lauritsen seriously or start referring to Percy Shelley as the author of *Frankenstein*. Lauritsen's book signifies, for me, the spectral challenge of the bad academic who impedes the progress of scholarship by resurrecting topics and political positions long thought to be buried. In contrast to Greenblatt's academic who maintains a renewable and special contact to the dead by contributing to the academic memorialization of the Romantic celebrity, Lauritsen's academic reanimates a reactionary specter, a dead critical horse, and implies that current English professors have neither the ability nor the care to attend to the literary past. The realism of the good academic attempting to secure a connection to the dead and renew that connection by inspiring new students is displaced by the gothic intrusion of a bad academic peddling the debris of outdated academic topics and seducing students with visions of overthrowing their academic parents. But these distinctions never really hold up. Lauritsen's bad academic has realist desires to establish a good connection with the dead just as Greenblatt's good academic does not ignore the possibility of a bad connection. Mary's historically inaccurate stillborn child, then, reveals not only the dead refuse underlying the discourse of literary production, but also establishes a connection to the dead Romantic celebrity that is constituted by junk, interruption, and unwanted or unauthorized ghosts.

CHAPTER 5
INCORPORATING THE ROMANTIC CELEBRITY: LITERARY ENCRYPTION, MARY'S
MELANCHOLY, AND SHELLEY JACKSON'S *PATCHWORK GIRL*

While *Frankenstein* enjoys one of the most famous literary afterlives in popular culture, Mary Shelley's own appearances in film and contemporary fiction are not nearly as numerous as her creation. With the exception of short roles in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990), appearances in films depicting the Haunted Summer of 1816, and a few biopics about her seemingly more famous friends and lovers, Mary Shelley hardly appears at all in popular films. The only explicit biopic about her life, *Mary Shelley* (2004), was produced as a documentary for Canadian television and never released in either the United States or Great Britain. In Mary Shelley's case, at least, the creator is not nearly as important as the creation.

The popular marginalization of Mary recalls the sexist approach to Mary's afterlife in the nineteenth century. Described most often as the "husband of Percy," or the "daughter of Godwin," Mary appears as a domestic figure sacrificing her name and her place in literary history for the preservation of someone else's memory. Henry Weekes's commissioned sculpture of Mary Shelley cradling a dead Percy Shelley in a pose akin to Michaelangelo's *Pieta* exemplifies Mary's secondary role. Mary is pictured leaning in, grabbing and cradling Percy's dead body. The poet's dead body occupies the center of the sculpture's composition and physically pushes Mary's body aside. Mary is pictured as a domestic mother for a masculine Romantic tradition, whose support for the more famous male poets marginalizes her own celebrity.

While academic criticism is focused on envisioning a Mary Shelley who is not simply the wife of a dead poet, the figure of a silent and invisible caretaker of literature remains attractive to those who see the decline of literature's centrality in English Departments. Marjorie Perloff has

argued that the contemporary English Department suffers from a lack of good caretakers for the literary tradition. She notes that interdisciplinarity has become “other disciplinarity,” and suggests that literature has become little more than a window “through which we see the world beyond the text” (654-5). Perloff imagines literature as a transparent figure for the content of other disciplines. To preserve literary studies as a discipline, Perloff argues that we should abandon our attachment to other fields and learn the “theoretical, historical and critical” foundations of literature (662). By suggesting we abandon our attraction to the exotic lands of other disciplines, Perloff simply replaces the idea of literature’s transparency with the belief that critics should learn the transparent foundations of the discipline. This suspiciously neo-conservative move would replace Mary on Weekes’s sculpture with the literary critic, who would now become an invisible and ghostly support to a literature made transparent by the disappearance of the interdisciplinary corpus. The promise of a return to literature acts only to turn the academic into a ghostly support for a fantasized disciplinary identity.

Perloff, furthermore, imagines literature as an institutional manifestation of what I call in this chapter literary encryption: a collection of literary ruins conjured into a cryptic body whose closure attempts to secure the disciplinary memory of the dead against annihilation. The crypt, according to Abraham and Torok, is the product formed by incorporating the Ego in an attempt to preserve the memory of a love object against the destruction of the body. Reacting to a trauma whose full impact cannot be articulated in language, the crypt also designates what the authors call an enclave, a space where the love-object is preserved. Mourning that is inexpressible, in other words “erects a secret tomb inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes and affects, the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt as a full fledged person” (*Shell and Kernel* 130). For Perloff, the maintenance of a disciplinary identity in literary

studies depends upon reclaiming a lost object of study and securing it as a stable base to argue for continued institutional relevance. The secret tomb, for Abraham and Torok, is filled with the dead who are kept alive and made into a person. For Perloff. However, the dead author is made into a personality who can be continually accessed by criticism, history, and theory. The academic is made into a guardian of the meaning of the literary celebrity. If Perloff seeks to encrypt literary studies from the harmful influence of interdisciplinarity, I argue that the intended effect of such an encryption is to reinstate the special connection between the Romantic celebrity and the academic reader. Literary encryption thus involves both securing the discipline against the harm of interdisciplinarity and reinforcing the connection with dead literary authors by crafting a stable discipline to entomb their memory.

This chapter explores literary encryption by looking at the example of Mary Shelley. The first section focuses on the critical and biographical invocation of melancholy in the construction of Mary's literary personality. Mary's fictional writing is placed in a circuit with her diaries and her journals to reinforce her characterization as a melancholic and control the discourse of her disorder. Melancholy, furthermore, disciplines Mary Shelley's identity by encrypting her personality in a critical corpus that can be examined and diagnosed. The critical disciplining of Mary's melancholy constructs her personality as a tomb for consumption by academic and popular audiences. The second section analyzes Shelley Jackson's appropriation of Mary Shelley in *Patchwork Girl* (1995) as an investigation of the encryption of the literary in New Media. Mary's gradual disappearance as a character reflects an outdated literary technology that has lost its identity. *Patchwork Girl* is read, then, as a literary ghost inhabiting a computational machine: the persistence and resurrection of literary discourse in Jackson's text suggests that it is haunted by the silent ghost of Mary Shelley. Literature emerges as an encrypted body that has

disappeared, and whose decaying corpse is rewritten into hypertext as the meaningless signifier of a past that has disappeared completely. Moving from the critical discourse surrounding Mary Shelley to the appearance of Mary in a preeminent text of New Media studies, this chapter argues that Jackson's hypertext reveals the symptom of Mary's literary encryption.

Mary Shelley in the Age of Cryptic Reproduction

The November 30, 1889, edition of *The Academy* included a review of Julian Marshall's *Life and Letters of Mary Shelley*, one of the first texts to address the topic of Mary's life after the death of her husband. The reviewer notes the originality of Marshall's text, which focused primarily on Mary and not Percy or Byron. The biography also, however, draws a picture of Mary's life that is dark and gloomy. Her story is

from first to last unrelievedly painful; and the picture is one of somber gloom only broken by lurid lights which serve to render the darkness more impressive. The central figure is certainly one of winning beauty; but it is always seen either in deep shadow or in fitful illumination of these ghastly gleams, and Mary Shelley is encircled by a "rabble rout," who seem more like shapes in some phantasmagoria of nightmare than like men and women of the every-day waking world.

Mary is pictured as haunted by the spectral traces of those close to her who, now dead, haunt her waking hours. The attitude is reflected in Mary Shelley's one printed obituary, written in the February 15, 1851, edition of the *Athenaeum* in which the author portrays Mary's descriptions of the world as "unreal in the excess of their sadness" (LMWS 397).³⁶ Like the review of Marshall's text, Mary Shelley is thought to have depicted a world that acted as a transparent window into her melancholic life. The dramatic tone of these reviewers is especially interesting when one understands that many of the poets in Mary's own circle wrote frequently about melancholy and several of them suffered from depression. Percy, Claire, Byron, and her mother

³⁶ Betty Bennett's three volume *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* provides this chapter with most of the epistolary material, includes this obituary at the end, and remains the best edition of Shelley's letters. The text will hereafter be cited with the initials LMWS.

Mary Wollstonecraft all struggled with the disorder, and the poets featured hopeless, even suicidal thoughts in their poetry. Nevertheless, Mary Shelley's work is characterized primarily as the writing of a melancholic, depressive woman.

This narrative of a melancholic Mary Shelley is typical of texts written about Shelley in the years following her death. This prejudice continues to more recent biographical and academic work. For example, Diane Long Hoevler (2005) reads *Mathilda* and "the Mourner," as instances of Mary Shelley's fictionalization of her own melancholic autobiography. Jacques Khalip (2005) argues that Mary's melancholy is a bequeathal of her mother's skepticism aimed at confronting the Romantic period's tendency toward exaggerating one's importance. Claire Raymond (2006) suggests that Mary's melancholic voice in her novels prefigures and revises her subservient position in the canonization of Romantic poetry.³⁷ Melancholy proves to be a powerfully seductive trope for Shelley critics. Esther Schor's introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (2003) attempts a compromise with the argument that Mary Shelley lived both a life of loneliness and a life of companionship. However, the image of the lonely writer deserted by her companions and dying without the fame of her more noted friends remains a powerful one.

I argue that accounts of Mary's life characterize her as a melancholic by linking her interest in writing with her experiences of watching loved ones die. A combination of journal entries, letters, and fiction create a cryptic picture of a Mary Shelley who is fundamentally obsessed with death. The interaction between the three sources creates a cryptic circuit between literary text, biography, and criticism whose contents in Paul de Man's words, "monumentalize"

³⁷ See Diane Long Hoevler's "Screen Memories and Fictionalized Autobiography in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* and 'The Mourner,'" Jacques Khalip's "A Disappearance in the World: Mary Wollstonecraft and Melancholy Skepticism," and Claire Raymond's *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath*.

Mary Shelley's literary character.³⁸ My interest in this section is to explore the literary encryption of Mary Shelley by analyzing this circuit. Melancholy, as a trope moving through the cryptic circuit, appeals to her life as a single narrative of death and depression. While chapter 1 looked at the attempt to articulate William Blake's physical body as a site of connection between the academic reader and writer, it is the melancholic character that provides this connection for readers of Mary Shelley's texts. Critics and biographers use the emotional intensity of Shelley's fiction to construct her historical biography. Furthermore, the literary elements embedded in the discussion of Mary's melancholy are made to reflect the connection between reading and death developed in *Frankenstein*. I argue that the trope of melancholy creates a literary crypt as a single, identifiable corpse focused around Mary's personality and acts to manifest the spectral trace of the author by fixing her novels as reactions to historical trauma. The analysis of a real historical Mary Shelley who wrote novels to work through her melancholy is a product of a crossing between textual ruins aimed at constructing a figure with an internal personality that can now be managed and dominated by critical discourse.

Mary's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) provides a literary blueprint to the melancholy described as an essential part of her personality.³⁹ The text connects writing and literature with death and mourning, and suggests that melancholy begins with an unnatural attachment to books.

Frankenstein's narrative includes episodes of death in the literary education of Victor

³⁸ See Paul de Man's essay "Shelley Disfigured," where he argues that "what we have done with the dead Shelley, and with all the other dead bodies that appear in romantic literature [...] is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves" (121). De Man is talking about Percy Shelley rather than Mary Shelley, but I suggest the idea applies equally (if not more) to the latter.

³⁹ This chapter uses the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*. While Nora Crook has argued that the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* is not less politically radical than the 1818 and carries many of the same thematic concerns, my reason for the preference surrounds the inclusion in the 1831 edition of the theme surrounding the overtaking of God's position by science. Since I am more interested in the relationship between Victor's education and melancholy, I am not as interested in the more theistic language of the 1831 edition. See Nora Crook's "In Defense of the 1831 *Frankenstein*" for her approach to the latter edition of the novel.

Frankenstein and Robert Walton. Shelley's novel, in this sense, provides an analysis of death that is primarily literary. It argues that the discovery of literature is, itself, a dark precursor to isolation, the neglect of the family, and finally the end of life.

Robert Walton's narrative in the novel parallels the burial of the dead with the discovery of books. While Walton is self-educated, a practice that he suggests alienates other people, his desire to become a sailor is fulfilled only by ignoring the wishes of his father and embracing the fantasies inspired by reading his uncle's collection of sailing books. On his deathbed, Walton's father forces his uncle to keep Walton away from the sailing industry. Death in Walton's narrative occurs as a block to the fulfillment of desire. Reading is seen as the action that causes Walton to ignore the wishes of his father and leave his family. Walton reveals that this absorption in books causes most people to "despise" him "as romantic" (53). Reading, in this way, causes Walton to ignore his dead father's memory, take up sailing, and leave his family. As a practice, then, reading leads to a narcissism that distracts the sailor from his call to mourn the dead and, instead, forces him to embrace isolation.

Victor's early memories are likewise punctuated with death and isolation. The first portion of the narrative focuses on Victor's introduction to reading and education as relatively free of consequence. His studies were "never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardor in the prosecution of them" (66). Shelley's Miltonic allegory of education figures as Victor's tempter the work of Cornelius Agrippa, a text that promises the "resurrection of the dead," and focuses Victor's interest in the conquering of death and disease. The literary narrative here introduces a tension between new and outdated knowledge whose misrecognition leads Victor to his failure. As he introduces the text to his father, the response is not enthusiastic. Victor's father "looked carelessly at the title-page of my book and said, 'Ah!

Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash” (68).

Victor’s father distinguishes between books that are essential to the education of the individual and those that are a waste of time. The latter impacts Victor far more negatively than the former. The scientist suggests that had his father performed his duty to direct his attention to “useful knowledge [...] the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin” (68). The narrative transforms intellectual nourishment, which is acquired by the consumption of useful books, into a poison brought by wasteful books that brings only death and ruin.

The death of Victor’s mother provides material evidence for Victor’s presumption that his acquaintance with the texts of Agrippa, and the dark desires for resurrection they inspire, transform life into decay. Victor calls the event “an omen, as it were, of my future misery,” and reads the death of his mother as an interruption of the beginning of his University education (71). He sees the interruption as a warning against proceeding with the path laid out by the books he read as a younger child. The death scene of Victor’s mother acts as a repetition of the death of Walton’s father, providing a contrast between the two characters. While both stories recall an interruption to reading and a suggestion that death accompanies the practice of reading, the death of Victor’s mother inspires melancholy. It is this melancholy that serves as the pre-text of the monster’s birth. Victor’s mother is encountered in a dream he has before first seeing the monster. In the dream, he kisses the image of Elizabeth who changes into his mother’s corpse: “a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the graveworms crawling into the folds of the flannel” (85). Victor’s fiancée becomes his mother’s corpse, which then dissolves into a monster. By reading, Victor both characterizes the monster as a horrific collection of occult sources and embeds these

sources within the corpse of his mother. The haunting of the mother has been transformed into a material creature that embodies Victor's loss.

Both of these early episodes in *Frankenstein* articulate a theory of melancholy that sees the condition as an effect of reading. Walton's story depicts reading as forcing him to ignore the wishes of his father and causing him to live most days in isolation. Victor's story connects reading with a dark desire leading him, he fears, to desecrate the memory of his mother. The book in *Frankenstein* acts to rewrite the destinies and the personalities of her characters. It, furthermore, tempts these characters from their families: Walton leaves his sister to go on ocean voyages in the Arctic, while Victor leaves his family to create his monster. *Frankenstein* depicts reading as an exercise in death and isolation and the book as a dark power inspiring melancholic reflection. The ghostly power of the book's impact on Victor's life is enclosed in the monster's physical body. As a material collection of corrupted and decayed bodies, the monster encloses this loss into his body as a physical object that can be scorned and destroyed.

The connection between death and writing provides a fundamental trope for the construction of Mary Shelley's encrypted corpse. If, as Fred Botting suggests, *Frankenstein* reflects the narcissistic desires of criticism, then I would add that the novel also provides criticism with a means to reconstruct Mary Shelley as a figure of melancholy.⁴⁰ This novel, along with others in Mary's corpus, is appropriated to place melancholy at the center of Shelley's biography. Victor's melancholy is said to reflect Mary's melancholy. Biographical accounts of Mary's life conflate biography with literature, and criticism with history, to create the membrane for Mary Shelley as a literary crypt. These accounts reflect the concerns of the novel by presenting a figure that is, like Victor and Walton, concerned with the intersections of literature,

⁴⁰ Botting argues that "[c]riticism [...] finds, and loses, itself among the broken narrative frames of *Frankenstein*" (17).

writing, and death. The widespread interest in the many deaths circulating around Mary's life sketches a picture of a life consumed by mourning the deaths of others. The construction of her literary identity uses melancholy to suggest a connection between Mary's inner thoughts and the critic who is able to access them. This identity, in turn, enables literary and academic culture to appropriate Mary Shelley's melancholy as part of a larger discourse of history, and authorial and disciplinary identity.

Critical and biographical accounts of Mary's melancholy move from sources outlining the uncanny encounters with death experienced by Mary Shelley to a biographical narrative dominated by the melancholic indulgences of its authors. Accounts of Mary Shelley's melancholy, I argue, appropriate fiction to heighten the literary effect of depression. As many of these authors have suggested, Mary's encounters with death began with her birth. Mary Wollstonecraft died giving birth to the child. The death was brought on by an incident involving Wollstonecraft's inability to eject the placenta. Marie Mulvey-Roberts argues that this creates a horrific portrait of Mary's birth: the object used to nourish Mary is seen as the instrument of her mother's death (198). Yet according to Wollstonecraft's midwife, it is a "prejudice common amongst many women, that they must be in great danger as long as the after-birth remains in the womb; and for this reason, the expulsion is seldom left to nature" (qtd. in St. Clair 177). The common parlance that links the words "placenta" with "afterbirth" invokes an object that is at first used to nourish the child and then if not properly ejected threatens the mother with death. The afterbirth becomes the site of superstition about death, and the womb is made into Wollstonecraft's internal crypt.

Godwin's hasty decision to remove the placenta reflected this superstition and was also used to heighten the gothic flavor of the scene. Wollstonecraft was not allowed to feed her

daughter due to fears that her milk was poisoned. Her entire body reflects the death that is seen growing in her body. Godwin calls upon a doctor who removes Wollstonecraft's placenta in pieces, but does so without sterilizing his instruments. As Janet Todd recounts, "Godwin recorded the time in his journal, then drew three wordless lines" (495). The wordless lines in Godwin's journal marks an empty time, a blank nothing narrating an event that—like the womb and the placenta—is transformed into a empty signifier of death. Shelley's birth, emerging as it does from the death of Wollstonecraft, translates afterbirth into death, womb into crypt, and the narrative recalling Godwin's life into a blank nothing.

Despite the lack of evidence outlining Mary's relationship to her mother, most biographical work continues to emphasize the death of her mother by the daughter and speculate on its impact to the early development of Mary Shelley's personality. Biographical accounts emphasize the horrific nature of the event by suggesting the uncanny polarity between the experiences of the two Marys. Miranda Seymour, for example, titles the chapter describing Mary Shelley's birth as "a birth and a death." Seymour suggests that it is

hard to be sure at what point and to what degree Mary felt that her own birth had robbed this beautiful, vital woman of her life—her mother was only thirty-eight when she died. Frankenstein's creation of a child he perceives as abhorrent may tell us something dark and troubling about Mary's view of herself. (33)

The biography turns to Mary's tale of resurrection as a means to understand the dark thoughts that may or may not have occurred to the author. She also suggests that the story of Victor's anger toward his creature might function as a literary reflection of anxieties about her mother. The death of Victor's mother from scarlet fever reflects the death of Mary's mother from her own infectious fever. Seymour concludes that "Mary may well have blamed herself for the puerperal (infectious) fever of which Mary Wollstonecraft died" (34). The melancholic effect of Mary's fiction is constructed as a telepathic connection to her innermost thoughts. While

Seymour's biography attempts to explain Mary's melancholy, it reveals the use of fiction to create a desire for access to the thoughts of the dead. Melancholy emerges as an effect of reading, rather than an inner psychological condition that reading can unlock.

The birth scene forecasts Mary's melancholy by marking her life with the stain of death. The slippage between birth and death remains a constant throughout Mary's life. She is born from the two crypts of her parents: the physical crypt of Wollstonecraft's death-inducing afterbirth and the written crypt of Godwin's blank journal diary. The tension between these two crypts impacts Mary's education. As several of the biographers recall in their texts, Mary learned her letters by tracing on her mother's grave and a proud Godwin would frequently introduce her in parties as a "Mary Wollstonecraft in the making" (Seymour 44). Once seen as the death of her mother, Mary's literary education has transformed her into the ghostly remnant of her mother.

The meditation on physical and bodily death is, furthermore, reflected in critical accounts of Mary's development as a writer. Julie Carson has argued that Mary's persona stems from the largely custodial position she takes with regard to dead writers (211). For Carson, this custodial position reveals itself most clearly in Mary's later novels and in her biographical work—a point Susan Wolfson echoes in her study of Mary's role as the editor of Percy's poetry, "[a]cross her volumes, she emerges as a uniquely privileged mediator, the intimate who is the poet's ideal, best reader" (193). Mary's desire to edit her husband's work becomes, for Wolfson, a means for the author to prove her worthiness and suggests that she had still not overcome her propensity for melancholy. Mary's status as a writer, moreover, is seen depending upon her intimacy with the dead and her ability to take the remains of the past, mediate them to a public living in the present, and provide a proper place for their preservation. In a letter to Frances Wright in 1824, Mary says that the memory of Wollstonecraft reminds her that "I ought to degenerate as little as I

[can] from those from whom I derived my being” (LMWS II; 4). Mary’s status as a custodian of the dead, then, extends to her physical and mental being and situates her identity as a relay station with the afterlife. Her interest in writing, furthermore, connects with her obsessions about death.

The connections between Mary Shelley, death, and writing are applied to an analysis of the melancholic aspects of her fiction, which are seen reflecting the events of her life. Diary accounts of these deaths emphasize the disconnection Mary feels to the world around her. This disconnection provides biographies and critical studies with the material to continue their arguments suggesting Mary’s melancholy. The combined deaths of her two children (Clara in September 1818; William six months later in June 1819) reverse the traumatic event of her birth. Now, instead of being the product of a woman on the verge of death, Mary gives birth to children who die. She is seen as both the daughter and the mother of death. While Clara’s death is marked only by a brief entry in her journal in September 1818, which describes their hurried trip to Venice with Clara, William’s is enveloped in a much longer letter to Marianne Hunt in which the mother complains that her son changed quickly from having “a fine colour—wonderful spirits” to “breed[ing] worms” (LMWS I; 102). The immediacy of both deaths causes Mary to experience long periods of depression, in which she is separated from the world around her. She writes to Leigh Hunt on September 24 that the vividness of life has fled from the world and that

I can assure you I am much changed—the world will never be to me again as it was—there was a life & freshness in it that is lost to me—on my last birthday when I was 21—I repined that time should fly so quickly and that I should grow older so quickly—this birthday—now I am 22—although the time since the last seems to have flown with the speed of lightning yet I rejoiced at that & only repined that I was not older—in fact I ought to have died on the 7th of June last. (qtd. in *Journals* 291)

Shelley’s letter communicates a profound stillness caused by the passing of time. In the context of her letter to Hunt, this takes the form of a profound quickness juxtaposed with the belief that

she should already be dead. These diary entries also, however, suggest the image of a writer who is struggling with death and noticing the world disconnecting from her.

Mary describes the theme of disconnection from a vivid world in 1844's *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, which Betty Bennett reveals is a literary reworking of Mary's memory watching Clara die in 1818 (221). Mary notes that it "is a strange, but to any person who has suffered, a familiar circumstance, that those who are enduring mental or corporeal agony are strangely alive to immediate external objects, and their imagination even exercises a wild power over them" (qtd. in Bennett 221). The experience of death opens Mary to the world of the inanimate, and she hovers between the expiring body of her daughter and the promise of life held together by her imagination. Further on down the page, Mary hears the communication of the inanimate through a series of memories that the objects impart upon her: "[T]he banks of the Brenta presented to me a moving scene; not a palace, not a tree of which I did not recognize, as marked and recorded, at a moment when life and death hung upon our speedy arrival at Venice" (qtd. in Bennett 221).

Mary's memory reconstructs Clara's death in a relay between inert objects that both interact and impress memory upon the writer. Mary's belief that she should be dead is coupled with a preternatural affinity with the inert and the inanimate. The journal entries suggest a mourning period that is tied to philosophical reflection, characterized by an affinity with the inert object that makes Mary feel alive. Mary's literary recollection of Clara's death, on the other hand, suggests the connection between memory and revision. The extended meditation on Clara's death is only available to her once she had remembered it some 36 years later.

The deaths of Mary's children fuse writing to the character of Mary's depression. Criticism invokes the deaths as a means to unlock Mary's internal thoughts. Emily Sunstein, for example,

sees the writing of *Valperga* and *Mathilda*, undertaken soon after the deaths of Clara and William, as part of a self-induced program of therapy (188). More radically, Rosaria Champagne has suggested that to read *Mathilda* in any way but an autobiographical meditation on melancholy risks reinforcing patriarchal law:

I am not just a little intrigued that other scholars—both feminist and politically undeclared ones—who have just read *Mathilda* conclude everything but the most obvious observation: that in a suicidal summer, Mary Shelley used *Mathilda* to concretize the aftereffects of what she experienced. That no critic has suggested this is no mere oversight: from a radical psychoanalytic-feminist perspective, the incest taboo has enforced critical interpretations of *Mathilda* that maintain the Father's law. (57)

Reading Mary's novel as an allegory of the novelist's own melancholy is both obvious and politically progressive for Champagne. She, consequently, uses *Mathilda* and *Valperga* as fictional performances of Mary's psychology. The external events occurring in Shelley's life, derived from her diary entries, are transposed onto a narrative of melancholy that is then connected to the written portion of the novel. Champagne analyzes *Mathilda* as an encrypted code hiding the internal mind of Mary Shelley. In order to unlock that mind, Champagne turns to the fiction, which coupled with the diaries describing her struggles after the death of her children, creates an internal space that is now defined by Mary's disorder. The novel provides a diagnosis for the author's biography; it unlocks the code separating the critic from a complete and present picture of Mary's personality. Mary Shelley's fiction is appropriated in order to visualize the secret interior of her mind and to better connect with her.

These tendencies reach an apotheosis in Louise Di Salvo's self-help book *Writing as a Way of Healing*, in which Mary's writing of *Mathilda* is cited as an example of a cure for suicide. Di Salvo describes her book as "an invitation to use writing as a way of healing," and the text transposes the experience of women as writers for the author's program (9). A series of readings provide Di Salvo with examples of women who were depressed, turned to writing for

help, and whose methods are now cited as a useful way to combat depression. Di Salvo connects Champagne's theory with its own narrative detailing Mary's struggle with suicide:

In 1819, during a summer of life-threatening crisis, Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*, kept her suicidal urges in check by writing her novel *Mathilda*. Her young son William had just died. The year before, she had suffered the death of her daughter Clara. [...] Connecting her desire with this heretofore unexamined, unspoken experience (the possibility of incest in her own past) saved Mary Shelley's life. (171)

The use of fiction to embody a depressive state in the criticism of Sunstein and Champagne is now abstracted as a method to combat depression. Mary Shelley's depression and the writing associated with that depression are encrypted, sealed, and made available to be exported to other people suffering from what is seen as a similar disorder. The cryptic circuit around Mary Shelley moves from fiction, to biography, to academic criticism, and finally to the genre of the self-help book. Shelley's literary crypt is transformed into a commodified pharmaceutical prescribed to depressive readers. The capsule contains both what is seen as a historical depressive state that led to the creation of fiction and the cure contained within that fiction. Di Salvo's story translates Victor's fear that reading can be poisonous and destructive to an environment where that poison can rehabilitate melancholic depressives and become a cure.

Mary Shelley's literary crypt appropriates fiction to fill gaps in Mary's more traditional textual remains: journals, travel writing, and letters. The connections between these sources form her body as a space preserved by its connection to her fiction. The cryptic body of Mary Shelley allows criticism to use fiction to construct a channel within Mary's mind, where it can extract evidence of a depressive state and market her cure to other depressives. Mary certainly did struggle with loneliness and depression, but the academic market tied to disseminating information about Mary's depression uses her writing to monumentalize her authorial figure. The diaries, for example, sketch out a picture of depression, yet Mary's melancholy is incomplete, ruined, insubstantial. Fiction acts to supplement the textual ruins of Mary's melancholy,

constructing a figure that can embody the struggle with, and the triumph over, her mental condition. As a disorder wedded to the inner workings of a mourning mind, melancholy forms Mary's texts as a crypt—sealing off the gaps and the nuances that might otherwise complicate the picture we have of her struggles with loss.

New Mediations of the Crypt

I have just argued that critical accounts of Mary Shelley's melancholy construct her texts as crypts for her inner personality. Now, I will argue that Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* symptomizes the memorialization of Mary Shelley, and literary culture in general, by revealing the intersection between the literary encryption of Mary Shelley and the technological preservation of the literary experience. *Patchwork Girl* was seated in the middle of a hypertextual revolution in English Departments. Called by Robert Coover a harbinger of the "golden age of hypertext," Jackson's text was celebrated for its formal inventiveness and its willingness to forego linear narrative and celebrate the deferral of meaning (qtd. in Keep). *Patchwork Girl* was characterized as nothing less than a complete rehabilitation of the literary canon, an embodiment of the poststructuralist iconoclasm of French theory, and an example of the new possibilities of feminine writing. As such, Jackson's text represented the culmination of an institutional iconoclasm that dismantled the literary canon and constructed texts as self-differing objects of play.

Yet *Patchwork Girl* was also described as making computers and hypertext new mediums for literary invention. N. Katherine Hayles called Jackson's text a useful starting point to explore "electronic hypertext as literary medium." George Landow identified the patchwork girl character as a "digital fulfillment [...] of twentieth-century literary and pictorial collages." Christopher Keep suggested that Jackson "explore[s] the literary potential" of hypertext. The literary dimension of Jackson's work is important to much of the praise surrounding *Patchwork*

Girl. Yet none of the articles on Jackson's text explore what literature means when transported to the realm of hypertext fiction. If, as Hayles suggests, hypertext necessitates the development of new reading strategies, then why continue to use the word "literature" and "literary" to describe what Jackson is producing?

I argue that the word "literary" describes Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* only insofar as the term is meaningless. The terms "literature" and "literary" function as blank signifiers, attempting to prove that hypertext can provide the same loosely defined experience as other literary texts. I suggest that this tendency to retrieve the literary in hypertext and other New Media applications functions to create literature as a melancholic object of preservation or a crypt. *Patchwork Girl* reveals this literary encryption by depicting the slow disappearance of Mary from the narrative and charting the reaction of the patchwork girl to this disappearance. Mary Shelley is also, however, made into a mouthpiece for Jackson's rehabilitation of the masculine Romantic ego and her subsequent attempt to fuse postmodern literary theory to a Romantic tradition. Jackson's text reveals the consequences of literary encryption and the complicated process of pathologically mourning the dead Romantic celebrity.

Hypertext literature developed out of attempts to provide new experiences that could not be achieved with print literature. Michael Joyce, author of *Afternoon: A Story*, describes his motivation for exploring the possibilities of hypertext in the 1980s as a desire to "write a novel that would change in successive readings and make those changing versions according to the connections that I had for some time naturally discovered" (31). Joyce saw hypertext as a means to produce a new literary effect: the shuffling of paragraphs and the creation of a narrative that could be viewed in different sequences. This hypertextual reinvention of literature, however, quickly brought about declarations of the demise of literature. Robert Coover called print

literature “dead as God,” in the June 2 1992 edition of the *New York Times Book Review*. Jay David Bolter announced the death of prose in *Writing Space*, but also suggested “our culture will want to keep the patient alive, if moribund, so that the mutual remediation with digital media can continue” (56). The dead body of literature, in Bolter’s account, is made into the conceptual equivalent of a bad horror film where literary cannibals keep the bodies of the old alive only to provide them with sustenance. While these proclamations proved to be a little premature, New Media nevertheless continues to invoke the metaphors of death to describe the innovation of new programs and the discarding of those rendered obsolete.⁴¹ Hypertext, itself, was declared dead by Nick Montfort in his 2000 review “Cybertext Killed the Hypertext Star” where he suggests that hypertext’s “corpus has been produced.” David Ciccoricco begins his book on hypertext, *Reading Network Fiction* (2007), lamenting that Montfort’s review and Coover’s essay “Literary Hypertext: The Passing of the Golden Age” both appeared while he was researching the book.

All of these deaths, I argue, figure New Media as a critical discourse mired in melancholy, and this melancholy reflects an inability to fully or finally conjure away its literary ghosts. The so-called death of hypertext and its failure to replace the canon of print literature have created a void in the heart of literary studies punctuated by a literary aura that has no material object. Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* reflects these issues not only due to its status as an exemplar of the genre, but also because it invokes the language of death and dying to situate its relationship to literature. Shelley Jackson, furthermore, sees herself as the spiritual daughter of Mary Shelley, and combines their names on the title page of the text: “by Mary/Shelley & herself.” Yet what that shared name means to the question of Jackson’s relationship to Mary Shelley remains vague

⁴¹ For example, Stuart Moulthrop argued in 1991 that hypertext brought about the “end of the death of literature” and a reawakening interest in typographic culture. See Moulthrop’s “You Say You Want a Revolution? Hypertext and the Laws of Media.”

and unanswered. I argue that Jackson's text allegorizes Mary Shelley as a literary crypt tied to the ascendancy of new technologies in English Departments and, as such, must contend with the melancholy associated with the death of older media.⁴²

Patchwork Girl uses the hypertext medium to dramatize the technological preservation of literary experience. The text imagines the resurrection of literature by referring to the bodily resurrection of the patchwork girl: a creature formed in Jackson's text by the writing and the stitching of Mary Shelley. The patchwork girl's body alludes to Shelley's monster in her novel *Frankenstein*. Both are formed from the parts of other bodies. Jackson's patchwork girl, however, extends the concept of the monster metaphor into a larger meditation on literary writing. While the monster depicted in Shelley's *Frankenstein* is made of corporeal body parts, Jackson's patchwork girl is also composed of computer code and written text. "[A]ll bodies are written bodies," Jackson argues by citing Hélène Cixous, "all lives pieces of writing" (all written).⁴³ The patchwork girl's body is simultaneously corporeal and textual, and the allusions to the connections between writing and the body suggest that the written set of screens comprising the *Patchwork Girl* program enacts the body of its main character. Jackson's text, in this way, does not merely represent a character, it reveals the act of reading as a corporeal experience in which putting together a set of screens performs the task of stitching together and resurrecting the remains of the dead.

⁴² In an otherwise enlightening study of the melancholic form of hypertext narrative, David Punday suggests that Jackson's text disrupts melancholy by celebrating the *Frankenstein* story and feminine creativity. He argues that the melancholic hypertext "traps the reader in a textual structure whose effects are inevitable" while the mournful text "looks toward the future and challenges the reader to respond and act" (98). The choice here is the same one literary academics have been posing for years: either we are exasperated and filled with dread when confronted with the breakdown of familiar forms of narrative or we become true iconoclasts and approach New Media with affirmation. Punday's essay seeks to purify Jackson's texts, and the iconoclast position in general, from melancholic tendencies.

⁴³ Parenthetical citations to *Patchwork Girl* refer to the name of the screen where the quoted material was found.

The link between text and corpse in Jackson's narrative is most easily seen in the first few screens that pop up after loading the program: the title page, the phrenology image, and the anatomical screen of an unidentified girl. The title page recalls aspects of nineteenth-century title pages in general, and Mary Shelley's title page to *Frankenstein* in particular. At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to include a title page to a hypertext that extols non-linearity and incompleteness. As Margaret Smith argues, the development of the title page in the sixteenth century protected the unity of the written work by covering copy between the stages of its initial printing and the construction of a hard cover that would provide further protection. Eventually, title pages gained a label to distinguish one book from another and decorations, frontispieces, and ornamentation for the purposes of advertising the book (17-19). The title page advertised a unity it protected, by covering the numerous contents of a book with a single page that characterized the book as a whole, with a title, an author, and a publisher. Jackson invokes the title page as a way to incorporate literature into the stylistic presentation of her hypertext and give it a literary weight.

Shelley Jackson's title page lists the title of the text "PATCHWORK GIRL, OR A MODERN MONSTER" in all caps. The title is centered, placed above the author, and followed by a series of section titles. These sections include "a graveyard, a journal, a quilt, a story & broken accents _____(sources)." Each section presents or enacts Jackson's patchwork girl in a different way. The journal relays the story of the patchwork girl through a series of entries taking her from the early nineteenth century to the present day. The quilt presents quotations from literary theorists and academic critics. The graveyard acts as a series of meditations on death and the body.

Mary Shelley's 1818 title page uses many of the same elements as Jackson's: the title in all-caps, the author, and the publisher. It also includes an epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) that reads: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?" The epigraph functions in Shelley's novel to place Frankenstein into British literary history, suggesting an allegorical relationship between Milton's epic and her novel. Shelley Jackson's title page also has a space for the sources of the text, but this space is left blank. The blank space suggests that sources do, in fact, exist but are unknown or simply left out. Visually, the blank space blocks the allegorical logic of literary citation in which a set of information about a source stands in for the physical presence of the source. Without that information, it is impossible to reconnect with all of the sources that make up Jackson's text. Literature, and the logic of the epigraph that informs literary tradition, is made the lost object of repression and disavowal.

Clicking on the word "sources" brings up an apology for Jackson's appropriation of sources in *Patchwork Girl*:

At certain times in this web I have lapsed without notice into another's voice, into direct quote or fudged restraint. My subject matter seemed to call for this very unceremonious appropriation. Those with a stronger sense of personal property may wish to know who is speaking when. (sources)

The "patchwork" section employs screens that both do and do not cite their sources. One screen presents appropriated material without quotes that must be seen before the reader can click to another one that clearly cites the sources. While she may not have a strong sense of personal property, Jackson is still anxious about plagiarism. The disavowal of a literary past is combined with a sensibility that recognizes the necessity of clinging to citation as a literary commonplace that cannot be completely consigned to the grave.

Jackson's second invocation of the connection between text and corpse, the anatomical picture of a woman, functions like a frontispiece accompanying the title page (Figure 5-1). If the title page lists the sections of the text and (more or less) its sources, the anatomical picture gives a visual representation of how the text functions. As Terry Harpold has suggested to me, the woman recalls Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (Figure 5-1).



Figure 5-1. Anatomical Woman (her).

Whereas da Vinci's piece extols vitality, the anatomical frontispiece looks more like an autopsy. The eyes of the figure are closed and her hair lies disheveled to the side. The various parts of the woman are marked with dotted lines suggesting preparation for an autopsy investigation. The body, despite being in stark contrast with the black background, looks pale and lifeless. The phrenology image, Jackson's third screen, portrays a head that is quite obviously alive, yet the image itself recalls outdated science and outdated technology. The title page, autopsy, and phrenology images present three deaths that elegize and mock the past. The title page links death with writing. The phrenology image links death with technology. These deaths invade the narrative construction of a beginning to Jackson's text, engraving the authors, sources, and images as sections of some unfinished grave.

Clicking on the various sections of Jackson's text listed on the title page gives us variations of the same image as the anatomical picture, except the sections of the picture are scrambled in different ways and no longer represent a single identifiable body (Figure 5-2).

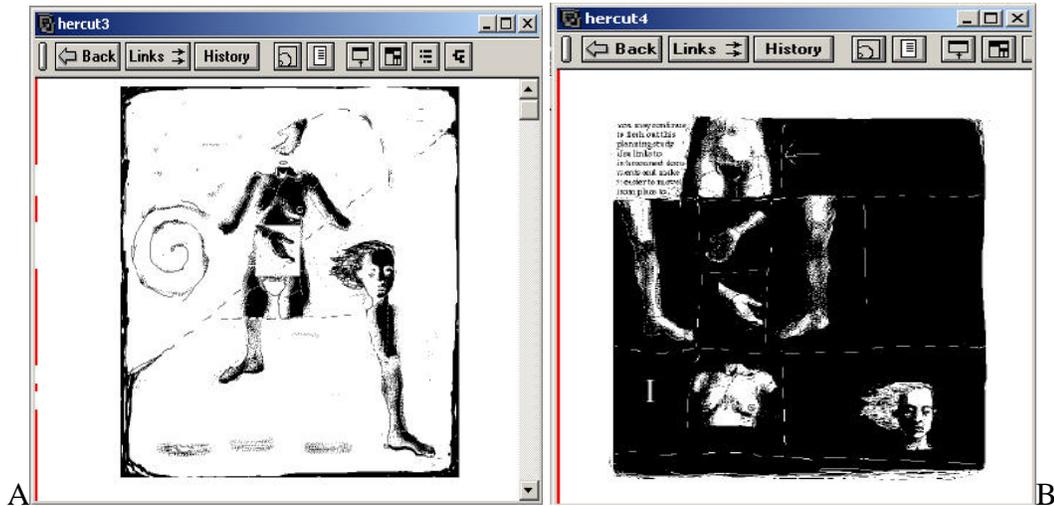


Figure 5-2. Scrambled autopsy in A) (hercut3). B) Another scramble (hercut4).

A second click brings up the following message: “I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piece meal. If you want to see me whole, you will have to sew me together yourself” (graveyard). The title page and the frontispieces lead to a message suggesting that to experience the patchwork girl as a complete body, the reader must dig up her parts and stitch them together. Readers are introduced to coded body parts that must be first resurrected, or opened through a series of screens, and then put together to form a totality.

Another click reveals the patchwork girl's body parts, including “a Heat, Trunk, Arms (Right and Left), and Legs (Right and Left) as well as divers Organs appropriately Disposed. May they Rest in Piece” (headstone). The headstone screen complicates the textual association with the physical remains of the corpse and the crypt. Clicking on each of the parts opens new windows that describe the lives of the various body parts before they were attached to the patchwork girl. Her head is described as being akin to an ancient vase, her trunk belonged to an

ambitious but passionate dancer named Angela, her right arm was once attached to a shipyard attendant who threw bottles at vagrants. Each body part is situated inside a narrative screen devoted to its history. Jackson opens her hypertext with metaphors that suggest both materiality as text (the title page physically holds the text together and creates a skin for its contents) and materiality as a dead body (the title page and subsequent screens suggest a head stone that is placed on top of the patchwork girl's encrypted body parts). Jackson vacillates between these two metaphorical invocations of the body and thus suggests that the literary body is preserved by the act of programming code.

Hypertext acts as the language used to resurrect the patchwork girl. A series of interfaces relay the patchwork girl to the reader who, then, linguistically reconstructs her. Code is translated into pixels displayed as words suggesting parts of the creature's body. The first few screens simulate Jackson's theory of bodily materiality and her attitude toward the literary past. This past is a disordered, blank, and encrypted set of parts whose meaning and cohesion must be deciphered by a computer program and ordered by a reader. The CD-Rom containing Jackson's hypertext acts, in this way, as the material embodiment of the patchwork girl's body and the program acts as an identity that can be accessed if one has the proper tools. Getting to the text of the patchwork girl involves navigating technological as well as legal limitations blocking the resurrection of her body. Only those who are able to load the CD-Rom program onto a computer capable of decoding its contents and displaying the pixels on a screen can access the text at all. I have a Macintosh iBook G4 and could not initially load the program because my operating system (OS X 10.4.11) is too advanced. In order to view *Patchwork Girl* on a Macintosh Computer, I was told to download a version of Mac Classic 9.0. The body of the patchwork girl was already lost to my Macintosh computer, whose operating system could not read the code

inscribed on the program's CD. Furthermore, the viewing of the patchwork girl's body is regulated by copyright. While there are no safeguards in the program that enforce this rule, the program cannot function without inserting the CD-Rom into the computer. Copyright protections and the boundaries of technological compatibility form a division between a material CD-Rom whose contents are unavailable and textual contents that must still be stitched back together.

Patchwork Girl's parts are available only to those who have the technological means, the legal right, and the linguistic ability to access the program. The preservation of the literary, in this sense, is obscured by the physical properties of the CD-Rom as an object. The body itself becomes the crypt both protecting and blocking the literary experience. As Richard Doyle has shown in his study of the discourse surrounding cryonics patients, encryption refers to both the psychological process of incorporation and the coding of a message to obscure its contents. Cryonics involves the freezing of a body that is near death with the hope that, some day, technology will be invented to revive the patient and cure his or her disorder. Doyle points out that many considering cryonic therapy are anxious over whether the body and mind can be preserved over long periods of time:

[F]or many cryonicists, apprehension about the stability of archival media over time is in some sense a discussion about the possibility of revival in the future; the very operations that disturb the possibility of an archive—decay, the sheer difference of the future (“will they have CD players?!), fire (“At least while you are animate ... a personal refrigerator is helpful in many ways.” [CryoNet, message 5591]) also threaten cryonic bodies. (71)

While patients are worried about the possibility of being physically revived in a future that has the technology to repair the damage inflicted by the freezing process, they are also concerned about the preservation of their identity. Shelley Jackson seems less anxious about the preservation of identity. Yet the ambivalence of *Patchwork Girl* towards literary property, along with the limitation of the hypertext to the physical object of the CD-Rom, threaten to seal Mary Shelley forever inside the tomb of outdated technology. Mary Shelley is neither alive nor dead in

Jackson's narrative but is preserved in a living-dead state, buried alive by the very thing that promises the preservation of her memory.

Jackson's narrative incorporates Mary Shelley as (in Derrida's words) "a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep as long as we keep it within us, intact in any way save as living" (xxi). Jackson memorializes Mary Shelley as an undead Romantic author in the narrative of *Patchwork Girl* by continually alluding to her work while simultaneously alienating her character from the historical figure named Mary Shelley. The journal section begins with a series of scenes written in Mary's perspective that recall Victor's telling of the Frankenstein story to Walton. In both, the creators have an eerie experience that prophesizes the first encounter with their respective creatures. Victor, as I mentioned in the first section, has a dream where his fiancée turns into his dead mother. He awakens to see the monster standing before him, a walking manifestation of his darkest fears and desires. Mary, in Jackson's text, walks on a road right before meeting her monster and views a sun whose light is distributed in-between patches of grey and yellow. The sun

played fitfully in the upper reaches of the cloud bank that hung overhead. There, through threadbare patches in the counterpane of gray that hung over the landscape, I could see its invalid fingers despondently toying with those vaporous growths and monstrous births.
(my walk)

The play of color and patchwork is invoked again when Mary describes the singular beauty of the monster. She compares the beauty of her different hues to the colors of autumn, suggesting that such a beauty cannot come from one color alone:

I believe it is because the myriad differing hues, while tending toward the self-same yellow one can achieve with the broth of tumeric, say, or onion skins, creates a disturbance of other colors around a root color: a penumbra, a kind of three-dimensionality of color. (she stood)

As many readers of Shelley's *Frankenstein* know, the color yellow plays a central role in communicating the horror of the novel. The 1831 introduction describes the creature Mary sees

in her dream as having “yellow, watery, but speculative eyes” (357). Victor describes the monster as having a “dull yellow eye” and “yellow skin” that “scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (85). And when he first discovers that the monster has killed Elizabeth, Victor sees the monster framed by the “dim and yellow light of the moon” (85). Mary’s world in Jackson’s text is saturated with yellow, which is gradually celebrated as a color of beauty. The cancerous metaphors in “my walk” are transformed into those invoking a more delicate, almost autumnal death in “she stood” where the dullness of the yellow is offset by its penumbra effect. The softening of the description here is typical of Jackson’s transformation of Mary from someone who is frightened by the patchwork girl and her strange behaviors to someone who accepts and even delights in them.

Jackson “rehabilitates” Mary Shelley by making her into a more tolerant character willing to venture into realms of sympathy and love that Shelley’s character Victor was never able to. She is also afforded an aesthetic reason for her tolerant attitude. The suggestion of a light giving birth to monsters in “my walk” is made into a source of beauty in “she stood.” Mary is more aesthetically sensitive than her scientist protagonist and more maternal, and as such she is able to pick out beauty from what is seemingly horrifying and ghastly. She welcomes the changes the patchwork girl provokes in her when she argues that the creature does not “resemble me” and then quickly adds, “I begin to wonder if I resemble myself” (appetite). Mary does not resemble herself, and this is the central point of Jackson’s rehabilitation: to create a postmodern Mary Shelley that is both familiar and different. Jackson archives Mary Shelley with her text, but does so in a way that changes Mary completely.

Mary Shelley becomes a composite signifier in Jackson’s text, referring to an author of *Patchwork Girl*, a character in the journal section, a sliver of flesh in the patchwork girl’s body,

and the source of historical documents used in the writing of Jackson's hypertext. As the story progresses, Mary Shelley gradually resembles herself less and less, until she resembles nothing at all. The text begins in Mary's point of view then switches to that of the patchwork girl. This process begins when Mary, responding to the immanent departure of her creature to America, cuts off part of her flesh and gives it to the patchwork girl as a parting gift. The shift in voice marks Mary's slow disappearance from the narrative, and the loss of her centrality as a character. Yet the patchwork girl promises to remember Mary by identifying herself with the author: "I remember when I was Mary, and how I loved a monster, and became one. I bring you my story, which is ours" (us). As she ventures to America, the patchwork girl ingests a sliver of flesh taken from Mary's leg:

Mary shrank, and I took her in, I became her repository. It bloated me, the responsibility of carrying that life. For a time I couldn't be much more than a kind of shell for it, drawn on by it, using my resources more to keep it fat and thriving than for my own affairs. Only with time (it was more than nine months) would the parent manikin shrink back down to the size of an embryo. Then I could begin to reabsorb her. (Aftermath)

As a metaphor of psychological incorporation, the scene characterizes the larger struggle over Jackson's ambivalence concerning literary tradition. The patchwork girl is depicted in a struggle with her literary past over the proper way to incorporate her creator. Mary Shelley is ingested and entombed inside her creature. The screen describes this incorporation as a struggle. Initially, the patchwork girl is overcome by Mary's authority and bloated by her body. After a period of mourning, the creature is finally able to overcome her memory and reabsorb her. The creation of the creature's individuality occurs soon after in a series of screens where the patchwork girl buys a dress, starts writing an autobiography, and borrows a name and a past from someone called Elsie. The individuality of the creature is maintained by silencing Mary's voice, asserting a unique and individual personality, and adopting a name.

Allusions to Mary appear three more times in *Patchwork Girl*. All three reference the question of preservation, whether Mary remains Mary after becoming part of the patchwork girl. In one, the patchwork girl wonders how much of Mary's personality resonates in her writing, whether her voice will make Mary's more authentic or whether the patchwork girl's "crude strength and techy bent are better filters for her [Mary's] voice than her still polite manners" (am I mary). The creature believes that her body can make a better Mary unencumbered by the politeness that kept the author from a more radical tinge to her voice. Again, we are presented with a desire to change and rehabilitate a Mary that is seen as archaic, part of a polite past whose manners are incompatible with the full blossoming of Mary's vision. Mary is remembered through the destruction of her body and the belief that her voice can resound even more authentically in the body of the patchwork girl. This struggle is characterized as a question of writing later on in the same screen, where the patchwork girl ponders, "Mary writes, I write, we write, but who is really writing? Ghost writers are the only kind there are" (am I mary). What began as a question based around a belief in the preservation and enhancement of Mary's voice becomes a suggestion that Mary was entirely absorbed by the patchwork girl. As a ghost writer, Mary becomes merely another spectral force inhabiting the always shifting body of her creature. She is preserved as dead and referred to by the patchwork girl as a ghost who remains present in her absence.

A second allusion to Mary occurs when the patchwork girl attempts to conjure up her voice from the many residing in the creature's head. She calls out to Mary in the hope of hearing her, but is confronted with a cacophony of whispers, none of which sound like Mary. On the next screen, the patchwork girl takes up a quill and tries to get Mary to write to her. Again, nothing happens. Mary is characterized as an absent voice and a mute substance. She is physically

present but does not respond to the creature's call for a living voice. Jackson reinforces this dead, mute aspect of Mary Shelley on the "M/S" screen, which is completely blank and reduces the authorial name to its initials (Figure 5-4).

The screen manifests the nothingness that preserves Mary's trace in the narrative as a blank placeholder of a literary past. As the patchwork girl moves to America, Mary remains as a blank nothing standing in the place of text that might otherwise move forward the patchwork girl's story, a cryptic blank screen whose presence literally stops the narrative. Mary Shelley returns as M/S: a screen with no words, a crypt with no corpse (Figure 5-3).

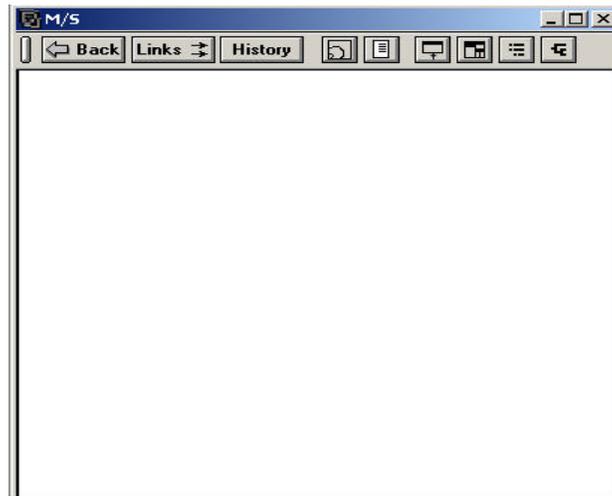


Figure 5-3. Inside the Crypt with (M/S).

A final allusion occurs in the graveyard section as a coda to a series of screens where the patchwork girl attempts to catalogue all of her parts. As she identifies the names of her parts, the patchwork girl begins to fall apart. She calls out to Mary, "Mary I know you want me back, but I shall be no more than a heap of letters, sender unknown, when I return. The truth is we are all fed on embryos" (mementos). The allusion to embryos follows a discussion Jackson undertakes in another part of the graveyard section surrounding Aquinas's theory of bodily resurrection. As Fernando Vidal has shown, the medieval conception of resurrection involved the perfection of

the body against its earthly decay. Medieval scholars insisted that the body must be resurrected for the soul to achieve beatitude (931-3). Eaten human remains would be resurrected, as Jackson recounts, with the non-human substance ingested by cannibals during their life. Aquinas, though, counters this theory of resurrection with the example of the “case of a man who ate only human embryos who generated a child who ate only human embryos” (eaten). The matter of the child would never be resurrected because all of its body comes from somewhere else: either from the substance given by its father or the substance given by the embryos it ate. Substantiated by corpses not its own, the cannibal child would disappear in the resurrection of the corpses it used to sustain its body. Ingestion and incorporation, once seen as acts of preservation against death, are turned into agents of annihilation and literary culture is revealed as a tradition sustained by cannibalism—unable to resurrect its now absent corpse.

As a literary crypt, Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* allegorizes the many deaths and acts of institutional cannibalism occurring in New Media studies. The fading corpse of literature is turned into a blank signifier called “the literary,” and used to preserve an intellectual experience against annihilation. Despite an attempt to preserve the literary author and show a history moving print literature to literary hypertext, Jackson’s text also charts the gradual disappearance and annihilation of the literary corpse as a direct consequence of hypertext. The literary crypt designed to protect literature from destruction has become the agent of its undoing.

Outdated Shelley

This chapter has argued that academic critics construct Mary’s melancholic personality as a literary crypt. This crypt is, then, appropriated by Shelley Jackson to show how these same critics look to New Media technology to preserve a literary experience that has lost its definition. In what follows, I will explore what happens when *Frankenstein* no longer signifies a piece of literature, and New Media studies removes all traces of the literary from its object of criticism.

Matthew Kirschenbaum, a theorist identified as a major proponent of moving New Media away from literary studies and toward an emphasis on the history of computation, invokes Shelley's novel in *Mechanisms* (2007) as an example of what he calls formal materiality: a symbolic process that invokes an "illusion of [...] immaterial behavior" (11). In the case of Shelley's novel, the essential presence of Frankenstein is based on a particular collection of letters and sentences. He argues, "a copy of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* is a perfectly valid way of experiencing a work (you don't have to go to the Bodleian Library in Oxford and sit down with the holograph manuscript to legitimately claim to have read *Frankenstein*)" (134). For Kirschenbaum, the materiality of Frankenstein depends on a set of signifiers whose coexistence invokes the same experience. This experience gives the simulation of an immaterial imaginative sequence that can be replicated by anyone else that reads the same group of characters.

Using *Frankenstein* as an example of formal literary materiality is quite ironic considering the novel's complicated reception history. The sheer ubiquity of the popular image of the monster, its face plastered on classic movie posters, comic books, toys, and cereal boxes make it nearly impossible to read Shelley's novel without at least momentarily imagining Boris Karloff's giant brow and Colin Clive's frenzied nasal voice screaming "It's alive!" Susan Tyler Hitchcock, in her book *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, reacted to this confusion by reserving the italic form of the letters for the novel and the unitalicized form when referring to the myth (11). The words and sentences collected under the title Frankenstein require the interruption of italics to secure its formal separation from the informal materiality of the monster's appearances in other mediums. While the formal materiality of *Frankenstein* preserves the illusion of the same narrative experience, the informal materiality of Frankenstein threatens to dissolve that experience under the weight of adaptations, allusions, and cheap appropriations.

It is possible to imagine a time when Mary Shelley's name disappears from memory, all copies of her book are destroyed, and yet Frankenstein's informal materiality still perseveres. The image of a monster that once read Milton in order to prove its humanity and now basks in the light of popular culture and film reflects the marginalization of the academic who now has no job to perform and no text to preserve. The question of literary preservation has been replaced by that of simply keeping up with the perpetually accelerating mutations of the monster's many appearances. As Avital Ronnell argues, it is the monster's ability to disconnect from mourning that gives it power over its creator. The monster "knows that it was created to sing the lament of mourning, to teach the necessity of hanging up, which the professors with their self-willed striving could not effect" (195). While the professor mourns a field of cultural history that is both expanding and disappearing rapidly, the monster disconnects completely from the melancholy circuit that defines the memorialization of the Romantic celebrity.

S. E. Barnett's installation "Mary Shelley's Daughter" (1999) provides a powerful allegory of this disconnection. The installation features used television sets taken from trash dumpsters and discarded VCRs with cables strewn about the room to, in Barnett's words, favor technology "as a means of stripping bare external superficialities." Barnett's installation ends up calling attention to outdated technology as revealing the essential vulnerability of his monster's body. The television sets each display one portion of a woman's body: the top set displays her head, another set her abdomen, yet another her arm, and another her legs respectively.

The body of the monster depends upon the constant supply of electricity and the working condition of her parts to remain alive. These elements, in turn, depend upon human observers who are willing to maintain the installation. At some point, people will lose interest and the gallery will chose a new installation. The television sets will be turned off, and the technology

now seen as useless will again be placed in the trash. Imagine the discarded sets deteriorating in a landfill, unplugged from the VCRs and the tapes that held the images of the body, the cathode ray tubes which broadcasted the images shattered and filled with decaying food, paper and excrement.

Imagine all copies of the VCR tapes likewise trashed, the images of the woman's body parts stained with an unidentifiable mixture of red wine, milk, and vomit. The monster has been completely disconnected with the instruments used to mediate our perception, and now exists merely as a group of informal, obscured signifiers on a role of film covered from any human contact. Memory of the exhibit is limited to a small photograph taken by the artist, placed on his website and viewed by a graduate student to use in the coda of his last dissertation chapter. Mary's literary crypt, designed to ensure her readiness to the academic's consumption is contrasted with a very literal crypt in which the material parts of the installation's body rot. The remains of Romantic celebrity exist here, in the trash heap, as much as they exist in the manuscripts handled carefully in University libraries, the books resting on the shelves of admirers, or even the cheaply produced *YouTube* videos featuring Romantic poems. And yet this very image, the trash that is not mourned, hardly finds itself the focus of criticism or the figure of theoretical reflection. In this academic blindspot, the trash of Romantic celebrity escapes academic attention because it is outdated, decayed, pungent, and useless. The figure of trash provides an image of a monstrous and absolute disconnection with literary mourning, as academics focus their memorial activities elsewhere and the remains of celebrity no longer look similar enough to the Romantic figure to inspire interest.

CHAPTER 6 AFTERWORD

If he loves justice, at least, the “scholar” of the future, the “intellectual” of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, “there” as soon as we open our mouth and especially when one speaks there in a foreign language.

--Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

What remains of the Romantic author? If the leftover parts of Mary Shelley are both traveling with her multi-media monster throughout its mutating appropriations and decaying quietly in some trash heap, how should we address or attend to the ghosts of her celebrity? I have argued that the depiction of the Romantic celebrity’s death in postmodern film and fiction reflects an anxiety about the marginalization of literary studies. The texts I have examined attempt to reconnect to fantasy images of authenticity and immortality embodied in Romantic poetry. Immortality in the discourse of Romantic celebrity is focused around perpetuating a relationship of familiarity. Mark Edmundson, Stephen Greenblatt, and Marjorie Perloff see their special connections to the ghost of Romantic celebrity as securing a connection with a spirit they already know. The perpetuation of disciplinary relevance occurs through having conversations with the same ghost over and over again, and doing so in the same disciplinary language.

The quote from Derrida I have chosen as my epigraph articulates a very different attitude towards the ghost. Derrida speaks of a multitude of specters that are both, in T. S. Eliot’s words, “intimate and unidentifiable” (140). Specters are always there, especially in those foreign spaces inhabiting the most intimate connections between the reader and their literary dead. Derrida mentions the return of something foreign, not the perpetuation of a constructed sense of closeness or the elevation of the academic into a special connection with the dead. He also sees the otherness of the specter speaking from the moment scholars open their mouths. The very

state of the scholar's being is populated with innumerable ghosts appearing, reappearing, and disappearing. What might it mean, then, to open the field of literary studies up to the foreign inside Romantic celebrity or to explore the "other" inside literary studies?

While I have focused on the fantasized connection between the academic scholar and the dead Romantic celebrity as an image of familiarity and desire turned into a decaying horror, an extended analysis could complement the work I have already done on the confrontation with the foreign ghost. The huge industry of Jane Austen books, both those written as sequels to her novels and those written to address the middle-class culture that regularly consumes these novels, would provide a useful counterpoint to the more gothic texts I explored in my chapters. Laurie Viera Rigler's recent novel *Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict* (2008), for example, depicts one of Austen's many contemporary fans traveling back to the early nineteenth century and learning to hate the restrictions placed on her behavior during the period. The disjunction between the fan's expectations and the space she encounters provides a critique of the discourse of personal familiarity I've explored in my project. Here, we find that the Austen fan really does not want to be embedded in the world described by her favorite novelist. The nostalgic space of Austen's novels is made into a world where the object of desire is foreign and disgusting.

More generally, the reincarnation of the Romantic author in science fiction could point to a more useful way to imagine the connection between the ghost and the future. I have already mentioned William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's use of Byron and Keats in *The Difference Engine*, but a more interesting connection to science fiction is found in Dan Simmons's *Hyperion* series. Simmons's books present a world in the far future that is dying and uses allusions to Keats to give the story mythological weight. The second book in the series, *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990), portrays the reincarnation of John Keats in the character Joseph Severn. Keats is brought

back to life as a cybrid, an artificial body given the memories of the poet, and is forced to reexperience Keats's death. The creators of the Keats cybrid see the repetition of this death as a consequence of bringing back the Romantic poet. An afterlife, in this novel, is only possible with a death experienced after death. The ghosts of John Keats recall not a lost presence, but instead prophesy the repetition of loss and death.

Texts like the ones I have explored in this project rethink the role of Romantic celebrity and literary immortality by linking them to discourses of death and decay. These discourses also reflect a belief that the connection existing between Romantic celebrities and their academic readers has now been erased or destroyed by the general dissolution of literary studies. Some of these texts approach the dissolution of literature by foregrounding the impotence of literary writing (*Disgrace, Gothic*); others allegorize death by focusing more directly on the dead celebrity (*From Hell, Patchwork Girl*). Whatever may be said about a future for literary studies, the specters inhabiting future scholars and future conjurations of Romantic celebrity will speak to us in a foreign language. Whether or not we hear, or can ever decrypt, these foreign future spectral tongues remains an open question.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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