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Abstract approved:

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My thesis explores the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth as emblematic of Western philosophy and literature’s longstanding preoccupation with the relationship between mind and matter. The poets’ attempts to mediate their languages and sensibilities with “real nature” have a complicated legacy for today’s readers, as Romantic literature tends to be anthropocentric and idealistic even as it gestures toward radical ways of being and perception. I ally with the emerging field of speculative realism in order to retrieve what is fresh and pertinent about these attempts to access and engage with material realities while still acknowledging the linguistic complexities that shape human subjectivity. Applying concepts from Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and Ian Bogost to readings of Coleridge and Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, I argue that the poets’ success in apprehending “nature” lies not in their ability to render accuracy through language, as traditional literary critics tend to favor, but in the failures of their language to contain the heterogeneous nature of reality. I devote Chapter One to my analysis of Coleridge’s strange but iconic poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and propose that the poet’s fractured and experimental style can be read as a break in anthropocentric methods of meaning rather than a poetic failure, as Coleridge’s contemporaries and even current readers have viewed it. Chapter Two elaborates on this argument by critiquing

Wordsworth’s attempts to restore a harmonious interface with the objects of his perception, but also emphasizes the power and complexity of Wordsworth’s brand of realism by reading it in material-oriented rather than humanist terms. Ultimately, I argue, speculative realism offers the possibility that both poets deploy philosophical and literary realisms that can be read in a new century that aims to legitimize nonhuman experience.

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“The Life of Things”: Weird Realisms in Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Saara Amelia England, Author

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Introduction

This thesis examines William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's extraordinary but disjointed collaboration, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798; 2nd ed. 1800)—a book of poetry that would become a touchstone of British Romanticism—as a case study of Western poetry's impulses to mediate mind and nature. Throughout, I focus on how these poets' language regulates and differentiates material encounters, but in turn yields to and is shaped by a multitude of nonlinguistic forces. My project draws from *Lyrical Ballads*' rich legacy of criticism in order to clarify Wordsworth's and Coleridge's styles and idealisms as nature poets—as Adam Sisman emphasizes in his biography of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the men shared an "appreciation of the sanctity of all living things, in the sublime, in the transcendent value of the mind's response to Nature" (219)—but utilizes the lens of contemporary theory, especially speculative realism, to apprehend the radically material and nonhuman dynamics of their collaboration. Reading the poets' ecological, metaphysical, and literary intentions with an eye for what speculative realist philosopher Graham Harman calls "weird realism" demonstrates how Romantic meditations on nature and perception can be retrieved for a new era of metaphysics and literary studies that seek to critique anthropocentric idealism and legitimize nonhuman being.

My argument rests on the assumption that different poetic sensibilities consciously and unconsciously initiate different encounters with external reality. Though Coleridge and Wordsworth both hearken toward an "authentic" exchange between language and nature, it is tempting—as readers and critics—to side with one over the other in order to formulate a language that stabilizes and verifies its objects of reference: Wordsworth's appealing determination to achieve an authentic, lucid realism in his poetry—to seek the "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (174) and to banish the "general evil" that threatens the "discriminating powers of the mind" (177)—or Coleridge's explorations of the supernatural and displaced horizons of the mind. I argue, however, that no singular mind or language can achieve, let alone monopolize, mastery over material, but can offer an incomplete vision, mediation, cross-section, and framework of realities and material encounters, especially when such subjectivity is open to diverse forays into the non-universal, the mundane, the inscrutable, and the incoherent. Wordsworth and Coleridge's collaboration, in this sense, employs two distinct languages that attempt to engage with material surroundings—neither of which fully appropriate nor render intelligible a "natural" encounter, but instead demonstrate how language becomes (partially) infused with material presence. On the one hand, Wordsworth's success in soothing our humanist concerns for "organic" correspondences between humanity and the so-called natural world offers an intelligible narrative, but ultimately emphasizes language's power to blind and alienate us from radical and powerfully disruptive re-perceptions of materiality. On the other hand, what is commonly viewed as Coleridge's failure to harmonize his poetic language—his disturbing inability to unify his chaotic and ruptured sequences and images—responds powerfully to readings that seek alternative points of contact and divergence between human perception and material otherness; the poet's fractured temporalities, unreliable narrators, incoherent stretches of description, and deeply broken correspondences between signified nature and nature "itself," reveal a poetic sensibility profoundly uneasy with the reductions of forced correspondences but open to the emergence of nonhuman vibrancy. Ultimately, both poets attempt to maintain a humanist hold over preordained and thus limited encounters between their languages and the objects that crosscut their poetic spheres, but their texts nevertheless apprehend and accommodate a multitude of nonhuman and material forces.

My argument draws from the new field of speculative realism because, like the Romantics, contemporary philosophers of objects and animals are at once metaphysically ambitious (philosophers like Harman and Bogost are preoccupied with both the strange inner lives of objects and the vastness of the cosmos) and acutely aware of the political, personal, and ecological implications of their work (theorists like Timothy Morton are concerned with what he calls "hyperobjects" and their effects on everything from the ozone to municipal infrastructures). Most importantly, both paradigms—the Romantic and the speculative—seek out meaningful relationships between their work and their environment; as such, the recent philosophical interest in the lives of objects might restore a sense of urgency to that Romantic inclination. Speculative realism can add concepts like Harman's "thing-power" and Bogost's "flat ontology" to already existing linguistic and ethical discussions of Romantic literature and philosophy, enabling new critical approaches to loosen and derail the era's general tendencies toward "correlationism"—Quentin Meillassoux's term for the reductively closed circuit of mind and matter in which Western metaphysics has been trapped since at least Immanuel Kant—and take seriously the vibrancy and constitutive omnipresence of materiality and nonhuman otherness. With speculative realism's help, I argue, we can re-view the era of Romantic idealism instead as a "time for testing these ideals," as Joel Faflak puts it (13), rather than a homogenous field of literary study. Specifically, we might move beyond Wordsworth's tight circles of secluded groves and rustic country life and Coleridge's vast but alienating and inscrutable interiority, to apprehend how the poets' texts slide up against, fuse with, explode, and partake of the radically nonhuman, ephemeral, mundane, excessive, and weird.

My reading of the distinctions and overlaps between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's styles advocates for nonstandard readings of their "organic" languages. If speculative realism must, as object-oriented philosopher Ian Bogost puts it, "abandon the belief that human access sits at the center being, organizing and regulating it like an ontological watchmaker" (5), then a conflicted and eccentric poet like Coleridge seems an excellent candidate for a proto-speculative metaphysics of poetry. The strange and inscrutable events of Coleridge's narratives seem to be evidence of nonhuman, nonlinguistic energies, whereas Wordsworth's collection of the "best objects" of Nature and country living (Preface 174) seems to correspond to what Bogost calls the correlationist "state of things," in which humanist discourse welcomes the world of materials outside of human consciousness into "scholarship, poetry, science, and business" only as far as "to ask how they relate to human productivity, culture, and politics" (3). In other words, Wordsworth draws all of existence through what Bogost calls "the sieve of humanity," discarding the "rich world of things" and denying "being" to anything not considered a subject (3). As literary critic Donald Murray celebrates, Wordsworth's poetry has the unique ability to reconcile the human mind with Nature through verbal "approximation" and the "rendering possible a poetic account of the special kind of intercourse" between them (6). To Bogost, this kind of intelligibility reduces the diverse, emergent "thingness" of an encounter, and is untenable to contemporary scholars who seek alternative ethics and philosophies to humanism[1].

As Bogost readily admits, however, "metaphorism," or the attempt to understand ontological otherness through careful speculation, is "necessarily anthropocentric" (74), meaning that even the weirdest, most strained infoldings of language and material are inevitably rendered intelligible by self-conscious subjects such as poets and their critics. In this sense, Wordsworth's attunement to the "life" ("Tintern" 49) of objects and nonhuman beings nonetheless speaks to a speculative realist sensibility via his receptiveness to material data and his linguistic and aesthetic attempts to accurately translate an object's form and idiosyncratic presence. What Murray calls the "dizzy openness of relation between the human mind and nature" (3-4) gives credit to Wordsworth's careful but enthusiastic approach to the strange vibrancies (to borrow Bennett's term) of his encounters, and such a humanist sensibility is not discredited entirely by more speculative forays into what Harman calls "weird reality."

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[1] See, for example, Bogost's passage on the "arbitrary specificity" of animal studies, and how scholars and writers "valorize" objects only insofar as they "extend human life and well-being" (8). This kind of "posthumanism," Bogost argues, is "not posthuman enough" (8).

Overall, if Wordsworth and Coleridge exemplify the anthropocentric tendencies of both poetry and idealism, they also anticipate how language (sometimes deliberately and other times unintentionally) does what Bogost calls "ontological work" by maintaining a "flexibility and openness" to "sensation[s] of surprise" that emerge from the "great wealth of objects" (44-5) that constitute their lives and sensibilities. Similarly, as Jane Bennett argues, perception of the world of "thing-power" requires an "anticipatory readiness" for the appearance of "vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics" (2-5). Throughout this thesis, I emphasize this ontological curiosity in *Lyrical Ballads* by drawing attention to moments of mysterious encounters and suspensions, including Coleridge's repeated fathomings of what Bogost calls the "murky otherworldliness" of objects, as well as Wordsworth's lucid and meticulous renderings of our perceptions of nature and what he calls "common" humanity (Preface 174). Such moments, plentiful in the works of both poets in *Lyrical Ballads*, speak to how distinct but mutually constitutive sensibilities can never totalize a material encounter but may nonetheless achieve a measure of insight into what Bogost calls "the infinity of being" (55).

Texts and Networks: From Romanticism to Speculative Realism

Critics of *Lyrical Ballads* have focused on how Coleridge's and Wordsworth's distinct personalities, literary styles, and critical legacies exemplify the Romantic era's earnestness, individualism, and idiosyncratic sensibility toward politics and the environment, broadly understood. Since my argument seeks to comprehend multiple realisms (in the sense that no single language or subjectivity can contain the heterogeneity of reality), I rely on this general categorization of the poets to understand the canonical power of *Lyrical Ballads*, but in particular on the critical tendency to divide the poets much as they divided themselves: Wordsworth persists as the stable, coherent nature-poet, whereas Coleridge becomes the erratic, wandering, and sometimes pitiful figure with a penchant for opium and plagiarism. In the rest of this introductory chapter, I will provide some historical context for the Romantic era and outline the critical tradition that has established these poets' canonical identities and legacies, before turning to re-summarize some of the contemporary theory from which I draw in order to understand how poetic language both reduces and expands our encounters with material and nonhuman beings. At that point, I will assert the importance of Jacques Derrida's concept of how the arrival of a "supplement" at the border of subjectivity differentiates "self" from "other" but destabilizes the notion of autonomous embodiment and perception, in order to connect this branch of post-structuralist thought to the major components of speculative realism that have followed the linguistic turn in contemporary theory, but have set their sights on the realm *beyond* traditional approaches to signification.

Scholarship on *Lyrical Ballads* is immense, but becomes somewhat more manageable when grasped as a series of historical fluctuations, and a general division between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's critical reception. Perhaps the most important context to keep in mind when reading about the Romantics is the radical upheavals in material life, technology and industry, politics, and culture that informed much of their poetry and philosophy. As Faflak writes, “the time [of Romanticism] did not stand still, and indeed seemed to its inhabitants to be moving forward with increasing speed and uncertainty” (2). It was an era of political liberation, cultural revolution, and colonial power, but also a “re-enslavement” of humanity to the powers of social upheaval and enlightenment ideology (Faflak 2-3). The Romantic period could be idealistic to the point of paranoia (Faflak 2), wielding a creative but frequently “apocalyptic” temperament, and unsettled in its reformist and reactionary sensibilities toward the “volatility” of the emerging modern age (6).

The Haven and Adams text, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Scholarship*, marks two “distinguishable periods of widespread interest” in the poet: 1793-1899 and 1900-1975 (vi). By the end of the nineteenth century, Coleridge scholarship was in decline as part of the “general reaction against Victorian sages” (Wedgewood qtd on vii), but two decades later, literary criticism saw a revival of Coleridge studies in works by Alice D. Snyder, Norman Wile, and Claude Howard (vii). Haven and Adams emphasize the substantial amount of nineteenth-century writing by and about Coleridge, including biographical material, memoirs, criticism and reviews, and collections of correspondence (viii). Coleridge was prolific and well-known as a “radical lecturer and journalist” in his time; maintained a literary and political presence on both sides of the Atlantic; and was considered one of the “two seminal minds of the age,” as John Stuart Mill described—representative of many of the “hotly debated” political and theological issues of Romantic and Enlightenment thought (viii). Haven and Adams consider John Foster’s 1811 defense of Coleridge’s short-lived periodical The Friend the first “extended and serious analysis” of Coleridge’s work (ix), but the first “full-scale treatment” of

Coleridge's poetry was by John Gibson Lockhart (or possibly Wilson) in 1819 (ix). From 1840-60 discussions tended to focus on Coleridge as a theological thinker rather than a poet (x). He was "hailed as a prophet" and "damned as a heretic" in England and the U.S., but toward the end of the nineteenth century there was less focus on Coleridge as a controversial figure and more on his poetry, biography, and "intellectual significance" (x). There was no "extensive reassessment" of Coleridge's work for some time, and the unveiling of a memorial bust of Coleridge as Westminster Abbey was reported as "The Canonization of Coleridge" (x-xi)—a sign that the intricacies and even contradictions of his life and work had been smoothed over by academia.

Though Coleridge was an influential figure in both life and death, it is not unusual for critical and biographical discussions of the poet and his work to focus on his strange subject matter and inexplicable stylistic impulses. For example, to provide a general sense of Coleridge's personality, vision, and, accordingly, his despair, biographer Adam Sisman describes the poet's struggle with opium: "dependence on the drug exacerbated all the most deplorable aspects of [Coleridge's] character: self-pity, evasiveness, secrecy, duplicity, indifference, passivity, apathy, paralysis, self-loathing and shame" (333). Such eccentricities were reflected in Coleridge's work and reception; at the time of *Lyrical Ballads*' publication, the "reactions to Coleridge's writing seem to have been as varied as humanity itself" (Haven viii): some "haunted," some "amused," and some "vehemently negative" (viii). In general, early nineteenth century reviewers tended to praise Wordsworth's lucidity and denigrate Coleridge's perceived obfuscations, especially his "failed" attempt to revive the ballad form in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." More recently, critics like Susan Eilenberg explore the poets' "attempts at mutual appropriation and possession" of each other's work, but describe Wordsworth's efforts as emanating from a place of "self-possessed" realism, historicity, and materialism, and Coleridge's from self-doubt and "exile," with a fixation on supernatural and psychoanalytical mysteries (x-xi). Accounts such as these emphasize how Wordsworth seems to maintain a grip on language, embodiment, and perception, whereas Coleridge's mind, body, and work alike consistently escape or exceed his control.

Indeed, turning to Wordsworth, we find a different trajectory in the history of criticism of a poet who both in his lifetime and afterwards was more regularly lauded than his one-time collaborator. Wordsworth succeeded Robert Southey as Poet Laureate of England in 1843 (Gamer and Porter 43), for example, and, though it was not published in his lifetime (Simonsen 127), Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is an oft-cited, highly influential poem iconic for its personal meditations and sustained engagement with questions of metaphysics, revolution, ethics, memory, and communion with nature[2]. Considering the ideological complexities of the Romantic era, we might consider Wordsworth as hybridization of radical and conservative qualities: while his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* marks a new era of poetry and philosophy (172), it also claims to be a corrective to the "triviality and meanness" of popular poetry (175). Such an advertisement can be read in terms of what Faflak calls the evangelical and reformist tendencies of the Romantic era—discourse that acted as a "moral response" to political and social turmoil and cautioned against ambition that "flew in the face of nature and divine law" (7). Such conservatism, I will argue, complicates our contemporary responses to Wordsworth's idealisms that seek more radical ways of apprehending "nature" and materiality.

Traditionally, however, Wordsworth is figured as a skilled nature poet who is, as Faflak writes, most "closely associated" with Romantic poetry (36). In twentieth-century discussions of

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[2] Sisman's biography, for example, consistently uses *The Prelude* as evidence of Wordsworth's conflicted feelings toward the French Revolution, family relations, and his companionship with Coleridge. Furthermore, critics such like Simonsen continue to reiterate the poem's importance to our sense that Romantic poetry can be "imagined" as "something that makes something happen" and in turn "causes historical change in a fundamental sense" (137).

Lyrical Ballads, critics such as Greenbie emphasize Wordsworth's "dignified and elaborate style" (xii), thus inserting him into the "best traditions of English literature" (xv). Greenbie seconds Wordsworth's objections to the "falsity of substance" in art and language (41), arguing that the lack of "imaginative feeling" apparent in the previous vogue for the "elegance and flowers of speech" in eighteenth century poetry so "obnoxious" to new developments of poetic diction such as Wordsworth's (44). Greenbie supports the image of Wordsworth as a reactionary to the "extravagance" (46) of earlier poetry, arguing that Wordsworth "naturally reproduces the peculiarities of emotional speech in a freer syntax and order of words, and in a more highly figurative expression" as he utilizes a "general language" that was "intelligible to all" (52). Greenbie conducts an extensive review of the diction, couplets, and "periphrastic elegances" that were in circulation when Wordsworth was beginning to write, concluding that he and Coleridge were "justified in believing that their theory and practice were in accordance with the *best* traditions of English poetry" (62-66, my emphasis). Similar to Wordsworth's own claims in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Greenbie writes of how the "bold young poets" were indeed "restating an old proposition, but the terms of the restatement were so striking, and the illustrations so original, that the old ideal seemed like a discovery of their own" (66).

Greenbie echoes Matthew Arnold's description of Wordsworth as a "teacher, a philosopher, a pure soul with a message of healing for a feverish world," as well as a "great and peculiarly self-conscious artist" (vii) with a "dignified and elaborate style" (xii). Likewise, in his study of Wordsworth's poetic syntax, similes, paradox, and use of both "metaphoric and literal images" (2), Murray celebrates Wordsworth's ability to deploy figurative language "without losing the naturalness and simplicity of everyday speech" (4-5). As I explore in Chapter Two, for example, Wordsworth's iconic "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" utilizes the empirically verifiable qualities of his setting—the “green” of the woods and the subtle movements of seemingly inanimate objects (14, 4)—to meditate on the natural sublime in confessional blank-verse form. Wordsworth’s mature but experimental style, Murray argues, enables the poet to “present his subject as at once ordinary and unusual” (4-5), and ultimately succeed in generating a poetry of “interchange between mind and nature” (10). Such praise of Wordsworth’s ethos and authenticity reinforces a tenacious but compelling strand of humanism: the belief in an evasive but fundamental relationship between human language—especially when deployed by a poet as sensitive and skilful as Wordsworth—and external reality.

Murray conducts an in-depth analysis of Wordsworth’s use of syntax, similes, paradox, and “metaphoric and literal” images (2), celebrating Wordsworth’s mature but experimental style (4) that successfully universalizes [human] “character” through poetry (6). To Murray, Wordsworth succeeds in his goal of writing poetry consisting of “a selection of the language really spoken by men,” but Wordsworth’s sophisticated combinations of personification, metaphor, actual and ideal themes, repetition, synecdoche, and literal and figurative language elevate his forms and demonstrate the “final unity of life and art” through poetry (10). Though Murray’s criticism tends toward humanist and correlationist sensibilities, I am interested in his exploration of Wordsworth’s use of formal devices to dramatize the “encounter and rapprochement of mind and nature,” as his poetry consistently draws upon and erases the “ordinary distinctions” between the “animate and inanimate realms” (7). What Murray calls the “gentleness with which Wordsworth shocks us out of our habitual ways of seeing things” (11), the way the poet’s images “give rise to our sense of nature’s participation” in a poetic narrative (12), and his “special fondness” for “equivocal” terms that “beg some deeper meaning” (17-19) evoke a speculative realist approach to poetic sensibility and material vibrancy.

Following similar lines of criticism on *Lyrical Ballads*, Eilenberg's important study helps us understand the nature and significance of Wordsworth and Coleridge's collaboration in terms of their shared but divergent idealisms of language and materiality. Eilenberg's interest in "the structures and processes of signification," as well as in Wordsworth and Coleridge's "mutual appropriation and possession" of each other's work that generated "competing versions of literary history and intertextuality" (x-xi) further clarifies the unique nature of these poets' distinctive relationship. Particularly important for my purposes is Eilenberg's demonstration of how Wordsworth's "property" and Coleridge's "possession" are ultimately the "same literary problem," and to distinguish between the former's "real" (Wordsworth's empirically consistent and lucid accounts of his thoughts and surroundings) and the latter's "merely literal" (Coleridge's playful experiments in language and fantastical tropes) in a text like *Lyrical Ballads* would be foolish at best (xi). Eilenberg's work is particularly useful in discussing Wordsworth's and Coleridge's distinct but complementary attempts to understand and execute correspondences between mind and matter; her refusal to validate one poet's sensibility more than the other supports the speculative realist argument that, as Latour puts it (in actor-network terms), language does not simply access either a "literal" or "figurative" set of referents, but rather a distinct but nevertheless *real* cross-section of material actants (qtd on Harman, *Prince* 25). As Harman paraphrases Latour, "Any name for anything at all is democratically confined to this layer of interrelations," and no signifier can refer "more directly than another" to some "proper" world essence (25).

Despite these divisions and failed syntheses, however, *Lyrical Ballads* remains an earnest and compelling collaboration between two men who, at least at this early point in their respective careers, held a deep reverence for each other's creative energies. More significant for my purposes in this thesis, both poets were motivated by an ardent desire to access a universal harmony of Nature, to reconcile language with some form of non-self or external verification of perception. As Stephen Prickett argues, Wordsworth and Coleridge's work in *Lyrical Ballads* "reflected" a "transcendent vision," but was "always the product of close conscious organization" (2), emphasizing their shared sensibilities and engagement with their surroundings. The poets' "philosophy and psychology" concerning symbolism and perception, Prickett argues, was grounded in "the attempt to put into words and analyze the conditions that inhibited or fostered their own growth" (19). Both seek a "glimpse of the whole," an encounter that "*shares* the nature of what is revealed" (Prickett 15, my emphasis), as well as a corresponding "ideal poetic language" in which "meanings would speak for themselves in their native tongue" (Eilenberg 169). What I consider in contemporary speculative realist terms is when to cooperate with and when to disrupt this correlationist tendency.

In further speculative realist considerations, the fact that both Wordsworth and Coleridge direct themselves toward what Eilenberg calls the "natural purity" and "organic wholeness" of Nature (169)—but strive toward this authenticity in radically different ways—reinforces the question of how poetic language ever manages to achieve a lucid rendering of "reality." While the last century of philosophy and criticism has compounded the Kantian belief that things do not exist or signify with any coherence outside of human consciousness, it remains tempting for readers to favor Wordsworth's claims in his 1800 Preface of looking "steadily" at his subjects, to seek the "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" and "communicate with the *best* objects from which the best part of language is originally derived" (174, my emphasis). Descendants of humanists that we are, it is difficult to shake Wordsworth's promise of a "worthy purpose" (175) of our arts and endeavors, and we strive to think "long and deeply," with a "more than usual organic sensibility," to discover and nourish what is "really important" (175) in the enlightenment of humankind. Wordsworth's influence is deeply and actively ingrained; his iconic work and its motivations, as exemplified in the above quotations, have become emblematic of modern Western poetry's compressed, weighty, concise, but, as Wordsworth's Preface explains, the "plainer and more emphatic" language (174) designed to intensify an observation or draw out a sensory encounter[3]. The present thesis wishes to take this humanism seriously as a means of understanding our distinctive experiences and motivations as self-conscious beings, but heed the calls of speculative realism to seek the weirdness of language and material.

It is at this strange threshold that I rely on Derrida's extended amplification of the encounter between "self" and "other" in order to locate moments of creative rupture between language and material. Though Derrida remains largely focused on the inaccessibility of "reality," his studies of subjectivity as the human (inter)face of différance—the combined force of difference and deferral that both makes possible and problematizes every act of signification—dislodges a tenacious thread of humanism: the insistence that selfhood and self-mastery are transcendental, self-evident truths that supersede the vagaries of materiality and otherness. In his essay "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida traces how the supplement of writing threatens the perceiving mind's authority and memory under the guise of a "remedy." The arrival of this external aid at the site of the logo- and anthropocentric body of the King sets off an improper, disorienting chain of signifiers, out of which it is exceedingly difficult to recover an

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[3] See, for example, Jonathon Bate's ecocritical essay "The Ode 'To Autumn' as Ecosytem." Though he is interested in darker themes than Wordsworth's "incidents of common life" (Preface 174), Bates nevertheless focuses on Keats' ability to "naturalize" the "progression" of one thing to another through the poem, creating a "contiguity between all its elements" (258).

"authentic" or "contained" self-sameness. Likewise, in his later essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," Derrida tries to meet the gaze of his little cat, only to find an "abyssal rupture" (31) that causes him to turn back on himself in shame, apprehending a non-self, a material externality, and the terrifying dichotomization of his naked self and an inscrutable other. Robert N. Essick describes in Coleridge's poetry an Adamic desire to construct a "motivated sign," a "unity between signs and their referents" (68) that depends on the poet's ideal concept of a sign that "always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible" (qtd on 68). By contrast, when read through a Derridean lens, both Coleridge's and Wordsworth's contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* can be viewed as accounts of linguistic anxieties, as each recognizes the slippery junctions between material and language, but simultaneously seek to restore a harmonious exchange between signifier and signified without resorting to the self-affirming language of scientific naturalism[4]. As the goal of this thesis is to suggest new readings of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early poetry that locates in them disruptions of the anthropocentric exchange between signs and objects, however, I see Derrida's displacement of such a unity as opening philosophical space for more radical emergences of nonhuman vibrancy: space that the new theories of speculative realism are currently attempting to map.

The problematic commonality among my selection of literary critics from Greenbie to Derrida, however, is their investment in the success (or lack thereof) of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's meditations on the relationships between human perception, material presence, readerly affect, and the formal devices of literature insofar as they apply to human mastery and signification. Each implies that the poets' creative powers lie in their ability to derive meaning from a multitude of external forces while seeking “authentic” or at least at least “stable” mediations between self-conscious sensibility and the external world. None go as far as breaking or derailing the correlationist track to the extent that theorists like Bogost and Bennett attempt in their realist speculations. Eilenberg, for example, analyzes the relationship between “literature and the objects of its reference” (xii), but asserts that “literature is fundamentally divided from the material world” (xiii). Materiality, Eilenberg insists, is only ever a “trope” or “symptom” rather than an “autonomous fact” (xiii), and she consistently turns her analysis toward the “nostalgia, mourning, envy, and resentment” that are said to characterize every necessarily missed connection between “romantic language” and the “material world” (xii). In sum, the critics I have outlined rely on what Bogost calls the “reign” of either “transcendent insight” or “subjective incarceration” (5), both of which occlude or dismiss the idea of “things” as legitimate objects of human study or sensory encounter.

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[4] Faflak writes of "Romantic science's" conflicted respect for both "earlier preformationist models of the planet's life as working by divine plan," and the concept that "nature" was "self-propagating and thus capable of its own mutations" (8).

In order to destabilize the correlationism of these literary critics, it remains to introduce more fully these recent speculative realisms on which I draw to explore the realm of objects that, as Bogost puts it, “fuse and connect in a conceptual fashion unrelated to consciousness” but that we nevertheless interact with by “some kind of proxy,” such as “tracing the fissures” of our connections (11). Here we find, as I mentioned earlier, “flat ontology,” one of several speculative realist methodologies that aim to “abandon the belief that human access sits at the center of being, organizing and regulating it like an ontological watchmaker” (Bogost 5). Instead, speculative realism—which, as its name suggests, proposes that we can have a non-idealist view of the world that is nevertheless distinct from naïve empiricism—aims to explore things and units as “both undeniably close and familiar, yet simultaneously distant and alien” (Bogost 24), always with a sensibility for the “black hole density” of objects and operations, the multitude of activity on the “exploded” horizon of a unit’s “being” (27).

Speculative realist philosophers are also interested in a critique of traditional vitalisms, such as what Bogost calls the humanist “compromise” that “imprecisely projects a living nature onto all things” (10) in order to legitimize its existence or enter it into the discourse of philosophy. Bennett takes up this challenge in *Vibrant Matter* by radically re-conceptualizing the terms of “life” and “matter” (vii) in her attempts to “bear witness to the vital materialities that flow through and around us” (x). Bennett’s is “not a vitalism in the traditional sense,” as she avoids calling the “impersonal affect” or “material vibrancy” of objects a kind of “supplement” or “life force” added to the inert matter of form (xiii). Instead, Bennett figures affect and responsiveness as *intrinsic* to materiality (xii-xiii). And, as Bennett asks, why explore such “vitality of matter” (ix)? She has a “hunch” that the “image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (ix). My thesis aims to emphasize similar problems with traditional humanisms and the correlationist model of mind and matter; if we continue to reinstate old vitalist hierarchies, we do much damage to the project of transforming our relationships to our nonhuman cohabitants. As an alternative offered by speculative realism, flattening those relationships opens up space for more supple and responsive philosophical meanderings.

Here it is also necessary to qualify my use of the label “speculative realism” and its various modifiers. While theorists such as Morton and Harman engage with questions of “weird realism” and, appropriately, *speculate* on meaning and existence operating on terms other than those of humanism, both identify themselves as “object-oriented ontologists” (or philosophers). The distinction lies in Morton’s and Harman’s qualms with process-oriented philosophies and what they view as the need to acknowledge the autonomy and insistence of multiple bodies and objects[5]. Furthermore, philosopher Bruno Latour identifies himself as an “actor-network theorist,” which positions objects in a vast, heterogeneous, and emergent network of relations that allows no ontological distinction between human and nonhuman bodies. While my thesis utilizes several materialist methodologies, I tend to favor the moniker “speculative realism” as a broad but productive description of contemporary philosophy’s legitimization of non-textual and non-constructivist experience (“realism”) that nevertheless acknowledges its epistemological and conceptual limitations (“speculative”). However, I take care in respecting the nuances of each theorist’s work and motivations and work to describe them with the labels they prefer. Furthermore, I frequently borrow terms from my selection of speculative realist and object-oriented theorists, favoring adjectives like Bennett’s “vibrant” and Harman’s “weird.” I find that using a diverse selection of terms helps gesture to what Bennett calls the “complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans” (112).

In sum, my speculative realist reading of *Lyrical Ballads* finds it to be a vast and heterogeneous network of energies and actors that, accordingly, constitute a diverse textual fabric. It thus aims to be contribute to both ecocritic and Romantic studies, especially insofar as the artists, philosophers, and critics of the latter era are preoccupied with the relationship between language and nature, and the perceiving mind and its objects of references. Above all, my approach tries to acknowledge the limits of idealist languages, while helping to recover what is still fresh and important about Romanticism by aiming to accommodate, or speculate, on the world of things beyond correlationism by “misreading” the language of *Lyrical Ballads*. In Chapter One I explore how Coleridge’s bizarre forays into dreamscapes and the “brokenness” of his language appear better suited for what Harman calls “weird realism,” but run up against their own set of limitations, such as solipsism and abstraction. Chapter Two, in contrast, argues that Wordsworth’s attempts at authentic mediation between language and Nature dissolve in what Bogost calls the “light of impossible verification” of material operations (30), and explores the possibility of “phenomenology that explodes like shrapnel, leaving behind the human as solitary consciousess” (32), rather than reinstituting the humanist idealisms of Romantic poetry. However, I continue to unite both poets’ distinctive inclinations toward what Bennett calls “material vibrancy,” arguing that it is imperative for contemporary readers to seek out realisms that challenge humanism’s tendency to locate itself at the center of aesthetic, philosophical, and worldly experience.

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[5] See, for example, Morton’s passages on “The Problem With Lava” (*Realist Magic* 162).

Chapter One: Coleridge's Broken Language

"Environmental rhetoric is too often strongly affirmative, extraverted, and masculine; it privileges speech over writing; and it simulates immediacy (feigning one-to-one correspondences between language and reality). It's sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty, and 'healthy.' Where does that leave negativity, introversion, femininity, writing, mediation, ambiguity, darkness, irony, fragmentation, and sickness? Are these simply nonecological categories?"

-Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*

In his Advertisement to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth warns his readers of the "strangeness and awkwardness" of the poems to follow (47). In his Preface to the 1800 edition, Wordsworth extends this admonition to describe the initially uncomfortable process of "readjusting" to a lost sensibility for *authentic* poetic language and subject matter: the human mind, Wordsworth argues, must remain free of the "gross and violent stimulants" that have drawn us from the natural paths of sensibility and harmony (176). But out of the numerous poems, revisions, notes, and collaborations spanning all three editions of *Lyrical Ballads*, the strangest text might be Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a rambling, supernatural frame-story in which an unnamed Mariner recounts an ocean journey and his encounters with the Albatross, the Lady Death, and a crew of zombies. The poem opened the lone volume in 1798 but was demoted to its near-end two years later; it appears that Coleridge's brand of "strange and awkward" was not what Wordsworth had in mind for his restoration of "natural" language. (Indeed, in later descriptions of the collaborative outlining of the ballad, Wordsworth confessed, "I soon found that the style of Coleridge and myself would not assimilate" [201]). To a Wordsworthian sensibility, it seems Coleridge's "Rime" propels itself in the opposite direction of "natural" language, toward inaccuracy, self-centeredness, and imaginative recklessness.

Critics who wrote alongside and following Wordsworth have likewise struggled with the "Rime's" content and structure. Contemporaries reckoned the poem as "nothing" (Gamer 15), and Charles Burney called it "the strangest story of a cock and a bull that we ever saw on paper" (qtd on Gamer 158). The poem's experimental style left readers confused and grasping for a coherent or convincing moral, and Coleridge himself returned to the poem more than once to literally "gloss" over its rough features and try to plug its leaks. The strange narratives of 1798 and 1800 were eventually shaped into a less-than-conclusive Christian allegory for its eventual publication in Coleridge's own volume of poetry in 1817, but the radiating network of vibrant, shifting revisions, correspondence, and critical responses that constitute the "Rime" persists for critics, poets, and students to open, read, rearrange, and renegotiate.

The present chapter conducts a post-structuralist and speculative realist reading of Coleridge's "Rime" in order to take seriously the "unintelligibility" critics have struggled with, not as an overlooked means to imaginary transcendence or a sign of impoverished literary talent, but as a complex web of significations and subjectivities, and, further, as an infolding of the human and nonhuman, immaterial and material, vital and mechanical. Ultimately, the *lack* of correspondence between Coleridge's authorial control, the medium of "natural" language, and the external world opens up space for nonlinguistic and non-anthropocentric presence. The sprawl of the "Rime" never manages to recalibrate what Coleridge recognizes as an irrevocable self-division between sensible language and "real" encounters, and meanwhile the unforeseeable fluxes of language and material both permeate and escape his narrative. It's at this point that I hope to find evidence of a poetic sensibility's accommodations of *material* vibrancy in order to understand how "nature poetry" can be extended to more radical territory.

My analysis focuses on the complex weave between narrative and material, but seeks to rethink the phenomenological binary of mind and matter. Like Coleridge's struggle with text and language, the "Rime's" narrator struggles to account for a bizarre journey, to distill a "sensible" narrative from an inscrutable series of events. As I mentioned before, the closest distillation of the poem for Coleridge and critics alike tends toward Christian allegory: the arrival of the Albatross in the Mariner's line of sight recalls the first division between Adam and his dominion over animals; the killing of the Albatross figures as a sort of original sin; and the Mariner's subsequent accounts of the event to unsuspecting passers-by represent his desperation to make sense of the trauma via confessional and narrative. But not surprisingly, attempts to placate or organize Coleridge's text by slapping a Christian allegory over it only exacerbate its excesses and impropriety. As Raimonda Modiano puts it, although such autobiographical narratives are the "only means by which the Mariner can relive his past," they constitute an "inaccurate view" of events and emphasize the "inner life of the self which is intrinsically mysterious, prerational, and mute" (42). And as Christopher Stokes argues, it is the very *irrationality* of a doctrine like Original Sin, not its reliability, that unbinds the poem's Christian themes from an "ultimate unity, harmony, and moral explicability" (4), meaning that even an attempt at religious ordering will not save Coleridge's poem from ambiguity. Finally, although he does not discuss Coleridge's poem explicitly, Derrida provides a more open, responsive, and ultimately productive framework for understanding "The Rime" than allegory can offer. In his "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)," Derrida suspends the Edenic narrative common to Christian discourse in order to demonstrate how an encounter with a mysterious animal (like the Albatross) evokes a traumatic but compelling division between self and other. In this light, we may see how the Mariner attempts to make sense of such material otherness via language and the tidiness of ideology, but it slips away from him, exploding the periphery of Coleridge's narrative into what speculative realism might call a vast heterogeneity of actors and energies that undermine any clear delineations of autonomous or self-evident subjectivity.

As outlined in my main introduction, the expansion of my analysis of Romantic poetry's mind/matter dualities into speculative realist territory relies on an unusual chronology of critical touchstones. Derrida's work locates moments, ruptures, or points of crossover between language and meaning, and his emphasis on the tension between mind and matter—though he does not moves outside of phenomenology—provides a model by which we can consider various degrees of access between the two, challenging what Quentin Meillassoux calls correlationism, or philosophy's tendency to legitimize being and meaning only as it applies to human perception, as outlined in Meillassoux's work *After Finitude*. When applied to *Lyrical Ballads,* a critique of correlationism is a critique of the model of a poetic mind that "vitalizes" or organizes the dead matter of the cosmos based on human access alone. Furthermore, the last century of linguistic theory has opened new channels of inquiry into the absence and instability of seemingly whole or infallible human authors, such as reliable Mariner-storytellers, or poet-masters like Coleridge and Wordsworth whose languages recreate the "motivated" language of Adam that, as Essick puts it, "is one with human perception" as an "echo of God's creative Word, differing from the Logos only in degree, and in the mode of its operation" (63). Finally, contemporary theories such as speculative realism have extended these decentering gestures to amplify the strange flickerings and overlooked intimacy of the *material*. Most relevant to the present claim is Morton's proposition: "For meaning to happen [in a non-anthropocentric manner], language must be noisy, messy, grainy, vague, and slippery" in order to acknowledge the "monstrosities," "strangeness," and "harmony in discord" in nature (65-6). Read in this light, Coleridge's bizarre poem serves as a jumping-off point from which we might get past the limitations of Derridean subjectivity, move toward agencies non-exclusive to the Romantic individual, and accommodate strange, tactile, vibrant, and emergent energies and inlets between language and material.

With this chimerical partnership of linguistic and ontological theory, I argue for the Mariner's accounts of guilt, chaos, and attempts at salvation as a series of radical moments rather than a climax-driven plot. In a more traditional vein, Kessler explores moments in which Coleridge remains "suspended between thoughts and things," attempting to "unify" through an "act of consciousness" what he views as the "opposites" of perception and external referents (135). But whereas Kessler argues that Coleridge lingers in these moments in order to render "glorified phenomenon" through self-reflection (135)—a familiar humanist practice of "animating" a series of encounters through what Kessler calls "higher consciousness" (134)—I will argue that such moments open thresholds onto nonhuman vibrancy rather than its stagnancy or passivity. Turning to Derrida, for example, helps us figure the Mariner's journey is a series of poetic *traces*, signs of encounter with otherness and multiplicity, particularly those of animal and material[6]. These traces are fundamentally disconcerting to the human subject; even as the Mariner attempts to master his narrative, the poetic trace dissolves at the borders of intelligibility, an insistence that, as Derrida puts it, "refuses to be conceptualized" (9). But this refusal, a type of material recalcitrance and network energy—what Morton (though not referring to Coleridge's poem) describes as "disaster" that has "torn a giant hole in the fabric our understanding" (14)—is a radical moment of material interconnectedness, what in Latourian terms might be viewed as apprehension of a society of actants. In his *Reassembling the Social*,

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[6] To Derrida, "thinking concerning the animal…derives from poetry" (8). And to Morton, "art" can "sometimes gives voice to what is unspeakable elsewhere" (12).

Latour argues that we might recognize the presence of the unfamiliar (animality, otherness) at the site of "accidents, breakdowns, and strikes," in which "completely silent intermediaries" become "full blown mediators" (81). In particular, the "resource of fiction" is a means to bring solid, taken-for-granted objects into "fluid states" (81) and thus apprehend (willingly or not) their autonomy and presence. Ultimately, when human language such as Coleridge's is expanded, let loose, dissolved, broken, or misaligned, networks of previously overlooked material express themselves through channels traditionally deemed "improper" to the poet or philosopher, expanding into what Morton calls the "intrinsically strange" (15) mesh of material vibrancy. Coleridge's poetry in "The Rime," I argue, is just such a language.

Frames within Frames: The Play between Gaze and Material

To begin my analysis, I wish to treat Part One of Coleridge's poem as a phenomenological-realist case study, in which functioning, recognizable subjects—the Mariner and his fellow sailors—encounter the haze of non-self and materiality. Beginning with the poem's displaced narration and the unidentified catalyst for the crew's journey into a "no-man's land," I wish to situate the Mariner and his readers at a threshold of ontological and epistemological uncertainty, but equipped with speculative and ecological instincts so as to apprehend *other* realities and material experiences even as their own are dissolved or destabilized. Using Derrida's concept of the animal gaze, I will pay special attention to the perceptual and ontological difficulties of the Mariner's first encounter with the Albatross, using that rupture between human perception and material otherness as a basis for my claim that a humanist sensibility's "broken" and "negative" encounters with external events make space for non-anthropocentric meaning and being.

A fundamental displacement between anthropocentric language and nonhuman material is immediately apparent in the frame structure of "The Rime," through which it is difficult to locate a reliable narrator or motivated journey. The poem begins, for example, with the outermost narrative of an "Ancient Mariner" who diverts an unnamed Wedding Guest from his nuptial festivities, launching peremptorily into the hook, "There was a ship…" (10). Like the unsuspecting Wedding Guest who "cannot chuse but hear" the Mariner's tale (22), readers are drawn into multiple frameworks of confession and memory, none of which align neatly with a singular ideological or aesthetic discourse. As the Mariner's ship "drop[s]" over an unnamed horizon (26), for example, the narrative opens up a strange psychological and material landscape: the drop suggests a terrestrial weight that has distanced the crew from any sensible mastery over their surroundings. And as Morton points out in *The Ecological Thought*, the ship slides into unfamiliar temporality: the sun comes "up," rising "out of the sea," but sets rapidly (Coleridge 29-30) in a sort of fast-forward view of nature, a bloom and descent at a scale undetectable by the "naked eye" (Morton 43). Like the frame structure, the formal elements of verse and stanza make it so the linguistic "summary" signifies the cosmological awesomeness of the scene; language immediately functions as a lens, an aid to the eye's incomplete perception. To Morton, these kinds of effects—sensual, technological—help to constitute a "big" ecological mindset, or the cooperative apprehension of non-correlationist ecologies (15). In other words, this language-as-technology immediately takes the focus away from anthropocentric mastery, tracing a realm where light, time, and velocity operate on the level of stars and orbits rather than human patterns of organization and patience. No cross-section of perception and material allows for authorial or readerly omniscience: at each level, intelligibility emerges and dissolves, emphasizing the infinite multiplicities of timelines and encounters unperceived from a localized or finite position.

In the 1798 and 1800 versions of the poem, Coleridge seems (initially) unconcerned that his internal yet otherworldly narrative does not unfold along a smooth, readable topography; it isn't until later revisions that he takes great pains to explain the gaps, recesses, and incomplete perceptions rampant in the Mariner's story[7]. This revisionist instinct exemplifies an author's attempt to "fix" a text, to make a tight weave and thus cover, repress, or obfuscate unforeseen or unwelcome actors. Coleridge's fantastical but material-driven descriptions—the trajectories of stars, the passage of time and movement through space—show how language can induce unfamiliar sensations of movement and displacement, an important contrast to Wordsworth's attempts to naturalize language, which tend to confine readers to a diminutive network of actors in the service of a particular narrative[8].

The *Rime*'s multiple frames and dynamic descriptions of "natural" trajectories, thus, position multiple humanist operators of language—the sailors, the Mariner-as-storyteller addressing the Wedding Guest, Coleridge the author, and readers of the poem itself —at a threshold of uncertainty and vulnerability. The sailors enter a land of "Mist and Snow" (49) where shapes and beasts are unrecognizable, and the ice surrounding the ship emits a "wild and ceaseless sound" (1800 version 60) that dominates the sailors' and readers' aesthetic and psychological perception of the scene. Stokes argues that this sea is a "region where orientation becomes confused," setting up an "equivalence between physical and spiritual security and estrangement" (5), again emphasizing the lack of a stable point of reference. Similarly, in his analysis of humanist apprehension of animal otherness, Derrida describes the “promise or threat” at approaching such an “open” territory: “You’ll see what you will see” at the border of man and animal, and this abyssal “vertigo” inspires fear and disorientation (17-18). Furthermore, as Morton describes our arrival at the “intersections in the unimaginably gigantic mesh” of material interconnectedness, he emphasizes radical unknowability: “We can’t predict or anticipate just who or what—and can we tell between ‘who’ and ‘what,’ and how can we tell?”—is ontologically nearby (38). The crew appears to have entered a realm where no reliable guide or language can transport them safely across the landscape—this lack of prescribed narrative is both terrifying and thrilling, as it opens the aesthetic and linguistic fabric of the poem to unforeseen and excessive encounters with animals and objects that more neatly orchestrated texts, like those of Wordsworth (and much of Coleridge’s own later, more conservative poetry), tend to repress. For example, in the mistiness of the Mariner’s surroundings floats an “Ice mast-high” as “green as Emerauld” (51-52); such a description draws attention to what Bennett calls the “impersonal” but nevertheless “vibrant” agency of nonhuman objects (xiii) that, as the Mariner observes, “floats” alongside the narrator’s sense of agency rather than fuses to its dominion, similar to Wordsworth’s objects “half-created” and “half-perceived” (“Tintern Abbey”).

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[7] Appropriately, some traditionalist critics treat Coleridge's gloss as an informative and sophisticated addendum. As Huntington Brown argues in 1945, the gloss has "*humanized* the impossible events of the voyage" (324, my emphasis).

[8] Though I do not provide many direct examples of Wordsworth's style and intentions here, I devote my second chapter to critiquing the poet's anthropocentric tendencies, but offering a re-reading of some of his iconic contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* as another realism consisting of lucid, positivist "metaphorisms" (Bogost's term).

Such a disconnection between the hard presence of otherness from the ordering and projections of the mind, however, makes even a speculative account of the scene’s “reality” difficult, as it is easy to resort to correlationist language, such as that of scientific empiricism or overly-personal meditations that reduce external data to purely subjective experience. The arrival of the Albatross through the fog and refracted light, for example, is an insistence of real, vital, and meaningful externality, but simultaneously a moment of identification and relief that necessarily occurs through the crew’s preexisting symbolic frameworks. In object-oriented terms such as Harman's, the Albatross exists as un-totalizable—irreducible to linguistic or perceptual encounters as an object always "withdraws" some portion of itself even in deployment (130)—but at the same time associative and meaningful—as Bogost might suggest, part of a metaphoric exchange (61). For a while, the Albatross draws the sailors into its "pure materiality," but soon the old signifiers—the ideologies and hierarchies the sailors carry as subjects already interpellated into their homeland's frameworks of intelligibility—take over the exchange. The sailors "hail" the only clearly defined emblem they have seen on their journey thus far "like" a "Christian soul" (63), attributing its meaning and wholeness to the Christian God's awesome power to pull anthropomorphized beings (bodies in service to a particular narrative) out of primordial muck. Like Adam naming the animals, the arrival of the Albatross signifies the sailors' mastery—their constitutive role in an anthropocentric, Genesis-like narrative—as it coincides with a blessing from God that splits the ice and brings a "good southwind" (69) to transport the sailors from the chaos of a strange, pre-linguistic realm. The Albatross itself follows the ship for "food or play" (71), suggesting its innocence and affection; its nameability domesticates (and, in object-oriented terms, reduces) the animal as a reflection of human will, value, and desire, and its presence and meaning are initially unthreatening. The significance of the Albatross's arrival in speculative realist terms is thus elusive and dynamic; while a realist apprehension of nonhuman actors seeks to legitimize such encounters as real and heterogeneous, it is difficult to shake the correlationist impulse to render material data into familiar tropes and signifiers.

Besides the presence of the bird itself, perhaps the most excessive, non-correlationist force of the encounter between the crew and the Albatross is the inscrutability of the Mariner's reaction and the events that follow the bird's death. If the poem were indeed an orthodox retelling of the Genesis myth, the "Rime's" thematic concerns with sin and retribution might establish this exchange as either a moment of absolute innocence (the Mariner bears no responsibility for his actions because he, like a child born into certain branches of Christianity, is unaware of sin) or a case study in due process of celestial law (the Mariner willingly performs an action and must be cast from Eden). However, if my argument about Coleridge's proto-speculative realism is correct, such Christian narratives reach their readers in playful, deeply ambivalent, and deconstructed terms, and the strange suspension of a "pre-linguistic" or "pre-selved" realm—the Edenic trope—as an icy, shadowy sea provides a means to disrupt these familiar notions of humanist motive and intention. As the Mariner shoots the Albatross—a perfunctory, matter-of-fact, almost inexplicable decision—it is difficult to determine an "apparent" motive or perceptible aftershock (5-6). As Stokes argues, Coleridge's Unitarian moral theory would have *emphasized* motives since their "determinative effects" were "their compatibilist analysis of volition, the only marks of responsibility" (5-6). But as there are no apparent cause-and-effect relations in the poem, the unfolding of events is "out of place" and seems to emphasize the Mariner's lack of will, attributing the decision to something that *exceeds* his understanding or his ability to binarize the events in humanist terms of power/passivity, vitality/inertia, or familiarity/strangeness. To Stokes, the mysterious, troubling endowment of *Original* Sin accounts for Coleridge's excessive narrative energy (7); for my speculative realist purposes, however, what is really being registered by Coleridge's poem at this juncture are the strange, constitutive networks of nonhuman and human material that simply escape our anthropocentric comprehension. What Stokes calls a "powerful but initially unintelligible event" (6) that lacks immediate retribution (there are no instantaneous lightning bolts from God) emphasizes the lagging incapacity of language to fully apprehend a subject's surroundings.

When read in speculative realist terms, this delay might be a threshold to the vibrancy of otherness—displays of pyrotechnics that destabilize the cause-and-effect narrative that the human will attempts to impose on the world at large. Ultimately, the structural chaos of Coleridge's narrative (the multiple frames, inconsistent allusions to Genesis myths, slippery and partial identifications of the poet with his Mariner persona) emphasizes quite beautifully how the self oscillates between fluid and fixed states as a condition of heterogeneous or nonstandard unities, and that language tends to reduce and cannot totalize that excess.

What becomes powerfully apparent in these disjunctions among will, language, and material is the vulnerability and shame induced by the fact of interdependence. While the "openness" of all the fog and mist is initially unthreatening—a mysterious but placating void—it allows the arrival of nonhuman objects such as the Albatross to enter the Mariner's sensory and perceptive horizons. In violent disavowal of such a frightening encounter between self and other[9], the Mariner subordinates the material (Albatross) as sacrifice, in defiance of what Derrida calls the "single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal" (4). The appearance of the Albatross is a type of salvation only insofar as it appears to temporarily relieve the sailor's confusion, but as an arrival from the outside, it evokes anxiety in the Mariner and thus symptomatic misidentification of the animal as a threat or sacrifice. Coleridge simultaneously recognizes how seemingly stable signifiers are necessary companions to humans in a hazy, undifferentiated mind- and landscape, but the otherness of their material referents invokes the shame of disorientation and interdependence. As an animal-other that guides the sailors through the fog and mist, it represents an external aid, the logistical divisions of subjectivity; this "technicity," as Derrida puts it, always accompanies "shame" that must be covered (5)—or, more precisely, clothed in *language* so that we might not be equally gaze-able in *material* terms, such as those of animals that exist and define in real but radically unintelligible ways to correlationist symbology. In the Mariner's case, a pointed disavowal of his vulnerability and instability as he oscillates among the innocence of not knowing differentiation—the horrible but compelling draw of the "real" outside—and the "fallen" state of killing the Albatross as an act of ideological and ontological domination.

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[9] Frightening, indeed. It's difficult to explain the source of the Mariner's anxiety because of the uncanniness of such an encounter. Does the Derridean encounter between self and other evoke anxiety because it insists on their intimacy or differentiation? How does the Albatross evoke such existential terror? Perhaps a realization that the linguistic assignations of "whole" subjectivity are arbitrary and slippery? For now I think the general instability of the exchange is reason enough for the Mariner to feel queasy.

In Derridean terms, following the initial trauma of differentiation, the sailors need a chain of increasingly complex differentiation, such as the linguistic nuances of tautology, to construct a sense of order in the second part of Coleridge's poem. The arrival and death of the Albatross generated an ontological and epistemological rift, and as the Mariner and crew work to establish guilt or causality, the supplement of their language tears, expands, and attempts to efface or cover that rift—*as they refuse to know in any terms other than their own*. This linguistic and psychological energy, in turn, continues to generate the vast, sprawling, heterogeneous story disseminated by the narrator. The Mariner repeats "For all averr'd, I had Kill'd the Bird" (91, 95)—first as a "hellish thing" but second as congratulation (95). The sailors praise the decision, retroactively attributing the "fog and mist" to the Albatross (96-8), not as some preexisting locality that exists on its own mysterious but real terms. The Mariner's retelling traces the reassignment of shame, a sort of cognitive dissonance made possible by self-reflexivity and language, further undermining any neat correspondence between external and internal but opening up new rifts and penetration points for material to move through. Language, in this sense, serves to cover the Mariner's shame, but simultaneously leaves a trace or supplement that blurs the distinctions between will and its objects. Coleridge uses the repetition of "I had Kill'd the Bird" to emphasize how language orders both present surroundings and recollects (and re-collects) the data of past encounters; the phrase loops in and between the sailors until they "take" to its supplement—appropriating its potency as if it were theirs all along—but at the same time permeates and expands the sailors' perceptual interfaces with their surroundings, allowing for what Bogost calls complex "metaphorisms" between active, intelligent, meaningful bodies (61).

To review the first section (and beginning of the second section) of Coleridge's poem, then, the Mariner's retelling of his initial encounter with the Albatross can be read as the construction of material-linguistic subjectivity. The strange and muffled landscape of ice and light is a realm of undifferentiated forms, in which the Mariner can identify "Storm and Wind" and "Tempest strong!" (45-46), "Mist and Snow" (49), "snowy clifts" (53), and even an emerald-green iceberg (52), but no "shapes of men" or "beasts" (55). "The Ice was here, the Ice was there,/The Ice was all around" (57-58), he cries, emphasizing the all-encompassing forces that of ice and wind that "play'd us freaks" and "drove" them along "Like Chaff" (47-48). The ship and crew are completely helpless against the material forces of their environment, and this vulnerability makes possible an encounter with the material, in the form of the Albatross itself. This moment is both *real*, to the extent that an autonomous, differentiated form arrives and its recognition as such by the crew implies a degree of intimacy, and divisive, since the bird's presence disrupts the continuum of ice and light in which the ship had previously existed. The Albatross arrives (61), the crew hails it in "God's name" (64), and as the Albatross flies "round and round" the "Ice did split with a Thunder-fit" and allows the helmsman to steer through the ice (66-68). The arrival of the Albatross, in this sense, marks a moment of language ("hail"), division (“split”), and mastery (“steer”). However, after a few days of the Albatross following the ship (70), the Mariner shoots it without apparent reason (80), demonstrating how that moment of “salvation” actually evoked hostility and displacement. Since the text itself tells us nothing of the Mariner’s motivations for this act of seemingly unprovoked violence, critics such as Stokes have typically taken this silence as an invitation for speculation, most commonly by suggesting that it represents humanity’s “Original Sin.” A deconstructive-materialist reading, however, suggests a different interpretation. Just as Derrida’s encounter with his cat at the start of “The Animal That Therefore I Am” provokes shame that must be covered in the face of the nonhuman Other, the Mariner’s killing of the Albatross marks a violent attempt to obfuscate the material, to cover his shame in the face of a willful other, but sets off a chain of signification that continually loops back on itself to cover its traces. The narration and dialogue seeks to realign an intelligible narrative, but are haunted by the material insistence of the Albatross, as the fabric of the Mariner’s language (and, in a broader structural sense, Coleridge’s) is open to cross-cutting forces of nonhuman vibrancy. As we will see in the next sections of Coleridge’s poem, the Mariner’s encounters have only just begun. (Mariner’s violence needs to be clarified earlier.)

“The Silent Sea”: Expanding Inner and Outer Horizons

Although in Derridean terms the Mariner’s acts of linguistic differentiation and hostility toward the animal has little to do with realms outside of human access (correlationism), a speculative realist reading of the “Rime” provides a framework through which readers might apprehend the complex mediation between the Mariner’s linguistic subjectivity and the real, autonomous bodies, such as animals and alien objects, it encounters. In order to articulate this further, I rely on Latour’s concept of “reassembling the social,” a process that he argues makes visible the nonhuman “social” actants—networks of material, animal, and objects—that usually remain undetected or taken for granted in our normal usages[10]. Following the important but unintelligible killing of the Albatross, the crew continues its journey farther over what is figured as the desolate, empty sea’s horizon; in Latourian terms, this *lack* of water, familiar distractions, rejuvenation, and linguistic coherence amplifies or highlights the sailors’ shifting, heterogeneous encounters with multitudes of vibrant actors, even as the narrator(s) fail(s) to comprehend or acknowledge such activity. In this expansion of trajectory and fantastical speculation, readers might also apprehend what Bogost calls “tiny ontology,” or the simultaneously compressed and expansive nature of being (19, 26-7). These speculative realist approaches amplify Coleridge’s discomfiting ability to disrupt anthropocentric ecologies and destabilize perception, especially potent considering he is a poet who strives (consciously) to achieve an authentic, metaphysically dynamic mediation between his language and surroundings but utilizes supernatural content and experimental structural elements to achieve his brand of “realism.” Ultimately, Part II of Coleridge’s poem extends the ontological and perceptual implications of the Mariner’s initial contact with the Albatross, drawing its readers into a complex interplay of human creativity and the material otherness it encounters.

Humanist readings of Coleridge’s “Rime” tend to focus on the doldrums scene as a means of understanding the poet’s creative struggle and potential, emphasizing the dead surroundings and summoning humanist narratives of self-actualization or noble-ized purgatory to rescue the narrator from almost certain oblivion. The Mariner perceives the landscape as a place of zero interaction, creation, or dialogue because in humanist terms it can only be figured as purgatory—their ship as “idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean” (113-14)[11]. To Kessler, for example, to transform such moments of “limbo” is to locate the moment “the poet [can] begin the process of transformation that leads to Being”—the perceiving subject can “convert” objects into “*living idea[s]*” (133). The Mariner, like the poet, is compelled to “create an abstraction” that can “inspire movement,” to move beyond the “stagnant position” of a dejected poet (132). Similar to Derrida’s paralysis on the threshold of otherness, the immobility of the ship and crew suggests they are at the limits of intelligibility or creative action. And such descriptions prove how difficult it is for correlationist subjects to apprehend the nonhuman freedom or vibrancy of radically alien territory. “We were the first that ever burst / Into that silent Sea” (101-2), the Mariner explains, figuring the crew as the first and only presence of “meaningful” subjectivity. Even as he is bombarded with sensory data and external reference points, the Mariner cannot help but emphasize his “original” and “exclusive” trajectory, to run what Kessler describes as the “shapeless accidents” of “nature” through the sieve of the “imaginative viewer” (136). Read along these lines, when human action and language are bound or malnourished, only stillness and anguish remain.

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[10] This is an extension of the Heideggerian conceptualization of “broken tools.” Harman, for example, expands on this concept in his essay “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer,” arguing that object-oriented philosophy relies on the warrant that an object’s use value or phenomenological significance are only slim dimensions of an object’s reality. When such value is disrupted or removed, the object’s autonomy and external presence becomes more apparent, even to the correlationist eye and hand (186-7).

In speculative realist terms, one of the problems with such anthropocentric musings is how they diminish and homogenize the quality of perceptual encounters. However, despite critical assessments such as Kessler’s, I argue that Coleridge’s poem is structurally and thematically complex enough to disrupt a humanist dominion over the so-called “shapeless accidents of nature.” Yes, it is true that as he draws meaning from his surroundings, the Mariner tends to eulogize and reduce rather than accommodate. As the breeze and sails drop (103), for example, the Mariner deems the scene as “sad as sad could be” (104), believing only the crew has the ability to “break” the “silence of the sea” with their speech (105-6). In the aftermath of the Albatross’s death, the Mariner uses his ambivalent shame to attempt to “sympathize” with his surroundings, but by detecting muteness and sadness instead of vibrancy. Likewise, while focusing almost exclusively on human pathos, Derrida writes of an apprehension of the “great sorrow of nature” (19), in which a subject hopes for “redemption (*Erlosung*) from that suffering” by living and speaking “in nature” (19)—though, in the Mariner’s case, he has been an agent of its destruction. But Derrida continues, stating that nature isn’t “sad” because it is “mute”; it is nature’s sadness that “renders it mute and aphasic” (19). The sadness comes from “*receiving one’s name*” (being properly, or improperly, named from the outside, receiving the Name of the Father), “being invaded by sadness” and experiencing a subsequent inability to “reappropriate” one’s “own name” (19-20). Remaining for a moment in Derrida’s eulogizing, we might see how the Mariner’s melancholia comes from a similar “naming” process, an encounter with the deep sadness of nature and his own “grieving aphasia” after his “original sin” (Derrida 20) on the sea. His Promethean “superiority” over an animal (Derrida 20) makes the Mariner feel powerful, as the act of killing has built a particular frame of reference, motivation, and significance (a seemingly self-evident division of self and other, as well as biblical drama to the events), but it also evokes shame and an overpowering sense of loss.

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[11] The Platonic mimesis of art is a type of trace: it threatens the original, makes movement, control, and vitality impossible.

However, as the Mariner’s narrative continues, speculative realist readers might begin to detect a multitude of nonhuman actors that persist, regardless of the crew’s mute sadness. Again, the Mariner’s distance from recognizable homeland and semiotic relief emphasizes the unintelligibility of this sin (or, perhaps, the sin of unintelligibility, as even the new “frame” is elusive and unreliable); though the Mariner makes concerted perceptual and linguistic efforts to make sense of his surroundings, the narrative that follows bends, stretches, and edges up against the slime and rot of a "silent" sea of vibrant actors (to borrow Bennett's term). Through the poem's *suspension* and *diffusion* of the disorienting rift between real and symbolic, nakedness and technicity, instinct and shame, the narrative both "appropriates" the scene by silencing its nonhuman actors, but also accommodates the actors' strange activities (the rotting deeps, the "slimy things," the dancing "Death-fires," and water that burns like a "witch's oil" [119-26]). Passages like these demonstrate how Coleridge's language is a cross-section of the fantastical and material, in which slippages, coverings, and realignments are actually *more* conducive in detecting and amplifying the nonhuman vibrancies of sky, doldrums, animals, and language[12].

The sailors' encounter with this realm is physically and figuratively shallow: touch and perception raises an object to a subject's "superficial knowledge," as Bennett puts it (6), and as the sailors are in radically alien territory they struggle to render sense through their (seemingly) stable mechanisms of signs, religious narratives, or self-assurance. But while it is important to discuss the complexities and limitations of poetic subjectivity—to ask humanist questions of access, identity, and the power of language—a speculative realist reading of the Mariner's immobility and discomfort must also rely on the warrant that such a "void" only exists in anthropocentric terms. The openness and displacement—the Derridean instability—of the Mariner's language generates possibilities of apprehending the nonhuman, drawing the crew farther over the sea's horizon as they follow the "other" along an emerging chain of differentiation through a landscape of "bottomless gaze" and the "abyssal limit of the human" (Derrida 12). But in crossing this new horizon, it is useful to take on the challenge, like the Mariner, of settling our transgressions in the profound, murky, and *un*settling depths of a "silent sea" (102), what appears to be an inscrutable and initially unsignifying place. In speculative realist terms, such a "void" might be read as mysterious and vibrant, not dead or homogenous, thus placing the crew at a speculative threshold, not a humanist hell. Indeed, as Morton argues, the ship is surrounded by activity (47). "The very deeps did rot" (119) points to a profoundly mysterious network of beings: "slimy things" crawling upon the "slimy sea" (122), an image that simultaneously expands the realm of motion and interaction and re-circles the Mariner, recalling the heavy rot of the Albatross around his neck. In this case, the inadequacy of language and the stagnancy of the "creative" mind have actually opened the narrative to the infinity of material: the humanist motive for creative sustenance does not exhaust the totality of the landscape.

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[12] An example of this flicker between language and material is the new weight the Mariner must carry: by the end of this "Part II," the Albatross is hung around the Mariner's neck, signifying how a *material* weight hangs where the immaterial symbol (though its material form may be wood or silver) of the Cross is typically located (37-38). The bird recurrently functions as a conduit between humanist and material experiences; its totality is never "exhausted" (Harman's term) and, even when dead, continues to throw its weight around the narrative.

The crew, however, tends to remain literally and figuratively afloat. Like language, the ship can be seen as a sort of mediating vehicle for human cognition: it is invisible but necessary, divisive but intimate, a tool but also a threat to the crew's mastery. The ship functions as a signifying veil or coat, a technological feat but also an uncanny reminder of vulnerability and intimacy with the material. To abandon ship and sink into the sea—naked, free, and lost—is unthinkable, and yet it's tempting to disavow the technicity that keeps one from sinking. Tools such as a ship are the bases for experimenting and coevolving with mobility, chemical reactions, languages, and other crosscutting material forces, but it becomes necessary to appropriate or subordinate their potency so as to cover the shame of dependence. At the same time, however, recognition of such "inherent partition between things," as Bogost puts it (40), is necessary for a speculative realist analysis of the mediations between literature and material. The detection of material vibrancy requires a flexible language and accommodative subjectivity, but also acknowledgement of the inaccessibility and inscrutability of objects (as Bogost puts it, accepting that the "subjective character of experiences cannot be fully recuperated objectively, even if it remains fully real" [64]). The crew's dependence on the ship, in this sense, is a Bogostian "unit operation" and a Latourian "alliance" (a vibrant intersection of material), but neither the humans nor the technology is fully immersed in or appropriated by the other.

Ultimately, Part II of Coleridge's poem might be read as a speculating on the limits of human perception and the material forces that tend to get lost, repressed, or obfuscated when poetic creativity seems to be under siege. My reading emphasizes superficial and partitioned apprehensions of external forces, but simultaneously attempts to muster alternatives to what Bogost calls the "correlationist trap" by applying Latour's concept of how "breakdowns"—of sustenance, language, and clear humanist operatives—open space for other forms of significance and vibrancy. As I hope to demonstrate in my reading of the third section of the "Rime," the drawn-out decay of the Mariner's linguistic and physiological power results in brief but radically material-oriented moments of non-anthropocentric vibrancy.

Zombies and Chimeras

Parts III, IV, and V of Coleridge's poem are structured as its climax, recounting the Mariner's strange and contradictory encounters with the sublime mysteries of mind and nature. The structural and thematic forces of the poem become strained and heterogeneous, culminating in the most dramatic interfaces of psychological and material forces: a strange, displaced scene of animal intimacy and spiritual salvation, and the evocative appearance of the zombie figure. Figuring this section as the most chimerical of the poem, I argue that a strange, distinctive, but *realist* account of “nature” emerges through the textual fabric of the poem at the moment it is most disjointed and (from critical perspectives) embarrassing. When language and its supposedly stable correspondences with reality, identity, and will are figured more as Derridean “abyssal rupture” (31) than an Adamic ideal, Wordsworth’s lucid, even-keeled texts begin to appear less sound, and Coleridge’s broken but experimental texts more heterogeneous and materially-oriented.

Before I lay out the post-structuralist and speculative realist concepts that allow me to figure this section as the most chimerical, I will follow the third section’s plot up until the Mariner’s “epiphany” regarding nonhuman life and celestial events, emphasizing moments of division and misalignment so as to arrive at the zombie scene already attentive to how, in Latourian terms, the text becomes the site of breakdown and thus susceptible to radical material presence. First, the Mariner continues to be deprived of, as Modiano puts it, a “corresponding language” to account for his surroundings (43). For example, In Part III the Mariner describes another “little speck” that moves and “takes shape” in the sky (141-44). The crew cannot “laugh” or “wail” to proclaim recognition of the object, yet as the Mariner has a sudden visceral impulse to bite his arm and suck blood, he is able to cry, “A sail! a sail!” (145-50). While the rest of the crew stands “dumb” and powerless, a skeletal ship drives “betwixt” them and the sun (151-53, 67-68). In this instance it is a *self-same* supplement that permits speech, even as an external arrival (similar to the Albatross) stimulates a response. However, this perverted self-empowerment divides the Mariner further from his crew, as he is the only shipmate left behind once Lady Death and her “fleshless” companion take the souls from the crew, leaving a “lifeless lump” in place of each of the “living men” (169-215). Furthermore, as Modiano argues, the Mariner’s words actually “blatantly conflict” with his surroundings, resulting in a subsequent "extinction of language" (43). After all, Modiano insists, "how is one to name and encode that most bizarre apparition of a spectral bark with a deathly crew on it?" (43). Such displacement between language and external referents, I argue, is actually what creates uncanny, associative space for nonhuman beings such as zombies.

The unreliability of his language (at least in human terms of mediation) pushes the Mariner to a place of "inexpressible solitude," as Modiano puts it. As each crewmember dies, he turns his face to the Mariner, and with a "ghastly pang" curses him with his eye (206-7). The Mariner does not know whether they "fled to bliss or woe," but as each soul passes him he recalls the "whiz" of his "Cross-bow" (215), emphasizing how the crew's departure constitutes an equally radical act of displacement—even disavowal—as when the Mariner first shot the Albatross. Has the Mariner himself been an agent of the crewmembers' deaths? Does the sound invoke the Mariner's guilt as the individual who has set off such a terrifying chain of events? Whatever has occurred leaves the Mariner in a state of shock and acute sensitivity: "Alone, alone, all all alone / Alone on the wide wide Sea," the Mariner cries (224-25). He walks among the lying dead, the "many men so beautiful," and "[lives] on" with the "million million slimy things" of the sea (228-31). His repetition of language and his attempts to "pray" to "Heaven" (236) are inadequate to combat the weight of his surroundings: a "wicked whisper" makes his "heart as dry as dust" (239), and when he closes his eyes "the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky / Lay like a load" on his "weary eye" (240-43). The dead men at his feet do not "reek" or "rot," but look upon him with "the curse in a dead man's eye," and for a week the Mariner waits in despair, unable to die himself (244-254). (Malewitz: language has also become asocial, perhaps a speculative turn.)

But this failure of language and familiar social orders leads to what Latour calls "a trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements"—a *type* of connection rather than a singular, homogenized "social" of humans and language (5). And in following these associations we must, as Latour puts it, "reshuffle our conceptions of what was associated together" (*Social* 6). Indeed, over the course of his solitude, the Mariner observes a multitude of "happy, living things" (274)—the "moving Moon" (255), the "charmed water" (262), and the "water-snakes" moving in "tracks of shining white" (265-66). "Elfish light" falls off the snakes in "hoary flakes," and their "rich attire" of "blue, glossy green, and velvet black" leaves "track[s]" and "flash[es]" of "golden fire" as they swim (267-73). What earlier in the "silent sea" had been a source of unease has now become a stimulating interplay between the Mariner's perception and nonhuman vibrancy: the solitude, suspension, and vulnerability of the setting have allowed the Mariner to witness an alien landscape in which anthropocentric mastery has partially dissolved, giving way to (borrowing Latour's terms) a new assemblage of meaning and relation. Though the Mariner attempts to describe the scene, he admits "no tongue" can "declare" the "beauty" of the scene (274-75), momentarily relinquishing his power of description to what Bennett calls the vibrancy of material. But as a "spring of love" gushes from his heart (276) he blesses the snakes, attributing the rapturous beauty to a "kind saint" who pities him (277-79). Moments of such material immediacy are difficult to sustain, and the narrative closes in at the "self-same moment" he prays, and the Albatross falls from the Mariner's neck "so free" and sinks "like lead" into the water (280-84). At the most concentrated and difficult moment of intimacy—what Morton would call an "unnatural, uncanny sequence of mutations and catastrophic events" in a "denatured nature" (*Ecological* 8)—the Christian narrative of absolution returns to reassemble the heterogeneous data in more familiar terms, and the (mediating) material weight of the Albatross falls away.

For a brief time in Part V of the poem, the Mariner appears to have transcended his curse through what later voices describe as “penance” for his sin (413). He is finally able to sleep—to retreat and recover from the material surroundings—and he awakens to rain (285-292). But the Mariner’s relief is also marked by a strange dissolution between his mind and surroundings: he dreams of rain and refreshment and external reality follows suit (291-92), suggesting the Mariner’s psyche has achieved nearly perfect correspondence with its surroundings. Yet he figures himself as “light” and ghost-like, as if he has “died in sleep” (297-300) and the absence of the Albatross has freed him from the insistence of the material. Such conflicting descriptions of the Mariner’s mental and physiological states make it difficult to determine the nature of his relationship to his material surroundings. Things appear to be back in order—as the confusing swarm of elements has receded and the narrative now begins to run smoothly—but the Mariner has been profoundly altered over the course of his solitude.

With this tension in mind, I return to Derrida’s post-structuralist critique of “simple exteriority” (30) in order to refigure the threshold between Coleridge’s immaterial text and material network as chimerical. The expanse of Coleridge’s *Rime* and its characters might be seen as Derridean “chimeras”— animals or appellations that cannot “be defined as one,” but rather as “more than or other than” one (23). Not figuring the poem as “whole” in the traditional sense endows its ontological status with vibrancy, resolve, and the potential for partial and playful threads of narration and encounter to emerge. Furthermore, classification as “chimera” is not divisive or speciesist: the “original” virtues assigned in attempts at Adamic language—such as in the epistemological and ontological meeting between the Mariner and the Albatross—

become legion and indeterminable. In the question of the animal chimera, Derrida speculates on "what is cultivated on the edges of a limit," and the concept of *trepho*, to "transform by thickening" (31). The "abyssal rupture" between the subject and other, he claims, is not "unilinear" or "indivisible," but "multiple and heterogeneous" embedded in history, semiotics, and never totally objectifiable relations (31). (This concept speaks to the speculative realist idea that to be properly named and classified is to weaken, reduce, or legitimize certain camps to inert matter or vitalist dominion.) More specifically to the "Rime" passage at hand, it is necessary to trace the heterogeneous cross-sections of the Mariner's account of his journey, not its apparent consistencies or one-directional narratives that readers are accustomed to follow.[13]

Derrida's analysis helps me deconstruct the phenomenological struggle of apprehending "material" in alternative terms than self-assured humanism's belief in reality and correspondence. And I argue that in his definition of a "chimera" (23) as that which exists "beyond the edge of the *so-called* human," somewhere along and among the "heterogeneous multiplicity of the living" (31), Derrida almost arrives at the threshold of speculative ontology. Boundaries between "living and dead," threads of "organization or lack of organization" among "organic and inorganic" realms become intertwined and un-objectifiable (31). In the context of the poem, there is no "simple exteriority" in the sense that whatever the Mariner perceives and translates to language is incomplete and likely bound up by what Derrida would call disavowal of "animality" (30), and the constitutive presence of otherness and opacity keeps a subject from ever fully achieving self-sameness. However, in a Derridean sense, the question of the Albatross's being, meaning, and suffering and the abyss between it and the Mariner (or beneath or around the Mariner, for that matter) can't quite be reconciled by material encounter, continuity, or denial of boundary; to do so would be what Derrida calls a "naïve misapprehension" of the rupture (30). As such, in order to explore Coleridge's particular brand of *realism*, it is necessary to expand on Derrida's speculation, to move beyond the multiplicities of conceptual narrative and situate the notions of "trace" and "rupture" in a *material* network, a chimera of weight, friction, chemical volatility, landscape, sea, and atmosphere.

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[13] At this point in his essay, Derrida digresses from the chimera-as-rupture to a different crosscutting of forces: artificial, agricultural, and genetic interventions and subjections of the animal (25). He reads violence and torture (25-26), not a refiguring of the being as multiple and willful. Haraway critiques this passage as evidence of Derrida's inability to figure any "otherness" but the question of animal pain and our corresponding pity (19-23). According to Derrida, a "certain *passivity*" disturbs the question—a "not-being-able" that turns "Can they suffer?" into "Can they *not be able*?" and thus struggles with the nuances of nonpower/power, possible/impossible, and the "vulnerability of anguish" (27-28). Ultimately, Haraway argues, Derrida gets stuck in war waged over pity and faith-based obligation, not rigorous speculation and encounter (20-1). Along similar lines, I utilize Derrida not to understand the linguistic implications of the Mariner's exchange, but move along to more material-oriented analysis.

Like Derrida, traditional critics of Romantic literature tend to get swamped at phenomenological limits, neglectful, disinterested in, or unsure of understanding how a text might operate in various cross-cutting terms[14]. As the death ship arrives and the Mariner is left alone on the sea, critics tend to focus on the endangered or idealized web of human intentions, or reduce the ecological operations of the poem to humanity's understanding of animals and penance. For example, Kessler explores Part V of Coleridge's poem as an idealized "resolution of conflict" (short-lived as it will prove to be) that exemplifies Coleridge's "paramount" concept of the creative unity of opposites (127-28). To Coleridge, Kessler explains, "Phantom abstractions" and "Phantom images"—such as death-ships, flying spirits, and luminescent water snakes—can be "evasions of reality and, if not endowed with true feeling, can be as dead as the outer world of nature without a shaping spirit of imagination" (127). And "far from falling into empty abstractions," Kessler continues, "Coleridge was steadily bringing abstractions into the service of Being" by unifying the "extremes" of "thought" and "thing" (127). To his credit, Kessler emphasizes the difficulty of such reconciliation (127), and states that Coleridge's "mind-nature conflict" remained "unresolved from beginning to end" (133). However, put in Kessler's terms, Coleridge lingers only on the "Being" that a poet can manifest through reflection and elucidation. Speculative realism, in contrast, helps us see that such an idealistic proposition, in which only the perceiving subject can animate the world of "dead language objects" (Kessler 127), reinforces the hierarchy of inert, formless matter in deference to a creatively individualistic Mariner.

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[14] This is a generalized reproach of the humanist criticism we have drawn from in the last century. I do not wish to reduce a mountain of theory, philosophy, aesthetics, and ethics to a molehill. While for the purposes of a speculative realist thesis I continually remind readers of the anthropocentric tendencies of our creative, philosophical, and analytical endeavors, I also acknowledge the rigor of our efforts to experiment with, innovate, and deconstruct even our most fundamental assumptions about the nature of language and reality. I am specifically reminded of essays like Kate Soper's "The Idea of Nature" and "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature," which negotiate both *real* ecological sites and humanist and linguistic constructs (*Green* 123-6, 139-143). I hope my thesis joins in such traditions of interdisciplinary rigor.

Indeed, it is here at a moment of *apparent* resolution—an "ideal" unity of "enlivening imagination" and the "pure apprehension of Being" (Kessler 132)—that Coleridge opens up his weirdest and most disruptive scene yet: the crew's resurrection into aphasiac, inscrutable, but fully-present zombies. The living-dead crew on board the ship poses the threat of unclassifiable otherness, signifying further displacement of what was already a strange, emergent network of chimeras. At this moment of crisis, when things have not been completely restored to their "proper" place and order, it becomes clear that the anthropocentric concept of the "social" has always been an assemblage of more than human actors. As Latour puts it, understanding the agency and diversity of material occurs at the site of "accidents, breakdowns, and strikes" (81). Coleridge's crisis of the imagination is just such a flashpoint: the zombie chimera—a compelling and terrifying splice of living and dead qualities—can only emerge along a rift or slippage of taxonomy and idealistic form.

But despite the material excess and insistence of the scene, the Mariner still doesn't legitimize the zombie crew's vibrancy to the extent a speculative realist like Bennett might, but he nevertheless witnesses uncanny flashes of object relations beyond his comfort or intelligence. The men "groan" much in the same way that the wind "roar[s]" and "drop[s]" like a "stone" (319-322); they cannot speak or move their eyes, and the scene appears so "strange" that even in a dreamscape they would be upsetting (323-26); they raise their "limbs" like "lifeless tools" (331), emphasizing their mechanical inertia over their autonomous vibrancy. In his exploration of the Heideggerian concept of "tool-being" (Harman's term), Harman emphasizes how it is only when an object like a hammer is broken that an anthropocentric subject recognizes the tool exists "independently of human access" ("Broken Hammer" 184). The correlationist circuit between subject and extension of tool tends to obfuscate or cut off any philosophical expansion into the "thing-in-itself," or, as far as Harman is specifically concerned, that humans have the capacity to get beyond a "human-world interaction" (185). To speculative realists like Harman, however, this partial accessibility, the elemental "withdrawal" in a human-object interaction must be extended to *all* object-object interactions, such as colliding billiard balls or rain falling on a tin roof (185). To Harman, there is no fully open channel of material interaction among any actors in the world, regardless of human presence. In the case of the Mariner's account of the scene, it is difficult to extricate the threads of his correlationist perception (not to mention Coleridge's imaginative work) from the material and ontological access points between the text and its referents, let alone the nonhuman/object relations that cross-cut the text.

To the Mariner, a certain “essence” of the crew has been stripped away, leaving “lifeless tools” (331) in a “cluster” of bodies (340). The Mariner recognizes “the body of his brother’s son” working alongside him (333), but cannot make sense of the men as anything but dead and hollow. But at this site of what Harman might call “*non-relational* conception of the reality of things” (187)—and what Latour calls an “elaborate,” even “artificial” scenario that reveals the “actions and performations” of nonhuman actors (*Social* 79)—the withheld or obfuscated qualities of material objects flicker and emerge into view. What Harman calls a “*weird* realism” stretches into the narrative of the poem, demonstrating how “real individual objects resist all forms of causal or cognitive mastery” (188). As the daylight dawns, the crewmembers stop their work, and “Sweet sounds” rise “slowly thro’ their mouths” and into the sky (339-42). The energy flies “Around, around” and darts to the sun, returns “back again,” but “mix’d,” then “one by one” (343-46). Little birds join in to “fill the sea and air / With their sweet jargoning” (350-51). The totality of the “instruments” is so insistent (or “vibrant,” in Bennett’s terms) it “makes the heavens be mute” (352-55), and even after it ceases, a “pleasant noise” like a “hidden brook” follows the ship as it sails on (356-361). What is originally presented as a “broken” narrative—inscrutable, embarrassing, or inconsistent—opens up to a bizarre but compelling network of nonhuman interactions.

To Harman, “no object relates with others without caricature, distortion, or energy loss” (188). The media of knowledge and language do not “exhaust” an event or object (188) such as the “real” entities that the Mariner fails to contain or render intelligible through narration. “Marinere!” the Wedding Guest cries, “thou hast they will: / For that, which comes out thine eye, doth make / My body and soul to be still” (363-65)—the Wedding Guest becomes aware of another suspension between his perceptive mind/embodiment and the Mariner’s strange account of past events. Though the events are still mediated through linguistic subjectivity (the Mariner's "eye"), what Harman calls the "caricature," "distortion," and "energy loss" (188) that occurs along what I figure as a "broken" circuit between mind(s) and matter yield to nonlinguistic presences. The poem's speculative realism, in this sense, depends on *opening* what Cleanth Brooks celebrates as the "closed off unit" of what is considered a good poem (qtd in Harman 189). As Harman proposes, Brooks views poems as "encapsulated machines cut off from all social and material context" (188) (though Harman proceeds to argue Brooks is "by no means true to the nonrelational view of poems that he seems to propose" [189]). To Harman, there is always a "hidden surplus" in poems; they cannot deliver the "prose truth incarnate," and the "literal" and "non-literal" dimensions of poetry cannot be separated as "two distinct zones of reality," but as "two distinct sides of every point in the cosmos" (189-90). Everything deploys in a relation of "reality," and everything "stands partially outside it" (Harman 190). The "Never sadder tale" told by the Mariner (Coleridge 366), in this sense, cannot be contained or thoroughly exhausted even by the dynamic media of language.

Before Coleridge breaks for the sixth section of the poem, he lingers in the displacement and relinquishment of the Mariner's narration. The Mariner returns to his account of the crew, now referring to the zombie men as "Marineres" (372) working silently to move the ship "onward" (381). This description stands in sharp contrast to earlier passages in which the Mariner identified himself as the lone survivor, battling the elements but yearning for death or resolution. At this later point, the Mariner and his Mariners have achieved some kind of ontological-equivalence-through-teamwork, and evidently this replication and reflection of the protagonist was disconcerting enough that Coleridge deleted these lines 362-77 in his 1800 revision of the poem. Meanwhile, the crew and ship continue to be accompanied by the "spirit" from the “land of mist and snow” (384-85), another entity that moves the ship (386). Such multiplicity of nonhuman energies acting on the ship emphasizes the Mariner’s relinquishment of will and trajectory[15].

“Strange Power of Speech”: Ventriloquism, Litanies, and Return

Following the Mariner’s radical intimacy with nonhuman and chimerical bodies, Coleridge faces the authorial challenge of restoring a linguistic power—albeit “strange” (620)—to his narrator and salvaging a more familiar, self-contained moral from the sprawl of his supernatural tale. To recover this sense of mastery and holism requires both violent disavowal and irrevocable accommodation: on the one hand, the Mariner attempts to shed the material debris of his encounter by reengaging (disjointedly and peripherally) with human voices and bodies, but on the other hand, the Mariner remains haunted by the strangeness and vibrancy of the “mesh” (to invoke Morton’s term) beyond the lighthouse. Though the poem ends with a tidy homecoming, the materiality of the open sea persists.

Before the Mariner can return home he faces the spatial and conceptual logistics of exiting or correcting the disorientation of his aphasia, solitude, and deployment in the nonhuman outside. Paradoxically, in Part VI of the poem, the initial solution seems to be for the Mariner to relinquish his narrative voice further to displaced and disembodied voices. As more cosmologically mysterious events mark a bizarre passage of time—the sun rises over the sea and begins to move “backwards and forwards” in a “short uneasy motion” (391-92)—two voices materialize in the air and begin to speak (402). “Is this the man?” the first voice asks, and the Mariner steps in to appropriate the narration to the Wedding-Guest: “By him who died on cross, / With his cruel he lay’d full low / The harmless Albatross” (403-406). The voices interject on the dissolution of the narrative, helping the Mariner conclude Part VI by translating the journey’s complexities into a statement on “the spirit” who “lov’d the bird that lov’d the man / Who shot him with his bow,” and how the “man hath penance done, / And penance more will do” (407-14). To Eilenberg, this act of “ventriloquism” demonstrates how the Mariner can never fully appropriate his narrative or disentangle the threads of his perception from the linguistic network of his experience, emphasizing how a lucid, neatly corresponding language does not necessarily emerge from an authentic encounter with material; the Mariner’s voice has become so muddled that two removed voices must supplement questions and explanations to advance the narrative in more familiar terms to the reader.

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[15] It is worthwhile to revisit the question of whether this surrender is voluntary or forced. If, in Latourian terms, the poem’s structure and content have, as I mentioned earlier, always been “more than human” assemblages, the question of the Mariner’s will becomes a question of apprehension: objects and relations exist, and the Mariner is object-oriented, whether he likes it or not. However, the Mariner’s transformative encounters with water animals and zombies suggest he is capable of actively legitimizing his surroundings by (paradoxically) dialing back his impulse to control. What is at stake is how speculative realist readers interpret the Mariner’s “strange power of speech” and the cursed narrative he carries back home. (More analysis to follow.)

The dialogue between the first and second voices (and, as a result, the reader) draws attention to the palimpsest of language and its objects of referents. The first voice echoes what may be the readers’ fixations on the bizarre descriptions of the ship’s journey (it becomes logistically complicated for the reader to keep track of where and how the ship is moving), and the second accounts for these inconsistencies in metaphysical terms, combining explanations of gravity with mystical personifications of the moon and tides. Weaving their dialogue into the Mariner’s narration, the first asks questions like “What makes that ship drive on so fast?” and “What is the Ocean doing?” (417-418), and the second replies that the moon “guides” the ocean “smooth or grim,” but looks “graciously” down on “him,” the ocean (419-26). The first voice puzzles again over the behavior of ship on water: “why drives on that ship so fast / Withouten wave or wind?” (427-28)—to which the second voice replies, “The air is cut away before, / And closes from behind” (429-30). The two voices remark on how the ship’s speed corresponds with the strength of the Mariner’s “trance” (434); it seems the water spirit and moon wish to suddenly eject his presence, or the Mariner’s concerted efforts to avoid his peripheral sensibilities compels the ship onward, as if he believes he can re-appropriate the ship’s velocity, although (as the first voice recognizes) the ship seems to move competently on its own. Whatever is happening, the unreliability of the poem’s narration and description keeps readers from fully comprehending its material and conceptual logistics; we are left to speculate, to fill in the gaps and re-align its overlaps in a more engaged manner than perhaps a “smoother” poetic structure would allow[16].

Such difficulties muddy the possibility of a clean exit. The Mariner hurries toward the shore, driven by fear and exhaustion, but the material trace of his encounter lingers with him: a repressed seam of otherness that will continue to irk him. Morton figures this kind of radical encounter with material as “viscous” and contagious (*Ecology without Nature*): once he has been immersed in the crosscutting mesh of language and material, the Mariner cannot fully re-collect a stable perception and embodiment. Once the “spell” of the ship’s velocity is “snapt,” the Mariner feels as “one” on a “lonely road,” walking with “fear and dread…having once turn’d round” and “turns no more his head: / Because he knows, a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread” (447-456). This “fiend” can be read in several ways: first, an anthropomorphized doppelganger that trails just out of sight behind him the Mariner as a shadowy projection, reminding him of his finitude and self-division (the arrival of the supplement, as Derrida reminds us, is always a sign of dissolution [20]), and second, as a *real*, material threat to the Mariner's body and perception. But despite this unease—though the wind that raises the hair on the Mariner's neck and fans his cheek "mingle[s] strangely" with his "fears"—the presence also feels like a "welcoming" (461-64), emphasizing how the vestigial memory of an encounter with material vibrancy might also be comforting and empowering. Read in contemporary speculative realist terms, the Mariner returns with a traumatic but ponderous attachment to a big "outside," to invoke Morton's term. As Morton puts it, the Mariner has experienced a radical "proximity" to strange otherness that "emerges from, and is, and constitutes, the environment" (*Ecological Thought* 46). "What the Mariner learns," Morton argues, "is how true sympathy comes from social feeling—the awareness of coexistence" (47).

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[16] At the risk of getting repetitive, the resulting textual-readerly fabric ends up being more heterogeneous and emergent—what can be figured more “realistic” when read in speculative terms such as Bogost’s and Bennett’s.

In more drawn-out threads, halts in the narrative, and introductions of characters, familiar landmarks begin to appear to the Mariner: the lighthouse, the hill, and the kirk signify his "own countree" emerging from the open, alien landscape (469-72). The bay becomes as smooth and clear as "glass," lit by a bright moon but giving rise to "full many shapes" and "shadows" (477-84). But the Mariner prolongs with the narrative further, turning back again to see the "lifeless and flat" corpses on the deck, this time with a glowing "seraph-man" standing on each of them (515-18) that stand as "signals to the land," a "heavenly sight" (520-21). These passages of oscillation—the Mariner's ambivalence toward his encounters, the exhaustive descriptions of movement and perception, the Mariner's slow return to "stable" land—invoke Bogost's "litany" approach to speculative realism: the philosophical effort to describe multiple, coexisting ontologies of objects, demonstrating how the language of assemblage and distinction does not always sever the scientist or poet from material nuances, but rather mediates and amplifies a subject's surroundings[17]. Through such a litany, it becomes apparent how things exist both "simultaneously" and "independently" from one another (18), how human and nonhuman units form a "common collective" (17). While the present analysis has largely focused on moments of linguistic rupture—in which the fabric of language loosens, tears, or disintegrates and material vibrancy emerges—this is not to say that language is hopefully impoverished or irreconcilable with a speculative realist approach. Indeed, its capacity for *active*—albeit untraditional—kinds of mediation, as I explore in more depth in the following Wordsworth chapter, can expand or diversify the periphery of a subjective gaze.

The litany approach to ontology has important implications for literary analysis of a poem like Coleridge's "Rime," as cataloguing is both a function of realism (unfolding and displaying a multitude of activity or history) and a manner in which alliteration, repetition of internal rhyme, and rhythm draw readers into an incantatory description of an object or event. In terms of speculative realism, a litany tends to halt the narrative arc, instead burrowing into its material peripheries in order to browse, recover, or illuminate objects and associations excluded from the traditional lines of authorial and readerly gazes. As the Mariner approaches the shore of his homeland, for instance, he gets swamped by images of shining rocks (503) and "crimson shadows" (512), a seemingly inconsequential flurry of activity as the seraph-men rise from the corpses (517-18), and a brief moment of solitude as the men depart and the wind blows on the Mariner "alone" (536). The narrative evokes a near-infinite mesh of space and depth—a weird, non-anthropomorphic scope of buzzing objects, encounters, weight, and fluid. Though the Mariner focuses on the potency of his solitude, his digressions and fantastical observations facilitate moments of material-oriented apprehension. Because of Coleridge's conflicted but compelling instincts as a supernatural-nature poet, readers encounter a wide and dynamic array of objects and energies in his multi-part poem.

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[17] In his *Alien Phenomenology*, for example, Bogost generates a litany of "E.T.," which includes both ontological and conceptual deployments of the object as film, video game, financial disaster, and conceptual sign, emphasizing how a radiating network of social and material units surround the single signifier (17-19).

But despite the Mariner's stalling descriptions, the anthropocentric narrative of the Mariner's sin, penance, and absolution continues to intersect with and drive the text of the poem. In a Derridean sense, the poetic litany might function as absolution, the loosening of the concentrated subject into disseminated texts, material intersections, supplements, and traces. In this sense, the Mariner might find a form of "salvation" at the extreme, discomfiting, but (paradoxically) blissful edges of his comprehension, as he apprehends the vibrant outside. However, as the Mariner begins to feel saturated with this data, he feels compelled to reach the shore's familiar landmarks and to beg the Hermit for absolution: "He'll shrieve my soul," the Mariner reassures himself, "he'll wash away / The Albatross's blood" (545-6). Ultimately, the Mariner believes the "firm land" will relieve him (604), as it might allow him to disavow the trace of his material encounter and recover the humanist delineations of self and other, mastery of perception, and hierarchy of form and formlessness. "O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!" the Mariner cries, to which the Hermit replies, "I bid thee say— / What manner of man art thou?" The Mariner's "frame" is "wrenched" with "woeful agony," and he is "forced" to begin his "tale" in order to be "left free" (614).

Since then, the Mariner explains, the "anguish comes" at an "uncertain hour," forcing him to tell his "ghastly adventure" (615-18). He likens himself to "night," passing from "land to land," with "strange power of speech" and an uncanny ability to "know the man that must hear" him (619-23). His journey has endowed the Mariner with charisma, mobility, and sensitivity, one perhaps too strange to be explained by his concluding moral. As he bids the Wedding Guest farewell, the Mariner states, “He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast. / He prayeth best who loveth best / All things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, / He made and loveth all” (647), a proclamation that leaves the Wedding-Guest “stunned,” of “sense forlorn,” a “sadder and wiser man” (655-57). It seems nice enough to wrap up the poem with the ethics of coexistence and spiritual communion, to deliver the concluding moral that, as Morton puts it, “senseless violence against animals is wrong” (*Ecological Thought* 46). But the Mariner’s moral is also insufficient. Like the Wedding Guest, we may feel sad and perplexed, weighted with data and narrative energy after the exhausting process of, as Morton explains, “ignoring the ethical entanglement with the other, then restarting it (or letting it restart) from an unimaginably nightmarish ground” (47). Or, more specifically, a vast and unsteady sea.

In the end, Coleridge’s poem remains haunted by its strange materiality. The Mariner’s broken and appropriated narration does not correspond to a verifiable set of objects and events, and the poet fails to provide what Kessler describes as a “substantial” language to unify mind and nature (124). As Modiano puts it, “the poem teasingly gravitates toward coherent systems of thought, and yet no mythic or philosophical tradition, be it Christian, Egyptian, Neoplatonic, or the like, is large enough to contain it” (41). These “failures” and excesses, I argue, enable the poem’s language to apprehend nonhuman and emergent objects and vibrancies, as they allow heterogeneous elements to signify on terms outside of humanist myth or mastery. Accordingly, such a reading demonstrates how the traditional, competent, masculine figure of the nature-poet does not have a monopoly on authentic encounters with physical and psychological landscapes. On the contrary, speculative realism allows oddballs like Coleridge to challenge humanist celebrations of the organicism and reliability of language, as well as an ongoing, alienating sense of ownership over the external realm of objects and animals.

That being said, this alternative realism should not monopolize the conversation. In my next chapter I return to Wordsworth's lucidity and careful approach to "natural" objects and personal reflection in order to develop another speculative realist—albeit more humanist—sensibility toward animals, landscapes, and objects. By giving fair space to both extraordinary poets' aesthetic, intellectual, and ethical projects, I hope to reinforce my claim that various languages and realities exist in a vibrant and crosscutting network such as *Lyrical Ballads*.

Chapter Two: Wordsworth's Humanisms

In the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth warns that a "multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor" (177). The solution to this "general evil" is to return to the "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible" (177). The poet contrasts vital, autonomous, and intellectual subjectivity ("voluntary exertion," "discriminating powers" and "inherent and indestructible qualities" of the mind) with a corrupted, fallen, and inert mental state (described as "unfitting," "reduce[d]," "savage torpor," and "general evil"). In concert with his aim to "make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing…the primary laws of our nature" (174), Wordsworth offers *Lyrical Ballads* as an echo of a "more permanent and a far more philosophical language" of "low and rustic life," as opposed to the "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression," the "fickle tastes" and "fickle appetites," of popular aesthetics (174-75).

As part of my analysis of literary and philosophical realism, this chapter will explore some implications of Wordsworth's correlationist aesthetic, in contrast to Coleridge's tendencies toward speculation and transgression. As we seek literary and scientific texts that open a window onto a particular cross-section of reality, it is tempting to harken toward Wordsworth's claims to avoid "falsehood of description"—to express his ideas through the "regular and natural part[s] of language" (177) in manners "restricted to their natural importance" (178)—in order to pin down an authentic account of cultural events, human and animal behavior, natural forces, and spiritual truth. However, if "broken" languages—as I argued in Chapter One—are more conducive to what speculative realists consider the imperatives of weird, non-anthropocentric considerations of reality, Wordsworth's humanist language is more problematic—and, in fact, productive in its stranger moments—than traditional criticism has effectively perceived. Read in speculative realist terms, Wordsworth's determination to generate "healthy" correspondence between his language and its referents appears reductive and artificial, as it limits ontological discourse to correlationist methodologies. Nevertheless, Wordsworth continually problematizes his acts of perception, leading to both intentional and unforeseen fluxes of "nature" that resists or exceeds Idealism.

The present chapter fleshes out this contrast between the two poets primarily by critiquing Wordsworth's anthropocentrism and regulative epistemological and ontological instincts, but exploring his own unique approach to poetic mediation. Wordsworth exemplifies many of qualities that have persisted in the reign of humanism, such as his allegiance to hierarchy and selectiveness as he attempts to "restrict" himself to themes and expressions he finds "proper and beautiful" (Preface 178). While on the one hand he states that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"—evoking both internal and external wellsprings, neither of which are easily containable—he admonishes the poet to filter, warning that the "influxes" across the borders of body and mind should be "modified and directed" by the poet's thoughts and contemplation (175). With "repetition and continuance," Wordsworth argues, the connection of "feelings" and "important subjects" will be "nourished," resulting in a "healthful state of association" and exaltation of taste (175). It is what can be interpreted as the centrality of masculine human poet—his powerful position of identifying, generating, and synthesizing substance and vitality while the rest of the cosmos exists in an inert or mundane state of anticipation to be illuminated by pre-existing templates of human significance—that I wish to destabilize, offering in its place an image of a poet who speculates, aware of his or her perceptual limitations and accommodative of nonhuman realities.

In addition to his problematic claim to the poet's exquisite centrality in meaning and aesthetics, Wordsworth insists on the medium of "common" and "organic" language, as opposed to the "asinine" and "artificial" (174-75). By contrast, a speculative-realist literary theory does not seek to revamp or reconstitute the nature-culture boundary by reinforcing a language of ecological "becoming" that is somehow a return to, as Wordsworth celebrates, the language of the uncultured (174)—a pure, folksy, and harmonious interface with British Nature's quaint villages, rolling hills, and emerald green forests. Instead, this approach respects the weird and the inaccessible as well as recovers the overlooked, taken-for-granted ways that we have coevolved with what Latour calls "hybridized" objects and networks, such as language, tools, fossil fuels, atoms, grass, ballads, and political upheavals. This reconsideration of the networks of human subjectivity is an exercise in both radical intimacy and radical alienation, particular in territory that has been ignored or disavowed as a threat to humanist autonomy.

At the same time, however, I argue that amplifying alternative sensitivities to material presence should not abandon or annihilate Wordsworth's effective and frequently generous practice of, as he writes, looking "steadily" at a "subject," as well as his earnest attempts to avoid imbalances (Preface 178-81) as he draws meaning and experience from material networks and exchanges. Wordsworth himself writes:

> [the Poet] considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of

> immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions which by habit become of the nature of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment (*Green* 20).

If Romantic poetry is about sensibility and contemplation (the slowing down of a day-to-day framework, a thoughtful aesthetic deployment into nature, the soul, the transcendental, or the sublime, and attention to multiple, strange, and alluring bodies of humans, animals, plants, and horizons), Wordsworth's poetry might demonstrate the permeability and adaptability of poetry as an ontological practice, as a medium for *troubling*, not regulating, the boundary between inside and outside and, as Haraway puts it, "becoming with" the nonhuman (3). In this sense, even traditional tenets of Romanticist philosophy and criticism can be amplified or read against their intentions as speculative realist tendencies. For example, as Murray writes in his investigation of *Wordsworth's Style*, Wordsworth's imagery exemplifies his "unusual precision" in gathering "little-noticed details" in an "observed object" (56). The "gauze of associated ideas" generated in a poem does not "alter" or obstruct an external image; instead the object *itself* "seems to give rise to the idea" (56). Through a careful search for "inherent beauty" or "unusual quality" in an object, the poet can create "an animated, a fully personified, or a symbolic image" that expresses some "affinity" between an individual and "symbolic objects in nature" (53-54). Although these methodologies continue to allocate aesthetic and intellectual power almost exclusively to the human mind, they suggest that Wordsworth respects a degree of cooperation between his surroundings and the forms and ideals his poetry endorses. Despite his insistence on humanist templates of beauty and meaning, Wordsworth is nevertheless willing to bring language *to* an object, generating metaphors that, as Murray puts it, “suggest that the ‘life’ of the object is not an attributed life, but a discovered life” (46).

Similar to the methodology in my previous chapter, my approach in Chapter Two is to trace the material infoldings, tracings, blind spots, and encounters that emerge in a selection of *Lyrical Ballads*’ other poems. More specifically, I will conduct case studies of Wordsworth’s poetry with an eye for object-oriented and speculative realist themes, trajectories, and emergences, as well as unintended slippages, disavowals, missed opportunities, and accidents of encounter. With its strange, multi-staged, sprawling, bi-authorial, and opiated contingencies, *Lyrical Ballads* escapes various attempts at authorial or formalist mastery, demonstrating how even Wordsworth’s most appealing dualisms of nature/culture cannot fully account for the phenomena of language, becoming, embodiment, or consciousness that resist easy classification as either natural or cultural. Indeed, as my analysis will show, classification is *not* a productive ecological sensibility in times of “crisis,” from the turn of the eighteenth century to contemporary questions of how to return to ontology in a new century of philosophy—our own—that troubles Idealist dualisms of mind and matter. In contrast to Chapter One, however, this chapter will also take Wordsworth’s more lucid and controlled poetic sensibility seriously as a means of apprehending, describing, and engaging with material realities. Wordsworth’s instincts for close observation, supple language, and sustained interface with concrete, local phenomena exemplify a humanist M.O. that nonetheless continues to be relevant to literary criticism and philosophy, even in the current onset of a posthumanist paradigm that critiques Idealist aesthetics and philosophy.

“The Female Vagrant”

The ontological openness and expansiveness of Coleridge’s “Rime” stands in stark contrast to Wordsworth’s concern for minds and bodies—usually feminized—in peril, especially in the absence of stable patriarchs or “healthy” economies of language, occupation, spirituality, and corporeal sustenance. As outlined in my first chapter, Coleridge’s Mariner is violently insecure at the threshold of otherness, but continues to be compelled into weird and vibrant encounters with animals and elements outside of his humanist control, which in turn shape the protagonist into a strange but charismatic witness to cosmological mysteries. Wordsworth, by contrast, presents a series of pitiful female characters whose bizarre encounters with complex, “imbalanced” networks of perception, material, and exploitive cultural practices result in destitution and psychosis. In general, I argue, Wordsworth’s vigilant partitioning of healthy and unhealthy, coherent and incoherent, and natural and artificial establishes a “nature” poetry that is selective and ambivalent toward material agency. Furthermore, in his efforts to regain his footing in times of social and ecological crisis—the increasing degradation of nature, the breakdown of the family unit—Wordsworth tends to exacerbate the excesses and contradictions of his subject matter further. In other words, Wordsworth’s dichotomies fail to contain the heterogeneous networks of his realities.

Wordsworth’s view of the onset of corruption and destitution in what was initially a stable, harmonious coexistence of family and nature can be traced in detail in his poem “The Female Vagrant.” The poem frames an “artless story” (2) told by a Woman who has lost her idyllic family and home, and now wanders the country with a “perpetual weight” on her “spirit” (270). As in “The Mad Mother” and “The Thorn,” the events of the poem demonstrate how cruel and exploitive effects of privatization remove rural families from their homes and traditions, and how the ravages of war and famine further disintegrate family structures by removing fathers and murdering children. Ultimately, “The Female Vagrant” might be read as an attempt to recover what Wordsworth’s Preface refers to as “the great and universal passions” of humans, their occupations, and the “entire world of nature” (180), the “purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature” of human sensibility (187). Accordingly, the poem’s endnote of despair and debilitation serves as an admonishment against the degeneration of such truths: the homeless, husbandless, and childless woman has suffered such great of injuries, and has been carried so far beyond what the Preface would call her “proper bounds” (181), that she can only weep—her tale “at an end” (“Vagrant” 268-69). However, a strange confession emerges near the end of the Woman’s tale that seems to contradict the conditions of her hardship: while the majority of the poem focuses on her victimhood and the relentless momentum of external events, the Woman suddenly seems to direct a portion of blame at herself, admitting that “what afflicts my peace with keenest ruth / Is that I have my *inner* self abused, / Foregone the home delight of constant truth, / And clear and open soul, so prized in fearless youth” (258-62, my emphasis). These four lines are difficult to reconcile with the rest of the poem, considering how Wordsworth ostensibly uses the poem to take aim at the horrors of warfare and other amoral, commercial, and *external* effects, not to assign guilt to an innocent heroine who once lived in harmony with family and nature.

I propose that the Woman’s disjointed confession and proceeding aphasia are symptomatic of Wordsworth’s reductive dichotomization of nature and culture. The final paradox of “female vagrancy”—a “natural” body that has been emptied of substance, language, and direction—is one of several oppositions that are never reconciled by Wordsworth’s ostensibly neat categories of nature and culture, female and male, coherent and incoherent. This is not because, as Wordsworth implies, modern industrialization and social practices have corrupted the harmony of feminized nature and bastardized its necessary categorizations, but because such realms and hierarchies—though efficacious and continuously emergent—are artificial and driven by a particular agenda.

To explain my argument, I borrow Latour's concept of "amodernity," or the philosophical, epistemological, and ontological rejection of what appears to be self-evident divide between nature and culture[18]. As Latour argues in his deconstruction of the supposedly independent categories of nature and society, such a dichotomization—the concept that either "Nature has always existed and has already been there," or "human beings, and only human beings, are the ones who construct society and freely determine their own destiny"—is artificial (*Modern* 30-31). These "constitutional guarantees" were "created together. They reinforce each other. The first and second guarantees serve as counterweight to one another, as checks and balances. They are nothing but the two branches of a single new government" (31). While I acknowledge, as Jhan Hochman argues, the frequently necessary differentiation of "nature" and "culture" so that "culture does not easily confuse itself with nature or Nature [a cultural construction], or claim to know nature as a rationale for replacing [it] with itself and its constructions" (quoted on Coupe 3), I believe Latour's "amodernity" provides a more potent means of disrupting the anthropocentric tendencies of poetry that, as in Wordsworth's case, enforces the intimacy of a certain kind of "culture" with a certain kind of "nature." For instance, Latour points to the problematic impulse—such as Wordsworth's—to purify intellectual and artistic discourse rather than acknowledge networks and hybrids. As an alternative, Latour insists on the "supple" treatment of bodies and categorizations rather than "rigid" partitioning (45).

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[18] To repeat, Latour's work in actor-network theory is not necessarily the same thing as speculative realism. Like other philosophers and theorists I have referenced, Latour speculates on networks of real objects and legitimizes nonhuman realms. However, Latour focuses more on relations and assemblages rather than autonomous objects.

Such an approach allows meandering, and, ultimately, offers an ethics that does not leave a woman literally or metaphorically stranded on an empty roadside—grieving, guilt-ridden, and aphasiac—as the receptacle of Wordsworth's frustrated inability to orchestrate the complexities of his morality tale.

To begin my critique, it is important to understand Wordsworth's nuanced but standard account of the dissolution of the "state of nature." In the first part of "The Female Vagrant," the Woman (mediated by an unnamed narrator [2]) describes an idyllic upbringing in a charming countryside: her father tended a flock that supplied a wealth that equaled "more than mines of gold" (4), and as a child she wandered her home with "thoughtless joy" and an abundance of sensory pleasures (6-9). The Woman knew her father to be a "good and pious man, / An honest man by honest parents bred" (10-11), meaning she came from multiple generations of virtue and tradition. She received an early training to say her prayers and read books, and "nothing" to her mind a "sweeter pleasure brought" (12-18). She was actively engaged in the seasons and activities of the year, and took pleasure from observing daily her surroundings, such as the various flowers in her garden, her various animal companions—from the swans at the waterside to her "watchful dog" that barked at strangers in the road—and her father as he sat "beneath the honeyed sycamore" on their farm (19-36). Her happy childhood provided a strong foundation for virtue and restoration, making the contrast to her later destitution all the more dramatic and (as I will argue) ethically problematic.

In describing a clean and happy country home, Wordsworth suggests that nature and culture are easily compatible when free of excessive, empty, or contradictory forces. As Wordsworth argues in his essay "Primary Laws," the Poet "considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature” (*Green* 20). Likewise, literary critic Soni describes the realm in “The Female Vagrant” as “premodern,” or untouched by the dissolute forces of “inequality, property, and money” that are (nevertheless) approaching rapidly (370). To Soni, such a “happy, *sustainable*, and fully articulated way of life” is a concrete and situated utopia (370), as well as a site of esemplastic speculation, a “counterbalance” of “competing imperatives of concrete representation and generative imaginative activity” (371). The woman simultaneously occupies a concrete space—“By Derwent’s side,” coexisting with an array of humans and domesticated animals (“Vagrant” 1-36)—and a transcendental haven of intellectual, physical, and spiritual development. Most importantly, nature and culture are peacefully and productively united: the former is temperate, abundant, and workable, and the latter virtuous, enlightened, and satisfied.

In contrast, Latour views the performative and fictional representation of such realms as reactionary, nostalgic, and an ineffective attempt to be “resolutely antimodern” against the inertia of social, environmental, and technological monstrosities (9). In Latourian terms, Wordsworth—in an ambivalently modernistic manner—maintains the impulse to “purify,” to deny the hybridization of “nature and culture” (10) by seeking the respite of what he refers to in Preface as the “real language of men” (171) and its correlations with the “beautiful and permanent forms of nature” (174). But in Latour’s terms, “just about everything” is a hybrid (48); he might argue that by maintaining the separation of nature and culture and, accordingly, privileging the “premodern” realm, Wordsworth neglects entire swaths of mediator and network that affect his heroine’s motivations and contentment[19]. Furthermore, Latour’s analysis demonstrates how poet-philosophers like Wordsworth carve out particular niches of nature and culture, rather than acknowledge the heterogeneous interplay among actors, histories, materials, and power dynamics. As hybrids make up both premodern and modern collectives (Latour 48), it is the artificial categorizations and historical divisions that order and divide our conceptions of reality and progress. In this sense, as Wordsworth describes the improper or haphazard "mixing" of nature with modern industry, he denies the possibility that his discourse of being is limited by his perception and ideology.

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[19] See Latour’s passage on air pumps; his critical response begins on page twenty of *We Have Never Been Modern*.

Instead of insisting on a virtuous "premodernity," perhaps we might explore Wordsworth's pre-industrial paradise with an eye for deployments and alignments that muddy the easy separation of country and city life, virtue and abuse, and rusticity and the soulless machines of progress. First, we might conduct a good old-fashioned historicist reading of Wordsworth's authorship in order to better trace the material, social, and political forces at work on his characters. Chaplin and Faflak's work on the Romanticism, for example, emphasizes the nonlinearity and uncertainty of the era, focusing on the complex ideological and epistemological negotiations of British nature-poets and the "various circumstances" that shape their writing (1). The values and drama foregrounded in "The Female Vagrant" are contingent on several of the agitations outlined in Faflak's historicist study, such as massive population growth, an according "progress from an agrarian to an urban industrial society," expanding British colonialism, and increasing interest in the "rights and imagination of the individual in a civil society" (2). Furthermore, Wordsworth's thematic concerns in his Preface and poetry seem to echo what Faflak calls the era's reformist impulses, such as the evangelical concern for the "degrading social effects" of population growth, the slave trade, industrial working conditions, and the growing tendency toward utilitarianism and social control (7). As I mentioned in my introduction, though Wordsworth is not as religiously oriented as, say, Coleridge the Unitarian, he nevertheless evokes what Faflak calls a "moral response and corrective" toward the "enervating effects of an increasingly industrialized society," as well as a "cautionary" attitude toward the potential for man's reach to exceed his grasp in a perversion of "nature and divine law" (7).

Second, and more specifically to a speculative realist reading, we might send Soni's "concrete lifeways" through Latourian ontography in order to radicalize the Woman's intimacy with nonhuman and material being. For example, Wordsworth's passages and descriptions of the Woman's idyllic life (quoted earlier) build a rich narrative of tools, animals, elements, and social forces that operate alongside and removed from the Woman's work, desires, and contentment. While it is important to acknowledge and describe such network activity for the sake of "flattening" the ontological elements of the poem, such a lens (a speculative re-scoping or re-view) also draws readers' attention to how *not* apprehending material vibrancy leads to the very reductive treatment of nonhumans that in turn leads to the suffering of humans. Wordsworth builds an Edenic paradise for the Woman, exorcizing it from troubling but nevertheless *real* forces, such as disease, unpredictable weather patterns, abusive family dynamics, and predatory animals. In neglecting such ontological diversity, Wordsworth generates a purified, superficial account of country life that he can only perceive as "corruptible" (in adamantly linear rather than network-oriented terms) by what he constructs as its binary opposite: the amoral, removed, unbalanced, excessive machine of cultural progress. Such a reductive dichotomization of virtue and vice, I argue, dooms the family's physical, spiritual, and ecological health from the start: their chances of adapting to or resisting change are essentially nonexistent.

In his partitioning of pastoral and hostile nature, harmonious and corrupted culture, Wordsworth positions two bodies as watchful guardians of the Woman's mobility and motivations. The dog, for example, evokes a strange hybrid of feral and domesticated qualities, as it is “watchful” of the Woman’s safety by displaying a “furious ire” of barking at strangers (34-5). Such a description constitutes an intense display of anger incongruent with the quiet harmony of the scene, and demonstrates how the Woman is consistently insulated from unknown encounters. Another, perhaps more disturbing interjection of the uneasy tension between idyllic home life and external chaos can be found in the Woman’s descriptions of her “good and pious” father’s tutelage (10). Emphasizing the purity and integrity of the family’s bloodline, the Woman describes her father as an “honest man by honest parents bred” (11), ostensibly banishing the suspicion that the patriarch could be anything but virtuous. However, the Woman reports that she believes “soon as I began to lisp, [my father] made me kneel beside my bed, / And in his hearing there my prayers I said” (12-14). While it is unfair to interpret the phrase “he made me kneel” as proof that the father is abusive, it is important to acknowledge how the Woman is *compelled* to perform the actions of a sweet, morally upright young woman of the country: she is trained from an early age to perform the tasks and gestures of a particular kind of “nature.” Lastly, reading these initial passages with an eye for binary complications draws attention to Wordsworth’s strange, Eden-like removal of the Woman’s mother; the Woman makes no mention of a death or domestic disturbance that would account for the mother’s absence, and the omission tends to convolute rather than simplify Wordsworth’s descriptions of rustic bliss.

In what Soni refers to as Wordsworth’s narration of the Woman’s passage through “historical phases and modes of production” (369), the poem moves from the seemingly incorruptible (yet strangely tenuous) realm of premodernity to describe the fateful onset of capitalism. Twenty or so years later, a “stately hall” rises in the family’s woods, and the arm of state economics begins to buy and parcel out the surrounding cottages and pastures (37-45). The woman’s father refuses to sell his “old hereditary nook” (44), to which the hall master responds with “cruel injuries” (46-47), such as the denial of water rights and the seizure of his home (51-54). His “substance” falls into “decay” (50), implying that his very body and mind were torn away with the mal-appropriation of his land. The family leaves, “weeping” (53), and seeks a home where they might live “uninjured” (54). These passages describe a fateful moment of displacement; the events constitute the beginning of a long and inexorable series of events that manage to erode even what Wordsworth views as the purest and most permanent qualities of the human spirit, tenacity and companionship.

Through a Latourian reading, the unnamed despot in Wordsworth’s poem could be viewed as a dynamic hybridization of social and material power. In Latour’s terms, the lord is both a Hobbesian Sovereign—reigning over the Leviathan “made up only of citizens, calculations, agreements or disputes”—and a collective of “brute” material forces that resist the orderings of cultural contructivism (28). His control over the area’s hydrodynamics, for example, is not simply an immaterial power game: the family suffers because of both arbitrary social dynamics *and* the material absence of water. Thus, the efficacy of the capitalist takeover of Derwent’s Side relies on a network (at times synchronized, at others not) of actors and agendas. Furthermore, in a (surprisingly) Latourian sense, Wordsworth appears to recognize the corporeal stakes of the family’s displacement: they suffer physical and psychical injury as their land, home, and resources are seized and partitioned. The father’s “decay,” for example, connotes a profound physiological intimacy with his surroundings. As this particular network of material vitality is dissolved, the human actors are left feeling stranded, even amputated.

Wordsworth continues to trace the breakdown of what he later identifies as “integrity” over the course of the Woman’s marriage to her childhood sweetheart and the death of her father. Though the newlyweds begin a family together, their “constant toil” and new paths of travel actually result in the *de*generation of their health and happiness (64-90). The Woman's father dies "when sad distress reduced the children's meal," but the Woman is happy that the "grave did hide / The empty loom, cold hearth, and silent wheel" from her father (86-89). Their "tears that flowed for ills" cannot be healed by "patience," and they cannot regain a sense of "hope" or "relief" (90-92). Eventually wartime displaces the family further, leading to "strain," "dismay," and more "tears" (95-97). Such passages mark what Soni calls the dissolution and obsolescence of pre-capitalist labor and companionship (369-70): instead of joy of personalized work, the Woman and her family suffer the alienation of industrialized labor, as the tyrannical new lord initiates the process of "infinite accumulation disjoined from use" (370). Again, Wordsworth seems to take aim at ruptures and disconnections that damage what he views as man's original and virtuous occupation of nature.

Though I have been utilizing Latour to counter Wordsworth's ordering of the social-linguistic-material-ecological networks in "The Female Vagrant," I pause here to acknowledge, as mentioned earlier, the efficacy and ethical imperatives of Wordsworth's descriptions. To borrow Coupe's terms in reference to the responsibilities of ecocriticism, there is a "pragmatics" to Wordsworth's dichotomizations, specifically in his invocation of "nature" that "challenges the logic of industrialism, which assumes that nothing matters beyond t echnological progress" (4). And (in a distinctively *anti*-binary move) this challenge "offers a radical alternative to both 'right' and 'left' political positions, both of which assume the means of production must always be developed, no matter what the cost" (Coupe 4). Furthermore, in aligning the family's tools and motivations with their "natural" surroundings, Wordsworth challenges what Coupe calls "the complacent culturalism which renders other species, as well as flora and fauna, subordinate to the human capacity for signification" (4). In other words, Wordsworth refuses to treat the heterogeneity of British countryside and domestic household objects (idyllic as the poet's descriptions may be) as something produced and regulated by industrial and commercial hierarchies. Of course, the Woman and her family (not to mention Wordsworth the author) take center stage as the "real" mediators of their complex nature, but the poem's account of hardship and moral imperatives resists a certain kind of humanist reduction driven by industry and acquisition.

In what appears to be attempts to heal the Woman's distress, Wordsworth sets the family on a path to new but—in the sense that nothing can replace the original Eden of their home—unsatisfying frontiers. As Soni argues, the rest of the poem "explores a series of potentially utopian spaces, but the quest is destined to fail even before it has begun" (372). First, in the absence of both father figures, the Woman and her children head to the "western world" by sea (100-117), a journey that marks the loss of their "native shore" (102), if not secure footing altogether. Among "sickness" and "hopes deferr'd" (106), the family "gaze[s] with terror" upon the threshold of death, the "gloomy sleep" and "anguish" of those who died over their journey at "the mercy of the waves" (112-16). Like in the Mariner's journey in Coleridge's "Rime," the open sea is a danger to physical and psychological health. But in Wordsworth's account the protagonist will encounter nothing as otherworldly as luminous serpents or mythological water spirits, only despair and emptiness as she is forced farther from her proper origins of virtue and security. "Oh!" the Woman cries, "dreadful price of being resign / All that dear *in* being!" (118-19). The price of survival has become to relinquish what sustains them best: home, love, health, and control. The Woman considers it "better" to "pine" away in a "lonely cave," "Unseen, unheard, unwatched by any star"—even to "obtrude" her family's "dying bodies" in the "streets and walks where proud men are"—than to follow, "dog-like," at the "heels of war," prolonging a "curst existence" in the company of men who "lap" their "very nourishment" from their "brother's blood" (120-126).

While Wordsworth slows the narrative of the poem to distinguish the Woman's vestiges of moral determination—as though hardship has yet to destroy her integrity completely—he also struggles to make sense of the excessive struggle and radical alienation he has put on the Woman. It seems at this point in the poem the reliable dichotomies of nature and culture have dissolved even for Wordsworth. Soni, for example, points out how the Woman's voyage to America offers a "possibility of successful and sustainable social change," as well a "return to a premodern world, even a state of nature," a "blank space for the projection of utopian fantasies" (372). Alas, the continent turns out to be a "hellscape of war" and "utter anarchy" (Soni 372)—a far cry from the domesticated nooks of British countryside. "Pains and plagues," "disease and famine," and "agony and fear" soon overcome the family, killing the husband and children and leaving the Woman destitute and grieving as she returns to her homeland (127-33). Wordsworth figures America as an excessive, hostile space—a site of nature too dark and inscrutable even for his categorizations. Here, at what appear to be the limits of his understanding, Wordsworth cannot keep his grip on what he hoped would reinforce his ordering of natural and cultural bodies. Instead, inconsistencies emerge, as nature is both a limpid, domesticated space of premodern harmony, and a wilderness that kills rather than accommodates human intentions.

In another doomed experiment in resolution, Wordsworth sends the Woman back to her homeland, though he understands the difficulty of such a "return" even as he insists on the linearity of the family's displacement and degeneration. The Woman quickly retreats from the horrors of the American continent, entering another potentially "utopian" space, as Soni argues: adrift on the ocean. After she can no longer cry, the Woman wakes up aboard a British ship, "despairing" and "desolate," as if "from a trance restored" (134-35). To Soni, the Woman's experience of "physical and psychical transformation" on board the ship signifies a "dream-like world of stability and rest" (Soni 373)—after such excessive suffering, the Woman can perhaps touch an "immeasurable plain" of peace ("Vagrant" 136), even profound ecstasy. The "groans" and "rage of racking famine" are behind her (146), and the "breathing pestilence" of "unburied dead" has cleared, replaced by a realm of "calm sunshine," an "hour of rest" and "heavenly silence" on the ocean (137-48). The death of "hope" and the loss of "fear in agony" (153) has stretched the Woman beyond what Wordsworth's Preface would consider her "proper" limitations (181), but has enabled her to "escape" the "crazing thoughts" of murder, rape, and wartime ("Vagrant" 158-60). The open sea does provide some otherworldly relief, after all; it seems only an absolute *outside* can soften and heal the Woman's "congeal[ed]" frame (154), even as the British ship contains her. But just as she reaches this "farthest" point of rest, "forever hurled" from "hope" and "sweet thoughts of home," separated by a "mighty gulph [sic]" from her past (163-173), the vessel reaches shore and "break[s]" her "dream" (178). The strange, immaterial, and "illimitable" (174) ecstasy of her despair is overpowered by the destination of the ship and the Woman's corporeal needs for food and shelter, and she returns to the obligations of land populated by real but corrupted bodies (180). As Soni argues, the "dream" turns out to be "deranged imagination that merely re-labels an unsustainable way of life as utopia" (373).

These passages in Wordsworth's poem depict what appears to be an irreconcilable paradox: the most strained, most hopeless, and most nonsensical moment of grief that inverts to ease, resolution, and clarity. The moment is unsustainable, as the Woman must return to stable ground and continue a life of poverty and struggle, but for a moment she witnesses a discomfiting freedom ("escape" [158]) from the traffic of commerce, greed, and material obligations that have led her to the brink of oblivion. It is to Wordsworth's credit that he allows this encounter to open a seam in the poem's otherwise irrevocable narrative: the Woman's discovery does not lead to resolution or salvation, but pushes the pure nature/corrupt-culture narrative to its strangest and most ambivalent limits without retreating to cover its tracks. Moments such as this support my argument that Wordsworth's "weird realism" emerges most potently when his attempts to shore up his dichotomies fail.

In what appears to be a reversal of the open, nebulous freedom of the ocean air, Wordsworth sends the Woman to, as Soni points out, a possible solution based on human ingenuity and ethics: a "robber band" that displays "remarkable, perhaps even unconditional hospitality" toward the Woman (374). This "radically egalitarian" network of gypsies, as Soni puts it, appears to be a "fully-functional utopian social order that finally redeems the failure of the utopian imagination…unlike the stunted and abstract partial utopias of America and the ship" (374). For a moment, Soni argues, "we can imagine using this outline to fill in some of the details for ourselves, in our own exercise of utopian speculation" (375). However, like the ship floating at sea, the society proves unsustainable, and the woman chooses to leave. In Soni's terms, "a utopia of thieves cannot be a paradigm for a functioning social order of any generality" (375). Such an existence is "parasitic" (375), Soni argues, and "dependent on the very thing it negates for its own existence" (376), whereas a utopia must be a "totality" (376). Yet, as these citations demonstrate, even this contemporary critic ultimately subscribes to the same set of artificial dualities that entrap Wordsworth; like Wordsworth, Soni insists on purifying the Woman's ethics and existence from the complexities of social orders, the interdependence of animal, human, and material networks, and the ambiguities of human motivations. The problem with both viewpoints is that they draw the Woman in the direction of “utopias” that deny the constitutive presence of hybrids and networks that crosscut her identity and trajectories.

This point in the poem compels us to be the most nostalgic for a lost nature, the most disheartened by the Woman’s failure to solve her ecological and spiritual plight. We arrive at the woman’s final condition of radical vagrancy, what Soni calls “utopianism without utopia,” or having *no place* to go in the absence of a guiding utopian framework (369). Far from the Wordsworth’s Romantic ideal of “the native and naked dignity of man…the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves” (*Green* 19), the Woman is devoid of any framework, promise, nature, or language to give her comfort or salvation. As Soni argues, the Woman’s final condition of “being oriented only to an indeterminate and indeterminable future is not liberating but tragic, because it results in the complete collapse of narrative into an aimless wandering hither and thither that is nearly indistinguishable from death itself” (369). As Soni argues, in critiquing the “radically contentless orientation toward the future” so characteristic of “modernity,” Wordsworth turns the Woman’s struggle “into stasis, paralysis, disorientation, and a desire for death” (369). In other words, Wordsworth’s attempts to be “resolutely antimodern,” as Latour puts it (9), put the Woman in a nonsensical state of vagrancy, hopelessly cut off from necessary networks of food and community needed to survive and yet weirdly transcendent, even ghost-like, in a most depressing and spiritually unsatisfying way. Most importantly, though Wordsworth ostensibly figures the Woman as a victim of modernity and social injustices, it becomes more apparent she is (disturbingly) symptomatic of Wordsworth’s impulse to purify. As Latour argues, “those who choose to ignore [hybrids] by insulating them from any dangerous consequences develop them to the utmost” (42). In other words, Wordsworth’s attempts to delineate a clean, harmonious interface between nature and culture backfire, as his heroine can be read as strange and symptomatic rather than a pitiful victim of modernity.

In the end we might choose to endorse Wordsworth's authorial decision to sacrifice the Woman for the greater goal of critiquing modernity. As I acknowledge earlier, the "pragmatics" (Coupe 4) of Wordsworth's characterizations are difficult to deny, as the Woman's tragic story (ideally) compels readers to consider the destructive tendencies of industrialization, warfare, and despotism. Indeed, I do not wish to deny the *real* emotional, material, and ecological hardship the Woman faces when displaced from her home and family. However, in reading the Woman's unfounded confession of having "abused" her inner self (259), I argue that a Latourian approach to the complex networks of becoming offers a radical and inclusive dimension to Wordsworth's nature-culture continuum that collapses as the Woman's tale comes to an end. As Wordsworth fails to explain the Woman's guilt despite her total lack of transgression over the course of the poem, the Woman might be read as symptomatic of the poet's reductive dichotomies—his unwittingly modernist attempts to purify the feminized site of nature. The Woman's hybridized "monstrosity," as Latour would put it, cannot be legitimized as anything but a mute, pitiful, inscrutable, narrative-less body, and Wordsworth cannot conceive of any other authorial action but to abandon her. A speculative, network-oriented reading, in contrast, does not disavow the symptoms of our ideological and semiotic negotiations of reality so adamantly, and perhaps acknowledges how the epistemological and philosophical limitations of human discourse do not account for the heterogeneous negotiations of coexistence.

"The Mad Mother"

As mentioned throughout this chapter, if my argument about Coleridge's "broken" language is correct, it seems the structural integrity of Wordsworth's meditations on characters and setting would have little importance in speculative realist discourse. Indeed, my analysis of Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant" focuses on similar moments of displacement and incoherence as a means of destabilizing humanist narratives of linearity and duality, the subject-object hierarchy, and phenomenology's vitalization of the dead cosmos, and continues to critique Wordsworth's claims to authenticity and all-too-easy dichotomization. However, another strain of speculative realist philosophy insists that boundaries and differentiation among objects, even in "flat ontology," are meaningful, ethically imperative, and proper to ontology. Harman and Morton in particular advocate for an apprehension of being that respects multiple and autonomous bodies, lest we wind up with what Morton disparagingly calls "lava lamp materialism," in which objects and their relations are figured as homogenous, promiscuous, oozing, and undefined, rather than intact, autonomous, and always partially withheld (*Realist Magic* 162). It is with this qualification in mind that I ally with Wordsworth's concern for psychological, corporeal, and material *efficacy* in addition to the shifting, transgressive, fuzzy speculative realism I explored in Chapter One, while rejecting what I view as his fixation on masculinist ethics and vitalist hierarchies that attempt to purify or de-materialize human subjectivity. This enables me to continue my argument that material is vibrant (borrowing Bennett's term) and agential (Latour's term), but to explore a different set of ecological and ontological implications of humans' interactions with animals, nutrition, weather, destitution, and war[20].

In what may appear to be a paradoxical cross-fertilization of materialist premises, I qualify that a rejection of "lava lamp-ism" nevertheless relies on the idea that objects and elements enter into shifting relations with one another through various physical modes of being. I rely on Bennett's exploration of "edible matter" to explain how objects can (like Bogost's "unit operations) be several things at once, for even as she defends "healthy" modes of being, Bennett defends a "conception of self" as an "*impure,* human-nonhuman assemblage" (xvii, my emphasis). An agential body of food, for example, "must be digestible to the out-side it enters" (Bennett 49) even as it performs its potent and multivalent functions as an autonomous object. "In the eating encounter," Bennett argues, "all bodies are shown to be but temporary congealments of a materiality that is a process of becoming, is hustle and flow punctuated by sedimentation and substance" (49). A substance operates along a continuum, at one moment a "full-blown entity," at another dissipating and being absorbed by an eating body (Bennett 49). Again, Bennett's emphasis on the materiality and nonhuman agency of these assemblages help to destabilize the traditional idealism that human bodies are endowed with a homogenous, transcendent, or immaterial "essence."

I turn to Wordsworth's "The Mad Mother" as a study of what Bennett calls "the case for edible matter as an actant operating inside and alongside humankind, exerting influence on moods, dispositions, and decision" (xvii), in order to consider the political and subjective imperatives of bodies in contact and withdrawal from one another. Specifically, the poem depicts the relationship between a husbandless mother and her breastfeeding child, to whom she is devoted to the point of psychosis and bodily degradation. In Bennett's terms, this kind of assemblage consists of numerous human and nonhuman actants (39)—the Mother, the child, the forest, the sun's energy, the Mother's breast milk, the child's appetite—and numerous "effects" (39), such as the Mother's delusion, pleasure, or death, the child's overconsumption, and reader sympathy or disgust. A reading of "The Mad Mother" that does not seek what Bennett calls an "enhanced alertness" to these kinds of assemblages (40) risks figuring the Mother's plight as immaterial, an issue of weakness or hysteria rather than a complex social-material-psychological crisis. Thus, in the following analysis, I will avoid reading "The Mad Mother" as a warning against overidentification and unbounded sensory experiences, focusing instead on how a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship between a mother and child depends on (in an echo of Bennett and Latour) strange and powerful alliances beyond the realms of patriarchal and linguistic coherence. Such a reading constitutes what Bennett calls a "political response" to the "capacity of things" to not only "impede or block the will of human designs but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii).

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[20] What Morton calls "hyperobjects," what Bennett calls "agential matter," what Latour calls "networks," and what Harman calls "black boxes" in an echo of Latour.

To begin, it is helpful to distinguish the pitiful, nameless woman in the "The Mad Mother" from the pitiful, nameless woman in "The Female Vagrant." While Wordsworth presents both females as victims of external hardship (the loss of husbands and economic destitution), the Mad Mother is not introduced as a happy, hardworking daughter of a pious father, but as a feral and delusional vagabond. The poem's opening stanza describes the woman's wild eyes, bare head, and sunburnt hair, which appear to be natural extensions of her rustic surroundings, such as a warm haystack and "green-wood stone" (1-8). She even talks and sings "among" the woods, though she has no audience save the "baby on her arm" (9-10, 5). She proclaims to her infant boy, “Sweet babe! they say that I am mad / But nay, my heart is far too glad” (17-18), and implores that he not fear her, a strange prayer between a mother and her child if she is indeed the happy and loving mother as she describes. “To thee I know too much I owe; / I cannot work thee any woe” (19-20), she continues, a strange tongue twister, almost like an incantation to protect herself from loss, and a clear declaration of submission to such a paradoxically helpless despot. Unlike the Woman in “The Female Vagrant,” the Mad Mother has already ceded her hold on clarity, autonomy, and maternal power: her destitution manifests itself as obsession, a loss of a “healthy” division between self and other, and a reversal of familiar narratives of nurturing and control.

The poem goes on to enumerate the Mother’s various ills, focusing on the disturbing pleasure she draws from her baby’s parasitical hunger. “A fire was once inside my brain; / And in my head a dull, dull pain” (21-22), the mother continues, implying she has suffered from bouts of hysteria and depression. She imagines three “fiendish faces” hanging at her breast—perhaps a premonition of her maternal anxiety during her pregnancy, or an earlier misidentification of her son’s own visage. Nevertheless, she is able to manifest a “sight of joy,” her “little boy of flesh and blood” (25-28), as an antidote to her suffering. In order to cope, the mother needs the baby to absolve her of her pain, to “suck” and “suck again” at her breast (31). “It cools my blood; it cools my brain,” she says (32), implying a direct, physiological correlation between her baby’s hunger and her mental comfort: she derives pleasure as her body is latched upon and unbounded, whereas it is the *containment* of energy, desire, and sustenance that has plagued her, for as the baby “draw[s]” her pain from her heart, it “loosens something” in her chest: a vital weight that she figures as a “tight and deadly band” (7). While the Mother identifies a threat as something already inside and ailing her, her devotion to her child is perhaps a more immanent death sentence; if the baby continues to suck the mother's life-force will dissolve entirely.

In Wordsworth's traditional literary terms, a way to speak of the interplay between intimacy and autonomy between a mother and child is through the Preface's explanation of "similitude and dissimilitude" between perceiving subjects (182). Like recent attempts to expand and refine language to acknowledge nonhuman or self-divided otherness, "The Mad Mother" elicits a level of reader sympathy for an ostensibly undesirable, unusual, or hyperbolic character. As stated in the Preface, Wordsworth attempts to "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature" (176)—to permit a level of identification. In "The Mad Mother," this is done by "tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings" (176), in Wordsworth's own words, demonstrating how even a mildly horrified, male-by-default narrator can discern and sympathize with a mother in crisis. Experiments in mediation and identification such as this illuminate how the nuances of language and narration permit a level of reconciliation between seemingly fixed or disparate entities. Likewise, but in more speculative realist terms, Bogost's concept of "metaphorism" outlines how multiple bodies encounter one another in meaningful but never totalizing ways (61). In terms of human perception, Bogost argues, we continually make sense—albeit anthropomorphically—of alien presence and experience through both our own networks of association (such as language) and the unique properties of their external referents (61).

While it is important to acknowledge the poem's gestures toward empathy and fluidity, the poem also warns that language and observation can result in dangerous slippages of health, identity, and autonomy, such as frantic hallucinations and death. As critic Matthew Bevis puts it, "[Wordsworth] imagines the psychological and linguistic consequences of over-identification:

psychosis and *semiosis*—a voice in which semiotic activity (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning) predominates" (108). The "mania" of the character is reflected in the monotony and "extreme regularity" of the Mother's rhythmic chants (Bevis 109), and the "symbiotic merger" between the Mother and her child results in a relationship with "no boundaries" (108). According to Bevis, the Mother must "retain the balance between similitude and dissimilitude…'being with' but also maintaining a feeling of difference" in order to save herself from total oblivion (109). Ultimately, Bevis argues, this loss of balance between similitude and dissimilitude results in the Mother's delusion (110).

Similar to "The Female Vagrant," Wordsworth's characterization of unhealthy overlaps of bodies and discourses speaks to his attempts to retrieve proper and authentic relationships and exchanges among God, humans, language, animals, and nature, mediated through particular channels of language, commerce, meditation, and perception. (*Lyrical Ballads*' recurring descriptions of alienation and exhaustion from city life demonstrate how environment and stimulus overdetermine health and tranquility. See, for example, Wordsworth's descriptions of sickness and imbalance in "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey.") Likewise—though actor-network theorists like Latour focus on concepts like hybridization—contemporary philosophers of speculative realism such as Harman insist on a "proper" of ontology: objects persist, have integrity, and "withhold" a level of substance in any embodied or inter-object relation ("Broken Hammer" 185). Extrapolating from Harman's argument, we might see how real and meaningful boundaries exist between entities in order to maintain a measure of social order, autonomy, health, or direction. In Wordsworth's poem, for instance, the mother's excessive identification and desire to merge with her child through the flow of sustenance exemplifies an alarming difference between "healthy" alliances—consensual sex between adults, a parent-child relationship based on growth and exchange—and the "unhealthy" sites of parasitism.

What speculative realism contains that Wordsworth's Preface does not, however, is the notion of "flat ontology," which acknowledges distinctions among objects and relations but situates everything on the same ontological plane as a tenet of object-oriented philosophy (Bogost 11). Once Wordsworth's concern for human health is localized and its actors and objectives (or *object*ives, if I may) clarified in relation to a multitude of other purposes, the poem becomes a microcosm for larger ontological processes, such as health, wholeness, structural integrity, creativity, and change. In a speculative realist or object-oriented sense, it is important to interrogate, qualify, or discard humanist tropes of a "proper" or "harmonious" ontology with Mankind at the center; withheld substance, process-based clusters, intelligible exchanges, and exploitive grabs for power and domination operate far beyond the human-on-human or subject-object locales that Wordsworth favors. Here, the need to "maintain difference" among actors is not to build a hierarchy of human and nonhuman or to once again disavow the alien as a threat to human autonomy, for this kind of reading discourages the apprehension of "nature" that exceeds the binary orderings of human health and happiness. A speculative realist approach, in contrast, emphasizes how "intimacy" and "difference" emerge within and along a vast network of hardness, softness, repetition, and mutation, the shifts and stops and realignments of a multitude of objects in the cosmos; to stick with Wordsworth's "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (174) and his emphasis on the "great and universal passions of men" (180) might appear quaint and reductive in comparison.

But, to return to the poem, normative psychology declares it unhealthy for a human mother to sacrifice herself to her baby's appetite[21]. The image of pleasure derived from dissolution is disturbing not only because it challenges the concept of agency as bounded and resolute, but also presents in place of agency an elusive body and mind that does not fit familiar templates of desire, knowledge, morality, and the subjective gaze. Like a Kafkaesque hunger artist, the mother exhibits a troubling and contradictory notion of control: she is at once willing and deluded, and to interpret her actions and determine her sanity would be exceedingly difficult. In a sense, the Mother is disturbing and inscrutable because of her dissolution rather than her material or semiotic withdrawal from the reader's gaze. Considering the implications of such an interplay, we might see how encountering the surface and material spread of things can be alarming, as we are so used to striving past bodies and grids (linguistic or otherwise) to find what's beyond and underneath. Wordsworth himself connects such perception of difference to sexual appetite and poetic pleasure (183)—the ability to interpret or relate to a character is pleasurable because of the encounter with *difference* (a Derridean deferral or, in Harman's terms, withdrawal), rather than communion. Read in these terms, the mother in this poem fails to "seduce" her listeners in the sense that she does not communicate any familiar sense of power, withdrawal, or physiological or mental health: she fails to withhold her mind and body from her child, yet her dissolute state makes her "unwilling" in the sense that she has lost any familiar sense of mastery or containment. Though readers might attempt to "read" the Woman by sympathizing with her character or coping with the “dissimilitude” that arises, she remains disturbingly, not alluringly, inscrutable.

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[21] A quick search for "unhealthy parent-child relationships" on Google, for example, brings up articles on the excessive tendencies of parenting: a mother can be too hard or too lenient, too distant or too intimate. Particularly interesting is how several articles on overinvolved parenting emphasize how "too close" parenting is not the same as molestation, stating things like "there are ways to be too close that don't include sex" (Williams).

Beyond a reader’s desire for tantalizations of character difference, coy femininity, or predictable subject-object relations, the ethical imperative of “withdrawal” is further explained with the help of Bennett’s concept of “edible matter” and the “generative” assemblage of edible and digesting actors (40). To Bennett, the exchange and transformation of nutrition demonstrates how nonhuman bodies are not limited to the “categories of context, tool, and constraint” but are actants “inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, and culture-making human beings, and as an inducer-producer of salient, public effects” (39). The practice of “enhanced alertness” to these edible bodies clarifies Bennett’s theory of “vital materiality” that challenges the notion of matter as homogenous or inert (40): if we aim to perceive (to a degree) the potent and continuous interactions between nonhuman chemicals, minerals, and nutrients and the living material they affect, we begin to understand the far-reaching implications of the in-and-out valves of physiology and perception, the vibrant activities at the sites of contact, permeation, and withdrawal.

To Bennett, the act of eating is a complex intersection of dependence, intentionality, selection, and effect. For example, food’s ability to change a human body’s mass or nutrition shows how a “nonhuman agency” is at work in a dietary exchange, as well as how food has the power to “promote particular human moods or affective states” (Bennett 41). Using Bennett’s terms, we can speak of a “profound reciprocity” between the Mother and her child, as the child’s consumption alters and reforms the mother’s “psychological, cognitive, aesthetic, and moral complexions” (43). Furthermore, Bennett reminds us (citing Nietzsche) that there is such thing as an “incorrect diet” that leads to “deep depression, the leaden exhaustion, the black melancholy of the physiologically inhibited" (qtd on 43). "Deficit or excess" that affects a body underscores what Bennett calls a "*material* agency," stuff that "modifies" that with which it "comes into contact" (43-44). Contact, in this sense, is not always the mutually beneficial alliance that we hope for Latourian actants; it can result in exhaustion, effacement, or death[22].

Ultimately, a speculative realist and network-oriented reading of "The Mad Mother" shows how individual and embodied autonomy is necessary for a certain respect, recovery, and health, but also how humans are not fully in control of this corporeal or mental stability. Though we detect the mother's discomfiting pleasure as her child tugs at her breast (the loosening of her reserve, the satisfying dissolution of her body and ego), we might take seriously the material implications of the exchange and recognize how functional subjectivity and physiological health depend on powerful and (to an extent) stable relations among actors. While Wordsworth depicts the Mother's over-identification as a threat to masculine embodiment and "proper" sexual and semiotic appetite (the absence of the husband/father has led to hysteria and overly sensual identification), speculative realism and actor-network theory emphasize the omnipresence and emergence of nonhuman actors, revealing how at the site of crisis (a mother in despair) it is difficult, let alone ethically problematic, to figure embodied mastery as immaterial or transcendental. Rereading texts with an eye for these kinds of material agency may encourage more responsive and inclusive conceptualizations of "nature," "femininity," and "power" that drive our discourses on empirical and social realities.

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[22] For more on the concept of "exhaustion," see Harman (*Prince* 132). Furthermore, Harman argues that Latour's actor-network theory does tend toward Hobbesianism, in the sense that Latour advocates that objects and relations are only "real" insofar as they generate alliances. For example, Latour might have few ethical or ontological qualms with the possibility of the Woman in Wordsworth's poem fading into her child's hunger, as it is simply a demonstration of how actors need allies to keep existing.

“The Thorn”

Another in a series of Wordsworth’s poems that depict a struggling, abandoned, or hysterical female is “The Thorn.” Like “The Mad Mother,” this poem depicts a woman who has lost or been betrayed by a man, suffers from melancholia, and participates in another “unequal exchange” with her child. In “The Thorn,” however, Wordsworth focuses his thematic energies on the unreliability of the narrator, using the persona of an older man who is “prone to superstition” (287) to consider the processes of mythmaking and origination of ghost stories[23]. The limitations of the narrator’s point of view exemplify how language and imagination can generate false or hysterical accounts of reality, and though Wordsworth continues to be concerned for his destitute mother-and-child characters, his dual focus in “The Thorn” consists of tracing how language can wriggle loose from a subject’s control, and corralling the narrative back in line so as to instruct his readers how to, as he writes in his addendum in 1800, receive the “full effect” of the poem (288).

Similar to my analysis of “The Mad Mother,” I wish to treat Wordsworth’s attempts in “The Thorn” to realign the relationship between language and its network of referents as a particular distillation of reality and ethics, but also to utilize speculative realism to engage Wordsworth’s humanist concerns regarding “authentic” narration with Harman’s concept of the “proper” of ontology—in this case, what I identify as socially and ecological real phenomena, as opposed to mal-appropriations in fantastical narratives and deluded gossip. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, in many ways this is an endorsement of a more traditional realism than was my interest in Coleridge’s hystericized and experimental impulses to explore weird mind- and landscapes; again, this thesis aims to take seriously the coexistence of multiple realisms, through which heterogeneous networks of material and perception deploy and withdraw. However, in exploring the disconnect between signifieds (objects, external bodies) and signifiers (an old man's delusions), I do not wish to recover a "natural" exchange between narration and material—to prove Wordsworth correct in stating that "there is no object standing between the poet and the image of things" ("Primary Laws" 19). Instead I am interested in how an account of reality is dynamic and slippery. Despite his belief in accuracy, Wordsworth spends plenty of time in the strange questions of language and perception, following new chains of signification that emerge from a single man's encounter with a singular network of events. This offers insight into dual imperatives of realist languages as put in speculative realist terms: to conduct careful forays into the realm of objects and nonhuman bodies, but to acknowledge the dynamic *weirdness* of what we deem "reality." As Bogost writes, we proceed as if through a funhouse.

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[23] See Wordsworth’s note to the 1800 version (287).

In the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth adds a note to distinguish the narrator from the author of "The Thorn." According to the poet, the "general notion" of this narrator is a "Captain of a small trading vessel," past middle age, who has retired into this community and thus is not native (287). Men like these, Wordsworth claims, often become "credulous and talkative from indolence" and "prone to superstition" (287). To Wordsworth, superstitious men typically have "slow faculties and deep feelings," with "adhesive"[24] minds and a "reasonable share of imagination," meaning "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements" (287). Imagination in this case does not include "fancy," or "the power by which pleasure and surprize [sic] are excited by sudden varieties of situation and by accumulated imagery" (287). As the narrator pieces together the story of Martha Ray, for example, he is prone to making supernatural effects out of natural or commonplace phenomena: a hill becomes a grave, a thorn becomes an anthropomorphized symbol for a mourning mother, and a pond seems to reflect a dead baby's face. (According to Wordsworth, these misidentifications do not count as poetic "fancy" because imagination is higher than psychosis [287].) The narrator thus represents the opposite of Wordsworth's poetic ethos; as he cannot *focus* on an object for what it "really" is, the man's powers of discernment are overwhelmed by his tendency to get carried away by information, to warp and be misguided by stories and sensory information.

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[24] "Adhesive" has a fascinating etymology. For example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the medicinal term "adhesive" designates "an inflammation that causes the adhesion of organs or structures that are usually separate."

The man's story begins with a description of a thorn, "old and grey," covered in lichens and "hung with heavy tufts of moss" (3, 14). He calls it a "melancholy crop" because the surrounding moss "clasp it round / So close, you'd say that they were bent / With plain and manifest intent, / To drag it to the ground" (15-20). But near the thorn is a "fresh and lovely sight," a "beauteous heap" of moss, full of "all lovely colours," as if a "lady fair" had woven and dyed the blossoms (35-41). The anomaly of the little hill catches the narrator's eye for a different reason than the thorn does: it appears beautiful and crafted rather than pitiful. However, the narrator makes a strange comparison: the heap is "like an infant's grave in size / As like as like can: / But never, never any where, / An infant's grave was half so fair" (52-5). The poem has set up a score of actors and objects that reflect a particular subject's sensibility; the narrator describes an idiosyncratic series of observations, puzzling the reader as to how these common but uncanny phenomena will extend into the body of the narrative. It's a rare moment of strain for Wordsworth: though he frequently slows down to collect compelling data from a scene, the opening passages of "The Thorn" stretch further toward a Coleridgean sensibility for awkwardly removed and perplexing accounts of "reality."

Subsequently, the narrator gives an account of Martha Ray, who according to legend was betrothed to a man named Stephen Hill until he left her for another woman (117-19). Martha was pregnant with his illegitimate child, and was so overcome by grief she spent months afterward in mourning, climbing up and down the nearby mountaintop to sit by the pond and cry, “Oh misery!”(123-33, 65). As all of this is mediated by a narrator we are instructed not to trust, the compulsions and ambiguities of his tale appear obsessive and poorly constructed: he repeats again and again he has seen the woman, but that he “cannot tell” the “true reason” of her actions, that the heap is *like* a grave, that he can only give the “best help” he can to help “trace” her tale (89-93, 105-11). Wordsworth draws the readers’ attentions to the unverifiable nature of the story, but (through his external annotations) utilizes such unreliability as a contrast to his own, more stable accounts of reality.

In his note to “The Thorn” Wordsworth explains the poetic effects of repetition and return. The repetition of phrases in this poem, Wordsworth claims, demonstrates the “inadequateness of our own powers” and the “deficiencies of language” to communicate “impassioned feelings” (288). “Poetry is passion,” and among other reasons, repetition and “apparent tautology” are “frequently beauties of the highest kind” (288). Another reason is “the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are themselves part of the passion” (288). Out of “fondness, exultation, and gratitude, the mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings” (288). The narrator, in this sense, is somewhat of a poet as he can (imperfectly or excessively) utilize emotional language. Interestingly, the narrator’s repetition reflects Martha Ray’s repeated trips to the mountaintop after the loss of her lover: she screams, “Oh misery! Oh misery!” as a means to cope with her humiliation and loss, creating a parallel between the narrator and the mother that elicits further sympathy from readers. However, this connection between the narrator and the mother is likely unconscious—or operates on terms that do not fit a prescribed narrative—for at the long-awaited moment of his encounter with Martha Ray the narrator turns away (200-1) in what appears to be a disavowal of his proximity with a grieving, inscrutable woman on top of a dark and stormy mountain. "I saw her face," the narrator admits, "It truth it was enough for me" (199-200)—it is perhaps at this moment he detects an otherness that does not fully "adhere" (to borrow Wordsworth's term) to his delusions.

The "full effect" of the poem (288) thus relies on our general understanding of how language fails to account for reality, but simultaneously generates new and complex chains of signifiers, such as anthropomorphized thorns and ghost folklore. But as in "The Female Vagrant," Wordsworth uses this phenomenon in "The Thorn" as a kind of warning to reader, in which a series of aberrant encounters (absence of the father/husband, the vestige of Martha's story, the arrival of the narrator onto the scene) has corrupted or deferred any easy, natural, or transcendental verification of reality. Wordsworth values the most accurate correspondences between events, images, and perception, and relies on master signifiers—sensible patriarchs, rustic homes, the "permanent and beautiful" forms of nature—to anchor his metaphysics. At the same time, however, he cannot help but drift into moments of misalignment, in which language, material, and perception seem to briefly lose their bearings in the orderly motions of mind and nature. Something gets lost or displaced at the junction of mind and matter, and Wordsworth actively seeks to recover a "natural" exchange. Poems like "The Mad Mother" and "The Thorn" amplify moments of inaccuracy, lapse, absence, and misidentification; because of the mind's fallen and agitated state, moments of what the poet considers lucid or authentic contemplation can be extraordinarily rare. What we will see next, however, is that when Wordsworth turns to the deepest, most isolated depths of a forest to seek clarity (as he divides himself from the mundane, the commercial, the political), he retreats further from any expansive or vibrant play of "becoming" among otherness. In what follows, I emphasize how the issue of authentic mediation between mind, spirit, and matter cannot be fully reconciled at the site of "nature" if the subject's intellectual and linguistic energy is directed so vehemently toward the immaterial.

"Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"

In the year 1336, early humanist scholar and poet Petrarch wrote a surprisingly modern account his ascent of Mount Ventoux in southern France. In the essay, Petrarch remarks that he decided to climb the mountain for recreational pleasure rather than from necessity. Similar to Romantic humanists to follow, Petrarch views his journey as an aspiration toward virtue and *spiritual* health. For instance, he consults a volume of religious musings by his mentor, St. Augustine, emphasizing the following lines: "And men go about the mountains to look out in amazement at the huge waves of the sea and the broad flow of the rivers and the tracts of the oceans and the stars in their courses, and they overlook themselves" (qtd on 105). Upon reading these lines, Petrach is "astonished," and determines to turn toward the inner realms of soul and mind (105). He becomes angry with himself that he should "look outside for what's within," when in actuality "nothing but the mind is wonderful" (105). As Petrarch descends, the mountain's summit suddenly seems miniscule now that he directs himself "toward what is good what is true, what is certain, and what will last" (105-106).

Such diminishment of the strangeness, power, and diversity of the non-self exemplifies a strain of Western philosophy that is continually oriented toward the humanist subject as the exclusive source of virtue and higher-order thinking. Artists and scholars such as Petrarch have given careful attention to the complexities of what appears to be humanity's unique mission to understand its existence, the nature of the soul, and its negotiations of mortal and material life, typically in adventurous but self-assured terms. As John D'Agata writes in his introduction to Petrarch's essay:

> This is a period that Petrarch saw as a transition toward something new. He coined the term 'The Dark Ages" in order to describe what had come before him. And while he wasn't entirely sure what it was that was coming at him, the burgeoning Age of Exploration was opening up the old world, and Petrarch was enthusiastically volunteering to step inside it, christening himself Europe's first true humanist, and providing the world with answers before it had even come up with questions (99).

The humanist impulse to expand the subject's physical and intellectual horizons on its terms alone is a strong one. However, over the years philosophy and criticism have also attempted to destabilize such self-assurance. For example, literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that "the will to explain [is] a symptom of the desire to have a self and a world. In other words, on the general level, the possibility of explanation carries the presupposition of an explainable (even if not fully) universe and an explaining (even if imperfectly) subject. These presuppositions assure our being. Explaining, we exclude the possibility of the *radically* heterogeneous" (33). In Spivak's terms, the ordering of perception and surroundings according to epistemological systems, such as appeals to religious deities or empirical of power, is highly problematic: while it is existentially reassuring to delineate a self through language and ideology, such efforts tend to reduce or exclude the possibility of encountering meaningful, autonomous being that does not adhere to familiar notions of selfhood.

As a thoughtful nature-poem that seeks to reconnect human contemplation with material interactions, Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" might serve as a counterweight to what can be read as Petrarch's determination to elevate human motivations above all possible modes of being and signification that constitute his surroundings. Rather than diminishing his mountains to puny rubble, Wordsworth beholds "steep and lofty cliffs" (5) that mediate and clarify his thoughts. And rather than scorning his admiration of external objects, Wordsworth celebrates the "wild secluded scene" (6) he occupies. However, Wordsworth is not completely free of the humanist impulse to star in the drama of metaphysical thought and being. Like Petrarch's account of recreational outing that inspires spiritual contemplation and internal reverie, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" describes meditation in a natural setting that results in "joy" of "elevated thoughts," a "sense sublime" of "something far more deeply interfused" than mere physical being (95-97). He places human consciousness at the center of sensation, intellect, and spiritual transcendence, endowing the poem's speaker as the principal creative agent. Meanwhile, the world of things dissolves as the "purest thoughts" of the poet's "moral being" emerge (110-12) unhindered by and, ultimately, uninterested in objects operate beyond his aesthetic and subjective body.

With this tension between dismissive and accommodative humanisms in mind, I view "Tintern Abbey" as a monument for Wordsworth's complex desire for authentic perceptual, material, spiritual, and aesthetic experiences. Wordsworth's gestures toward the "real" must be historically and ideologically contextualized in order to understand him as both conservative and radical, fixed and dynamic, and, particularly for the present purposes, idealist and network-oriented in his aesthetics and philosophy. In his historicist study of "Tintern Abbey," Richard Gravil argues that in Wordsworth's twenty-eight years of life, what was then known as "natural philosophy" had been a "cafeteria" with everything from pantheism to Newtonian materialism (41). As such, "the depiction of mind/matter communion in 'Tintern Abbey' is consistent, or not inconsistent, with almost any of the gradations of materialism on offer" (43). Indeed, Wordsworth's deep consideration of a particular network of external data in "Tintern Abbey" and his correlating mental state offers a multivalent case study of what it means to be oriented to material realities on their own terms, and when, despite our best empirical, egalitarian, or speculative intentions, we have not gone far enough to acknowledge the radical "life of things" ("Tintern" 49).

I turn first to critic M.H. Abrams' critical treatment of Wordsworth's narration and aesthetics in order to understand the subjective gaze that drives "Tintern Abbey" and, accordingly, limits the poem's gestures toward material otherness. When Abrams describes Wordsworth's mastery of the "return-upon-itself" (83) meditation—the "peaceful outer scene" that "calls forth a recollection in tranquillity of earlier experiences in the same setting," leading to a "sequence of reflections which are suggested by, and also incorporate, perceptual qualities of the scene" (80)—he inadvertently points to the problematic idealisms of Wordsworth's reverie. The "shape of perfection," Abrams argues, is the *ouroborus*, "the symbol for eternity and for the divine process of creation, since it is complete, self-sufficient, and endless" (82). Evoking this circularity, Abrams demonstrates Wordsworth's tendency to cast threats of material otherness out of the correlationist circle, to disavow external networks of becoming. This prevalent theme in Romantic literature and criticism—its fixation on eternal wholeness and mystical self-sufficiency—emphasizes its tension with speculative realist ecologies, in which the symbol of the ouroborus may stand for ontological weirdness but not ontological transcendence.

Specifically, Wordsworth's poem begins with the speaker's return after five years to a scene of "mountain-springs" and "steep and lofty cliffs" (3-5). He hears the "sweet inland murmur" of the landscape, mild external events that "impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky" (6-8). After a time of "repose" (10) and reflection upon the "forms of beauty" in the grove (25), the speaker contrasts the scene to the "lonely rooms" and "din / Of towns and cities" (27-28), where only the recollection of natural beauty provides "tranquil restoration" (31), summoning "sensations sweet" that the speaker feels in his blood, "along the heart," and in his "purer mind" (28-30). In his classic essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," Abrams situates "Tintern Abbey" in a tradition of poems that:

> present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer

> scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation (76-77).

Abrams masterfully traces the poem's humanist drive toward immateriality and clarity: Wordsworth's narrator may suffer ponderous bouts of incoherence, but his poetic presence at the site of nature leads to transcendence of mundane or commercial networks of being. This *re*covery, along with the speaker's *re*turn and *re*vitalization, emphasize how Wordsworth's process of sublime restoration is always a turn *back*—ouroborus-style—as a restitution of an original and enduring spirituality. Such a return is also a move inwards, toward the solitude and stability of higher consciousness. In such a "blessed mood," the "burthen of mystery," the "heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" is lifted ("Tintern" 38-42).

Read in Abrams' terms, Wordsworth's empowerment of human language and perception over his surroundings constitutes an idealism rather than a realism. For instance, Abrams deems it both "inadequate" and "misleading" to label these meditative passages simply as "nature lyrics" (77). Wordsworth's aim to "look steadily" at his objects, Abrams explains, is necessary, but not "adequate" enough to generate a Romantic lyric, a highly personalized and mediated text (77). Indeed, Abrams argues, Wordsworth "manifested wariness, almost terror, at the threat of the corporeal eye and material object to tyrannize over the mind and imagination" (77). In other words, the poet's sensitivity to *external* data can threaten the autonomy of the perceiving subject. In contrast, the "normative experience," Abrams explains, is the mind's *mastery* over the senses (77). Abrams proposes "descriptive-meditative" as a better qualifier than "natural," but still considers the moniker "clumsy" (77). Above all, Abrams wishes to emphasize the "remarkable phenomenon" of the "repeated out-in process," between poet and surroundings (78). Through such “interplay” (78), intellectual engagement with the landscape leads to enlightenment on what Abrams calls the “great issues of life, death, love, joy, dejection, or God” (78). As the speaker of “Tintern” carefully calibrates his mental state to his surroundings, Abrams argues, he “revives” the “picture of the mind” (62)—what the poetic subject views as a harmonious, pleasurable, and willful state of being and perception. Read in these terms, though Wordsworth engages profoundly with his surroundings to generate the text of “Tintern Abbey,” the poem functions as a window onto a masculinized, logocentric soul, not a weird external reality.

In further subordination of the dynamic materiality of the scene, Wordsworth’s speaker determines the interplay of embodiment and environment as secondary to the subject’s transcendence. As Abrams argues, Romantic lyrics follow “the meditative mind” as it “*disengages* itself from the physical locale, moves back in time…then forward to express” hope and anticipation, incorporating present and the recollections (81, my emphasis). The speaker describes the sensation of his soul’s vitality, as the “breath” of his “corporeal frame” and the “motion” of his “human blood” are “Almost suspended,” his “eye made quiet” so that he might “see” into the “life of things” (43-49). This higher, abstract vision of the sublime depends on the speaker’s withdrawal from the sense faculties and, accordingly, the heterogeneity of his surroundings. Vestiges of material encounter are filtered through the speaker’s memories of “coarser pleasures” in his “boyish days” (74)—the “glad animal movements” (75), haunting “passion” (78), and “dizzy raptures” (86) of a body and mind let loose into the landscape—and the speaker finds “Abundant recompence” (89) in his present, “subdue[d]” state (94), where, tracing the “setting suns,” the “round ocean,” the “living air,” and the “mind of man,” he detects a “motion and a spirit” that “impels” all “thinking things, all objects of all though, / And rolls through all things” (95-103). However, as he recovers from this sleepy, receptive state and the “picture of [his] mind revives again” (62), the speaker imbues his material surroundings with a universal vitality and intelligibility that hinges on *his* creative action. “I have learned / To look on nature,” the speaker explains, “not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity” (89-92). In other words, as he looks and listens, the speaker translates sensory data to abstraction, the unique pains of *human* existence. Furthermore, though he feels a “presence” that “disturbs” him (95), the speaker distills this shadow of otherness through “the joy / Of elevated thoughts” and a “sense sublime of / Something far more deeply interfused” (97). While this elusive presence “rolls through all things” (103)—whose “dwelling” is sunsets, ocean water, and the “living air” (98-9)—its occupation is to empower all “thinking things” and “all objects of all thought” (101-2), effectively reducing universal vitality to the extent of human contemplation. Because of this animating spirit that “rolls through all things” (103), the speaker considers himself a “lover of the meadows and the woods” (104); he must identify himself in his surroundings, to “recognize / In nature and the language of the sense” and the “anchor” of his “purest thoughts” (108-110). The higher mind holds dominion over what the senses half “create” and half “perceive” (107-8), limiting the speaker’s speculations to a correlationist cross-section of reality.

So much for the humanist side of things. However, while Abrams seems content with apprehending Wordsworth as a master of perception, interpretation, and filtration, other critics focus on Wordsworth’s willingness to orient himself to external and emergent properties of matter that exist and signify on their own terms. In this sense, “Tintern Abbey” can also be read as a highly personal but accommodative apprehension of localized materiality. I argue that this kind of speculative realist reading effectively critiques the idea that texts are hopelessly severed from material realities, but simultaneously acknowledges the complex but incomplete mediating powers of language. As Coupe writes, to combat the "arrogance" of subordinating the nonhuman world to human constructs is not to simply insist that, for instance, Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" is "about" daffodils (2), or, for that matter, "Tintern Abbey," if not an Idealist construct is simply a naturalist's report on a secluded grove in eighteenth-century Britain. As such, Coupe argues that "we must avoid reducing complex linguistic performance to the level of merely pointing at things," and yet "concede the existence of a certain kind of flower" (2). In other words, a nature poem like "Tintern Abbey" can be read as a product of both human (linguistic) and nonhuman agencies.

Though he predates contemporary discussions of speculative realism, Murray demonstrates how traditional and contemporary literary criticism can accommodate discussions of poetry that does not operate entirely on the author's Idealism. For example, he emphasizes the significance of a "Wordsworthian pause" that seems to "invite us simply to look at the planet" in order to "observe what it is in its own right" (46). Murray acknowledges that a reader may reject the discovery in such moments of a "life" of objects, but, in doing so, "chooses to shut himself out of the Wordsworthian transaction between man and nature, either by preferring the conventional notion that poetry's wildest imaginations are true, and that there is no need for exact observation, or by rejecting all notions of the 'life of things'" (46). In other words, Murray is confident that the exchange between real nature and Wordsworth's perception is as close to "truth" as poetry can be. By critiquing the rejection of nonhuman vitality, Murray positions Wordsworth as a thoughtful mediator of material that signifies on its own terms, in contrast to a speaker who dominates and reduces a site of radical otherness to his perception alone.

"Tintern Abbey" abounds with temporal, spatial, and metaphysical pauses, inviting the reader to consider Wordsworth's careful but compelling descriptions of the landscape. For example, Murray emphasizes how "Wordsworth's 'forms' are not Platonic [in the sense of being] found in the mind" (40). Rather, "they enter the mind and take possession of it" (Murray 40), positioning the poet as receptive and malleable rather than dominating and self-assured. Furthermore, while the image of an "anchor" of Wordsworth's "purest thoughts" can (as I mentioned earlier) be read as a subordination of external forces to the stabilization and empowerment of poetic mastery, Murray's reading offers the concept that "it is only because [objects] are substantial that the mind can be 'steadied' by them" (40-41), meaning that Wordsworth's subjectivity is *not* self-sufficient, but dependent on nonhuman networks of power. Such objects, as Murray argues in an echo of Wordsworth, combine even with the physiology of the brain (qtd on 41), a far cry from the denial of the "materiality of mind" or the "life of things" (43). Furthermore, as Murray points out, the poem doesn't even assert a "transcendental deity" (43), and critical responses such as those in *The Monthly Review* were outraged at Wordsworth's endowment of natural phenomena with intellect and capacity for reflection (43). Ultimately, Murray argues, Wordsworth's poem treats matter as "active," figuring nothing to be in total "repose" (44)[25]. In this sense, the Wordsworthian "language of the sense" is "first and foremost the language by which we name the things, the material objects, we perceive" (47); Wordsworth does not start out with readymade objects of the mind; the mind is peopled and developed while impressed from the active and heterogeneous outside (48).

Not surprisingly, Murray reaches this humanist concern for nonhuman and material vitality through a sort of "common ground" between Wordsworth's mind and his surroundings, arguing that Wordsworth must return to the "present objects" of nature in order to form "*poetic* symbols" from his "pure memories," or "pure abstractions" (31). Wordsworth's frequent references to the “green” of his surroundings in “Tintern Abbey,” for example, constitute the color as “the correlative of Wordsworth’s accession to the life of thought” (Murray 29). “Green” becomes “the element of thought—tranquility—in nature, and, finally, it becomes a symbol” (Murray 29). It is the “external manifestation” of “inward harmony” (30). In other words, Wordsworth legitimizes *real* qualities of trees, ground, and atmosphere as weighty objects—“anchor[s]” (110)—but expresses them in symbolic and abstract terms.

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[25] Murray points out how even Locke considered "matter itself might be capable of thought" (47).

By approaching Wordsworth’s thematic and structural intentions with an eye for his accommodation of external reference points of the non-self, we see how, to Wordsworth, the most pleasurable and enlightening interactions between mind and matter occur when the two are blended—consciously but organically—and attuned to one another because of their common elements. For example, Murray writes of several images of “interfusions” between objects and forces in “Tintern Abbey,” such as the tension between outward water and the “inland murmurs” (lines 3-4) of the land and the overlap of past and present memories and sensory experiences (31). Wordsworth finds “man and nature,” Murray argues, to be the ultimate interfusion, “more deeply” at present in Wordsworth’s poem because they are “bound spiritually” in thought rather than sensation (31). The highest and purest interfusion, in this sense, occurs in the (immaterial) medium and esemplastic power of philosophical energy, a state of being that, according to the poem’s speaker, can only be achieved with age, reverie, and return.

Along with Murray’s list of “interfusions,” “Tintern Abbey” contains a series of images that unite unusual qualities, further emphasizing how the poetic mind discerns and accentuates states of being from which a human mind can render abstraction. For example, Wordsworth describes the mountain cliffs as both “steep” and “lofty,” two adjectives that may appear synonymous but develop a strange tension between material and immaterial qualities. While “steep” connotes an abrupt and precipitous incline, “lofty” connotes a more abstract ascent of intellect, character, and status. As Wordsworth is using the cliffs as an external point of reference for his mind’s eye, the material seems to meet the poet’s perception halfway, functioning as a (flickering) conduit for human language and apprehension of the sublime, connecting “landscape” (material) with the “quiet of the sky” (ethereal and seemingly intangible) (lines 7-8). Wordsworth also turns his poetic eye to the “vagrant dwellers” in the “houseless woods” (20), evoking a paradoxical image of both open, restless wandering and fixed, secluded stasis. This image supports Wordsworth’s duality of being he explicates later in the poem: human development consists of both youthful excitement—the sensory-driven experience of material immediacy, also aligned with the image of “unripe fruits” that “lose themselves” on line 12—and the slowed inertia of introspection as the speaker returns to nature with what Murray calls a matured and “higher mood” (30). As a text of “emotion recollected in tranquility” (Preface 183), “Tintern Abbey” draws unlike qualities into communion, blending material and immaterial referents to exemplify what Wordsworth views as the meeting point of perception and external realities.

The claim that Wordsworth legitimizes (to an extent) the real existence of the objects and bodies drawn into the poem by his contemplation and language challenges conceptions of the poet as a one-dimensional idealist. For example, as Gravil outlines, Marjorie Levinson’s seminal criticism *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* argues that Wordsworth only sees “beauteous forms” of the forest inhabitants, not “images of nature” (qtd on 37). As such, what Gravil paraphrases as Wordsworth’s “Cartesian epistemology” overlooks the *real* existence (and, accordingly, despair) of vagrants, permitting them only to exist in his conscious, aesthetic mind (37). However, Gravil offers another reading of the lines that suggests Wordsworth’s reference to “seeming”—or the unreliability of interpreting a scene—“problematizes the act of noticing” (39), reminding us that the “evidence of human suffering” is “easily blent by the wishful-thinking or picturesque mind into its own complacent landscape” (39). In other words, though Wordsworth may appear to idealize the reality of his surroundings, he continually explores the difficult implications of mediation, acknowledging his own place in the snare of correlationism. Materialist and historicist studies such as Levinson’s remind readers of the need to represent *real* bodies and hardship in texts, but Wordsworth nevertheless highlights his speaker’s concern for *how* he encounters such pressing social issues.

“When a Romantic poet confronted a landscape,” Murray writes, “the distinction between self and not-self tended to dissolve” (102). Such a Haraway-esque “becoming with” (3)—as well as Wordsworth’s meticulous considerations of the diverse cross-sections of reality he occupies—initially seem to appeal to a speculative realist discourse on engaging more ethically and carefully with the lively world of things. Murray even goes as far as to ask, “Who is to say that an object outside the mind cannot be literally ‘akin,’ even in the most basic, the genealogical sense, to the mind’s idea of that object?” (102), emphasizing the possibility of nonlinguistic, physiological, network-oriented conditions of the mind’s engagement with its strange material surroundings. However, as it likely evident in these passages of Murray’s criticism alongside details from Wordsworth’s poem, it is impossible to read Wordsworth as anti-correlationist, and not simply because it would project historical anachronisms onto centuries-old poems. As I have argued throughout my chapters, although speculative realist theorists such as Bogost do not deny the difficulties and imperatives of relational, subjective experience, they nevertheless insist on methodologies—scientific, philosophical, perceptual, linguistic, and practical distinctions from the empiricist, phenomenological, and idealist hubris of Western humanisms—that legitimize the elusive but nonetheless real heterogeneity of being. As such, Wordsworth's continued insistence on humanist tropes of coherence and anthropocentric universalisms position him as a nature poet who limits himself to a binary-driven template of reality.

Ultimately, I second Gravil's proposition that "to describe Wordsworth's personal negotiation with the competing ideologies of British empiricism, Enlightenment materialism, native benevolence and nascent Idealism would involve difficult discriminations" within Wordsworth's "intellectual texture," but to determine the poet as a "Cartesian-Hegelian" poster boy would be "inadequate" (36), as well as reductive. Conducting a speculative realist reading of the multifaceted entity known as William Wordsworth and his poetry legitimizes his heterogeneity, his elusive mixture of maddening idealist tendencies, historical imperatives, generous ethics, and metaphysically potent forays into his real but ever-emergent surroundings. My analysis of "Tintern Abbey" aims to explore the paradoxical requirements of such a reading.

Conclusion

The Romantics leave a complex legacy. On the one hand, modern scholars have gladly extended the epoch’s strains of individualism and thoughtful engagement with natural surroundings by emulating writers like Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s cross-fertilizations of literature, metaphysics, and contemporary politics. On the other hand, however, the term “Romantic” connotes in our time a naïve, self-indulgent young man, fatally summoned into the wild blue yonder by outdated idealisms. In the bus-turned-shelter he occupied for almost four months in rural Alaska, modern-day Romantic Christopher McCandless wrote the following:

> Two years he walks the earth. No phone, no pool, no pets, no cigarettes. Ultimate freedom. An extremist. An aesthetic voyager whose home is the road. Escaped from Atlanta. Thou shalt not return, 'cause "the West is the best." And now after two rambling years comes the final and greatest adventure. The climactic battle to kill the false being within and victoriously conclude the spiritual pilgrimage. Ten days and nights of freight trains and hitchhiking bring him to the Great White North. No longer to be poisoned by civilization he flees, and walks alone upon the land to become lost in the wild.

McCandless’s text can be read as a kind of neo-Romantic manifesto, raising questions about the efficacy or futility of human attempts to align language with experience, desire, and observation. Does McCandless’s language reveal something *real* about the material and cultural space known as the Alaskan frontier? And if it does, in what possible ways is this “reality” relevant to us as creatures of language? Do McCandless’s attempts to narrativize his experience through references to Roger Miller songs and Western films dilute a “natural” correspondence between his signifiers and landscape? Does the self-appointed name “Alexander Supertramp” fully appropriate McCandless’s identity and freedom? Do his proceeding journal entries—from their weather reports to his final entry, “BEAUTIFUL BLUEBERRIES”—accurately document the degradation of the “false being within,” alongside McCandless’s body and mental state? Can we trust Wordsworth’s conviction, that deep contact with nature produces language that reveals nature, and therefore “read” McCandless’s words—from his names to manifestos—as conduits to *real* nature and *real* correlative humanity? Or does McCandless stake all on a Romantic delusion?

I hope answers to these questions remain complicated, in the sense that they work to strain and release rather than binarize and contain. My analysis of Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s poetry aims to destabilize the old dichotomizations of “authentic” and “constructed” language, focusing instead on how the boundaries between poetry and its objects of reference can be emergent, slippery, and heterogeneous. I hope to have offered readings of *Lyrical Ballads* that hold at a distance the opposing, but equally humanist-driven, discourses of nature-poetry as either a noble and universal language or hubristic idealization of an inscrutable “outside.” We engage in and rely on material realities, even as our languages can never totalize or contain an experience; perhaps we can remember this to perpetually re-apprehend how we are not trapped in linguistic constructs alone, but that we are also part of diverse networks of objects, bodies, reactions, and meaning. Maybe we can perceive and act in ways that the Romantics could only gesture us toward.

I have oriented my thesis toward the complications of a poetic inclination to mediate mind and matter, focusing on how Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s proliferations of *texts*—poems, prefaces, addendums, and long legacies of metaphysical treatises and Romantic criticism—work to authenticate everything from the natural sublime to material being. But rather than confirming that correlationist aesthetics really do what they purport to do, I hope to have effectively highlighted what I view as Romanticism's most intriguing and relevant preoccupations to modern posthumanist readers: the heterogeneous interface between mind and external matter, and the constitutive effects of language(s) on being, perception, and encounters with otherness. Coleridge and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* offers overlapping but divergent accounts of "authentic" mediations between Romantic imagination and its objects of perception: Coleridge's as the frequently perplexing forays into the supernatural and unreliable, and Wordsworth's as the ultimate promise of language that harmonizes nature and the human soul. I argue that neither poet's sensibility triumphs as the most lucid or reliable in terms of human reader's interest in reality, organicism, and what Wordsworth calls the "life of things" ("Tintern" 49). Indeed, it is the stranger and more uncooperative moments in Coleridge's and Wordsworth's poetry that generate uncanny metaphorisms between nonhuman experience and our own. Speculative realist readings of Romantic literature can generate novel theories of aesthetic function, and, maybe more crucially, open our readings of the Romantic legacy—a copious textual record of human apprehensions of materiality—to more astute and rich possibilities than orthodox readings have accessed. And, of course, if our aim is to re-kindle something of the Romantic faith in human relations with nature, even alongside our world-weary dismissals of dead boys in Alaska, then radical (even beautifully perverse) readings of the Romantic record might actually render something far more efficacious than either the reiterative or cautionary.

The main premise of this thesis contributes to both the legacy of Romantic literature and criticism I have studied, and to the body of speculative realist scholarship I have applied to my readings of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's poems. As a student of Western humanities, I hope to have demonstrated how materialist metaphysics can be used to explore questions of meaning, authorship, and aesthetics, particularly within the dynamic but humanist-inclined body of literature by European and American authors. My work offers new insight into the study of *Lyrical Ballads*, particularly in regards to the text's complex negotiations of rural and urban spaces, naturalist philosophies, and physiological, intellectual, and imaginative sensibilities. I wish to emphasize, as Chaplin and Faflak argue, the Romantic era's "complex and often ambivalent" negotiations of the politics, technologies, and philosophies of their era, celebrating their "abstract, conceptual, intellectual commitment to liberation and innovation" (xv-xvi), but cautious of their "elevation" of the poet as a "uniquely gifted individual whose creativity is the expression of an original genius that has transformative power" (xvii).

My analysis does not give full justice to the complexities of *Lyrical Ballads* and the new materialist studies of the twenty-first century, and there are more threads of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's work for speculative realism to pursue. For example, my selection of poems from *Lyrical Ballads* is limited; I might expand my argument with future readings of poems such as Wordsworth's "Michael" and "Nutting," and Coleridge's "The Nightingale" and "The Dungeon", all of which are emblematic of the poets' unique mediations of perception and otherness. Furthermore, my analysis does not conduct historicist and materialist reading of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's lives and work as a means of identifying Latourian networks of social, technological, and natural objects that shape and energize their poetry. Such a reading might explore the material implications of the Industrial Revolution, the Reign of Terror, Dorothy and William Wordsworth's occupation of their houses in Racedown and Alfoxden, and Coleridge's bouts of sickness and opium addiction. Additionally, a different speculative realist reading of *Lyrical Ballads* might generate a litany of objects—Coleridge's skeletal ship, Wordsworth's thorn—and consider what Bogost calls their "unit operations"—their "unfathomable density" and "weird relationship[s] between parts and wholes"—as both autonomous and relational entities (22).

As is likely evident in my analysis, working in speculative realist territory can be tricky, resulting in contradictions and competing assumptions in the quest for philosophical realisms that are non-anthropocentric but also intelligible to human readers, not to mention respectful to autonomous worlds of objects but relevant to the familiar ways we interact with tools, animals, fetishes, artifacts, and assemblages. Most importantly to my thesis, realist speculations must keep us aware of how language both elucidates and occludes qualities and interactions among objects, as the attempt to establish a firm, empirical language of realism (paradoxically) can be oppressive, diminishing, and tunnel-visioned. As my thesis posits, the alternative, emergent properties of language might be more conducive to *radical* apprehensions of being and interactions.

This is not to say that non-meaning is better. As philosophers, we seek all kinds of meanings, developments, differentiations, and patterns that do not appear limited to human language games. But in order to avoid the hubristic tendencies of philosophy and epistemology, human operators of language and aesthetics must facilitate contact and meaning that is untotalizable by familiar systems of signification, such as structurally sound nature poems or airtight lists of chemical data. As an alternative to these traditional celebrations of order and clarity, my analysis posits that the apprehension of nonhuman meaning and being emerges through errors, partial translations, mutations, and reconsiderations of our humanist narratives. Though it often slides into idealisms, Romantic poetry has been remarkably conducive to this kind of speculation.

This speculative realist approach based on "broken" language opens possible discourses with other disciplines as well as multiple readings of *Lyrical Ballads*. The first is ecocriticism. As Coupe argues, "the relationship between nature and culture is the key intellectual problem of the twenty-first century" (xvii). In this vein, Coupe argues, "green studies reminds us that place matters as much as time, geography as much as history, being as much as becoming, permanence as much as change" (6). This attention to diversity and contingency is highly relevant to the goals of actor-network and speculative realist theory. Furthermore, ecocriticism is interested in how Romantic poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth contribute to contemporary discussions of "the continuity between the language and symbolism of poets" (Coupe 6). From here, Coupe argues, "the interest…is in deciding how far the spirit of romanticism needs restating in order to give a challenge to our times" (6). I second various speculative realists who argue that radical materialist philosophies add a sense of urgency and non-anthropocentric ethics to discussions of an earth in crisis[26].

An important result of the dialogue between speculative realism and ecocriticism is the consideration of how to face material realities—species extinction, soil degradation, the environmental effects of fracking and overpopulation—while responding to the powerful legacies of postmodernism and poststructuralism, theories that posit that nothing is accessible (or, in more extreme claims, exists) outside of linguistic play. Again, I turn to Coupe, who argues the most productive ecocritical discussions advocate for postmodernism's "provisionality and pluralism, given ecology's emphasis on the creativity of organic life and on the need for biodiversity," and, especially, an alternative to consumerist capitalism, but at the same time remain “committed to resisting the global theme park which we call ‘postmodernity’” (7). (In other words, we can’t rely on Jean Baudrillard as the sole source of postmodern ethics.) Likewise, I argue that applications of speculative realism to texts such as Romantic poetry can be logical and compelling extensions of twentieth-century discussions of relativism and the critique of humanism and naturalist language, but offer pertinent alternatives to what Coupe calls a “heavy-handed culturalism, whereby suspicion of ‘truth’ has entailed the denial of non-textual existence” (2). Speculative realist scholars would heartily corroborate Coupe’s statement that things do not only exist as “signified within human culture” (2); the project from here is to legitimize the nonhuman in productive but thoughtful terms.

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[26] Bennett, for example, argues that "to incorporate a greater sense of the active vitality of foodstuff" into the current "slow food movement" would "animate a more ecologically sustainable public" (51).

Reading as a speculative realist also bears powerful implications for new approaches to other naturalist or environmentally-minded authors in the Western canon, such as John Ruskin and his attempts to “improve upon early romantic concepts of the relationship between art and the environment” (Coupe 14), Virginia Woolf’s Romantic and feminist scholarship on the Wordsworth siblings, and primary and secondary works of modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, and Gertrude Stein. My thesis also (indirectly) offers insight on various incarnations of literary realism across Western humanities, from the highly personal and nature-oriented essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to the synesthetic intricacies of Vladimir Nabokov’s novels, to experimental texts on the nature of animals, objects, and nonhuman interactions, such as Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Albert Goldbarth’s “Delft: An Essay Poem,” which is cross-cut with meditations on a Renaissance flea, and Eliot Weinberger’s *An Elemental Thing*, which considers everything from donkeys to the Saharan desert to ice, enmeshed in striking and non-orthodox histories, materialities, and aesthetics.

But these are only a handful of possible directions. For now, my thesis explores how the unreliability of language is perhaps its best quality when it comes to legitimizing a non-anthropocentric universe. As scholars, I hope we are receptive enough to know when philosophical materialism calls for an active, mediating deployment of our languages, and when it requires us to quiet down and let things speak in unfamiliar but compelling terms. It's a hard project: as Morton writes, encountering objects and otherness "goad[s] us to greater levels of consciousness," and this means "more stress, more disappointment, less gratification (though perhaps more satisfaction), and more bewilderment" (*Ecological Thought* 135). It seems human philosophy has always been fascinated by this difficult interface of mind and matter; I value deeply the contemporary efforts to consider these legacies in more radically inclusive terms, even when it hurts.

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