Encounters with the outcast: the ethical relation in Wordsworth and Lacan

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Encounters with the Outcast:
The Ethical Relation
in Wordsworth and Lacan

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ethical importance of the moments in William Wordsworth’s poetry when language verges on silence or presents experience as finally unintelligible, and explores the ethical dimension of outcast figures intimately connected with the problem of this void in signification, on the basis of Jacques Lacan’s insights concerning psychoanalytic ethics. The question that orients the examination of the ethical issues embodied in Wordsworth’s poetry is how one should encounter or represent the outcast figure as a rupture in meaning. And the ethics of subjectivity which Lacan explores in terms of his theories of the gaze, feminine jouissance, and the reconsideration of the nature of community which these entail, allow us to see more clearly the importance of the profound and mysterious encounters found in Wordsworth’s poetry—often between a speaker and some “outcast” other.

Chapter One rereads three poems included in Lyrical Ballads—“The Thorn,” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” and “We Are Seven”—taking as a guideline for analysis Lacan’s account of the “not-all” which is tied to the ethical import of feminine jouissance. Chapter Two explores the speaker’s sudden encounters with three outcast figures introduced in The Prelude—a blind beggar, a discharged soldier and a drowned man—in terms of Lacan’s theory of the gaze. The concept of gaze
which Lacan develops in order to articulate a specific moment in the constitution of
the subject provides an important clue to read the encounters not simply in relation to
the outcast figures, but also in relation to the speaker himself. In addition, this chapter
reconsiders the Winander Boy episode as describing the subject’s gaze present at his
own death. Chapter Three examines *The Ruined Cottage* as the story of Margaret
transmitted by the Pedlar to the narrator, through Lacan’s ethics of speaking well. The
ethics of speaking well leads us to understand the way in which the Pedlar preserves
and transmits the truth of Margaret without covering up her fundamental
unintelligibility.
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INTRODUCTION

Susan Wolfson, in the introduction of her book *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*, claims that the major poems of Romanticism are “critically implicated in perceptions that provoke inquiry, experiences that elude or thwart stable organization, events that challenge previous certainties and require new terms of interpretation”; she formulates this as “the fundamentally interrogative character” of English Romantic Poetry (18). As Wolfson acknowledges, though, the interrogative activity is “not unique to English Romantic poetry” (*Questioning* 18). Indeed, beginning with a consideration of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, she comments: “[T]hat many of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* turn upon exchanges of question and response is nothing extraordinary in view of social custom and literary tradition” (*Questioning* 42). Why, then, is the interrogative mode in English Romantic poetry of particular importance to Wolfson?

She gives us her own answer to this question: “If in these poems Wordsworth uses questions and responses in fairly conventional ways, he does so as part of an unconventional poetic program” (*Questioning* 43). The unconventional poetic program has something to do with Romantic poetry as a place of unanswered questions and a place “where answers, if they are accessible, are often ambiguous, inadequate, unstable, or so tidy as to appear to parody rather than confirm the desires
they satisfy” (Wolfson, Questioning 21). For Wolfson, unanswered questions function to loosen “the bindings of meaning by intimating something in excess of what language can say and frame” (Questioning 21). Specifically, when it comes to several poems in the 1798 version of Lyrical Ballads—for example, “We Are Seven,” “Anecdote for Fathers,” “The Thorn,” “Tintern Abbey,” and others—she classifies them as occasions when questions and answers “fail to link, when there seems to be no common frame of reference,” thereby directing our attention to what she calls “the presence of a mystery beyond the reach of simple interrogation” (Questioning 44). In each poem, a speaker or narrator poses a number of questions with regard to a mystery at the heart of experience, but he is left with “scraps of language” which “at once tempt and defeat” any interpretation, instead of “the intelligible, translucent signifiers Coleridge identified with the operation of symbolic language” (Wolfson, Questioning 59). Even more important for William Wordsworth’s poems is that those “scraps of language” which resist absorption into any interpretation, like “the navel of the dream” elaborated by Sigmund Freud, are transmitted through outcast figures (4: 111n1).

In order to have a better understanding of the ethical importance of the moments in Wordsworth’s poetry where language seems to verge on silence or present experience as finally unintelligible, and in order to grasp the ethical dimension of the
outcast figures intimately connected with this void in signification, we need to examine Jacques Lacan’s insights concerning psychoanalytic ethics. On the basis of Lacan’s psychoanalytic ethics, one cannot merely argue that the hermeneutic anxiety arising out of unanswered questions in Wordsworth’s poems is resolved through the conferral of plural meanings or through hermeneutic pluralism, since Lacan’s ethics allows us to pursue a more fundamental anxiety; more specifically, the idea that Romantic questioning leads to a pluralistic hermeneutics could be seen as a defense against this fundamental anxiety.

Let us begin with a brief overview of general problems of ethics which Tracy McNulty provides in her book *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the Expropriation of Identity*. First of all, McNulty directs our attention to the origin of the word of ethics, ἔθος, the meaning of which is “abode” or “dwelling place” and then gives us a fragment from Heraclitus, ἔθος ἀνθρώποι δαίμον, on which Martin Heidegger comments in the process of exploring the genealogy of ἔθος (see McNulty xv-xvii). With regard to the fragment from Heraclitus, ἔθος ἀνθρώποι δαίμον, which is usually translated as “a man’s character is his daimon,” Heidegger maintains that it should be rendered as: “The (familiar) abode for man is the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)” (258). Noting that the ethics is concerned with the gesture of “the host opening his home to the stranger” or with the situation in
which “what is familiar to man is at the same time made to open itself to what is unfamiliar,” McNulty observes that traditional ethics is centered primarily on “man there where he is at home, in his place, possessed of an essential autonomy” (xvii, 201).

According to McNulty’s account, it is the ethics of “dwelling at home” that Lacan calls into question through his reading of Freud’s texts. Lacan’s remark on Freud’s statement concerning the ethics of the unconscious, Wo es war, soll Ich werden, deserves a closer examination in this context: “I am saying that Freud addresses the subject in order to say to him the following, which is new—Here, in the field of the dream, you are at home. Wo es war, soll Ich werden” (Four 44). Freud’s formula, Wo es war, soll Ich werden, is translated in the Standard Edition as “there where id was, there ego shall be,” which has been interpreted by the proponents of ego psychology to mean “the ego must come to dominate or subsume the id, to bring it within its parameters,” as McNulty summarizes (McNulty 200). But Lacan insists that Freud’s formula indicates “the necessary expropriation of the ego by the id: there where ‘it’ was—the id, the Thing—the subject shall come into being as a subject of the unconscious, and not as a self-possessed ego” (McNulty 200-01; see Lacan, Four 44-45). It might be said that the subject of the unconscious or the subject who is “at home” in the domain of the dream corresponds to the subject who “cannot be at home
in the ego and the homeostatic ideal it upholds” (McNulty 201).

Interestingly, McNulty stresses that the ethics of “dwelling at home” can be considered in connection with “the ideal expressed by what Freud calls the pleasure principle, the homeostatic mechanism that seeks to maintain organic and affective equilibrium by binding or draining off the unbound energy of the drives” (McNulty 201-02). This leads her to read Lacan’s discussion of Aristotle’s ethics, since Aristotle’s ethics also aims “at a lowering of tension, an affective equilibrium or stasis,” as implied in Lacan’s following point in *Television*: “[W]hat else is the famous lowering of tension with which Freud links pleasure, other than the ethics of Aristotle?” (McNulty 202; Lacan, *Television* 19). But here one should be careful to distinguish between Aristotle’s ethics and Freud’s pleasure principle, which is one of the issues that Lacan explores in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

According to Lacan, with respect to Aristotle, “[w]hat cannot fail to strike us right away is that his pleasure principle is an inertia principle,” which is to say that “Aristotle’s thought on the subject of pleasure embodies the idea that pleasure has something irrefutable about it, and that it is situated at the guiding pole of human fulfillment” (Lacan, *Ethics* 27, 13). For Aristotle, pleasure or “the equilibrium it sustains” is “the rightful home of man, there where he is in his place” (McNulty 202).

What, then, does Freud place at the heart of his formulation of ethics? Instead
of pleasure, he considers death drive as the guiding pole of human fulfillment. Here it may be helpful to recall McNulty’s summary of how Freud’s theorization of the death drive renders problematic the Aristotelian ideal of affective equilibrium. According to her, the death drive can be described as “a destabilizing force internal to human life” that Freud first identifies in a compulsion to repeat which interferes with “the logic of the organic instincts”; here the logic of the organic instincts points to what Freud characterizes as “the fundamentally conservative expressions of an ‘inertia inherent in organic life’ whose aim is to restore an earlier state of things” (see McNulty 202; Freud 18: 36). Consequently, pleasure, as Freud articulates it, “is neither instinctual nor native to man but the expression of a fundamentally nostalgic quest for a lost state of equilibrium” or “an always already lost instinctual homeostasis” for the human subject, whose “neurophysiological functioning is irrevocably compromised by the unbound energy of the death drive” (McNulty 202).

McNulty argues that Lacan goes one step further by “characterizing the pleasure principle as a corrective or compensatory mechanism that is directly overdetermined by the death drive”; in other words, by underscoring “the continuum between pleasure and the death drive” (McNulty 203). Bearing in mind that Lacan translates Freud’s death drive with the concept of jouissance, she goes on to say that whereas pleasure is “an attempt to bind the excess energy of the drive to a provisional
aim,” *jouissance* is “what insists in and beyond pleasure, an excess that fails to be anchored,” which causes the pleasure principle to inevitably fail “in its quest to hold the death drive at bay” (203). Thus at stake for the ethics of psychoanalysis elaborated by Lacan is nothing but “the subject’s response to the *jouissance* at work in the body”; the *jouissance* in question is what “remains, insists, and repeats, dwelling uncannily within the subject in a way that forever disrupts the equilibrium that Aristotle’s ethics, as a ‘lowering of tension,’ would take as its ultimate aim” (McNulty 203). And what is even more significant for Lacan is that “the excess of *jouissance* manifests itself as something that exceeds speech, that cannot be spoken” (McNulty 204).

The question of how one should encounter or represent this unspeakable *jouissance* is at the heart of Wordsworth’s poetry. The question not only raises the possibility of an ethics of subjectivity beyond the pleasure principle and the ego it sustains; it also calls us to rethink the nature of community. It is this double focus on subjectivity and community that we find in the profound, mysterious, and nearly unintelligible encounters embodied in Wordsworth’s poetry—often between a speaker and some “outcast” others. Such an inquiry into the double focus on subjectivity and community also requires a new consideration of sexual difference. In his seminar on *Encore*, Lacan provides his unique elaboration of sexual difference; more specifically, he presents two pairs of logical formulae of sexuation which enable us to reconsider
the nature of community and the question of exception connected with it.¹ As we will see in Chapter Two, the logic governing the community and its exception has been explored by a number of contemporary thinkers, including Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben among others. For Lacan, the question of community cannot be properly developed without considering the problem of sexual difference. Lacan’s account therefore develops two distinct forms, two possibilities of relating to the Other, which can be called “masculine” and “feminine.” Here we need to be circumspect about the way we understand the difference between men and women; for, as McNulty indicates, “Lacan’s characterization of ‘woman’ is not strictly or even necessarily related to the female sex; ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are for Lacan positions taken up in relation to the signifier, and not biological determinations” (266n35).

Let us briefly review the main outline of Lacan’s argument. To begin with, in the logical formulae of sexuation, the two formulae on the “masculine” side can be read as “All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier” and “There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier.” The point of these formulations might be encapsulated in the following terms: it is a radical exception to the symbolic order that makes possible the symbolic order as a field of totality. As is well known, the pattern which establishes a “masculine” subjective structure stems from Freud’s

elaboration of the mythical primal horde introduced in Totem and Taboo. According to Freud’s revision of Darwin’s account of the primal horde,

All that we find there is a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up….One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually….They hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too….A sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. The dead father became stronger than the living one had been—for events took the course we so often see them follow in human affairs to this day….They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. (13: 141, 143)

On the basis of this narrative, Kenneth Reinhard paraphrases the first formulation of the “masculine” side, “All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier,” to mean that
“to be a man is to be under the universal thrall of the phallus as signifier; and the name for the limitations that this signifier imposes is ‘castration,’ the price of entry into the technologies of symbolic mediation” (51). All men, as “castrated subjects,” enter the rule of the symbolic order, and in this symbolic order, they form a collective with equal rights and equal restrictions as suggested in Freud’s narrative. But the second formulation of the “masculine” side, “There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier,” makes clear that there is one man who remains uncastrated; it is the primal father in Freud’s narrative that embodies the uncastrated man who “supports the illusion of ‘having it all,’ the possibility of unlimited enjoyment, that enables men to bear their own castration” (Reinhard 53).

The important point to retain with respect to Freud’s explanation of the primal horde is that it does not merely show how the symbolic order is established—more specifically, the way in which the primal father is expelled from the community, in order for all the sons to enter the symbolic order which would be a meaningful totality—but rather who or what is responsible for the obscene malfunction of the symbolic order itself. One familiar way to interpret Freud’s account of the primal horde is to view it as a kind of “mythical” narrative, in which an original state (primitive authoritarian domination) is replaced by a more civilized and rational state (the quasi-democratic rule of the brothers). But Lacan argues that Freud’s account is
quite different from this kind of imaginary history, and that its purpose is quite different, insofar as it aims to account, not for the “lawlessness” of the original primal father, but rather for the peculiar disequilibrium that accompanies the very establishment of the law itself. What is in question here is the possibility that the myth of the primal father is constituted as a response to, or a defense against, the originary condition of the symbolic order. What if the symbolic order bears within it a kind of disequilibrium that produces a dimension of meaninglessness? And what if the myth of the primal father corresponds to the attempt to localize the very anxiety which is caused by the disequilibrium within the symbolic order and then to remove it from the field of the subject and the community? In this context, we can even think that the reason the sons themselves experience some kind of fundamental anxiety is precisely because they enter the symbolic order, which means that while the primal father is mystically situated in “pre-history,” as if this stain of crime and guilt could be eliminated from the symbolic order, the symbolic order of language is actually the very engine that produces the sons’ anxiety in the first place.

This is why, in Lacan’s sexuation graph, the two formulae on the “masculine” side must be considered with, or more precisely, supplemented by two formulae on the “feminine” side; these formulae on the “feminine” side open up an interesting path to a conception of community which would not simply be based on the symbolic
order as a field of totality, universality and sameness. The “feminine” side is also
made up of two formulations: “There is no subject that is not subjected to the phallic
signifier or the symbolic order” and “Not all of a woman is subject to symbolic
ciastration.” For a “feminine” subjective structure, a complete exception to the
symbolic law, such as a Great Mother who proves the rule by escaping castration,
cannot exist. This is to say that there cannot be a unified category, “all women” which
is guaranteed by the radical exceptionality. The two formulations on the “feminine”
side are thus summed up as follows: “Woman” is neither entirely subjected to the
symbolic law, nor entirely outside it. In this respect, the ethical import of the
“feminine” position is tied to the dimension which Lacan calls the “not-all.” First of
all, one must be careful not to make the false assumption that the woman’s not-all
“involves the nonfunctioning or suspension of the paternal signifier and consequent
nontotalization of the field of signifiers” (Reinhard 59). As Lacan emphasizes, woman
“has a supplementary jouissance” in relation to “what phallic function designates” of
jouissance (Encore 73). It can be said that woman, not wholly inscribed within the
phallic function, points to some structural lack within the phallic function or the
dimension of meaninglessness within the symbolic order. In the words of Reinhard,
the woman’s not-all “defines something more like a nonaccord or noncompliance with
the phallic function, submission to it with reserve” (59).
Lacan’s account of two pairs of logical formulae of sexuation, which focuses eloquently on the nature of community and the question of exception involved in it, allows us to see more clearly the ethical dimension of the outcast figures in Wordsworth. The chapters that follow will explore Wordsworth’s elaboration of this ethical issue in more detail, following a series of well-known figures, from Martha in “The Thorn” to Goody Blake in “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” through the blind beggar and the discharged soldier in The Prelude, to Margaret in The Ruined Cottage.

In this context, it is necessary to note that when we discuss the outcast in Wordsworth’s poems, the way in which the community explains and defines them serves as the point of departure for us. In Wordsworth, however, the narrator’s own presentation of these outcast figures can never be reduced to the representations which the community has provided; one might say, in other words, that the “sense” of the community is registered but never confirmed, and that, on the contrary, another possibility, and thus another community, is always being explored in Wordsworth’s poems. Let us take as an example the way in which the villagers explain Martha in “The Thorn”; they say that she is suffering from abandonment by her fiancé or from the trauma of her forced infanticide. Their attempt to expel Martha from the community by proving her “crime” or “guilt” is reminiscent of the process by which the primal father who exercises his unlimited jouissance is killed and thus expelled.
from the community. The villagers’ interpretations of Martha can be articulated in terms of the “masculine” logic which requires two positions in relation to the law—total submission on the one hand (the villagers) and absolute exceptionality on the other hand (Martha). As a matter of fact, the community’s attempt to construct an exceptional position to maintain its own meaningful totality is very often witnessed in the encounters with outcast figures described in Wordsworth’s poems. For instance, in the Blind Beggar episode of *The Prelude*, the blind beggar cannot help depending on other people to write and read the written paper upon his chest that explains his story; this means that the written paper, rather than representing the truth about the beggar or allowing us to encounter the beggar’s own voice, instead shows how the society defines him or pins down his vagrancy.

This, however, is not the whole story. We should attend to another layer operating in Wordsworth’s texts which is necessary to be examined in terms of Lacan’s account of the “feminine” side of the sexuation graph. The outcast figures in Wordsworth’s texts, including Martha and the blind beggar, can be said to embody what resists the symbolic order without standing as an exception to it; in other words, they embody some structural lack within the symbolic order. As a kind of void or point of resistance irreducible to meaning, they remain fundamentally unintelligible or strange in the symbolic order. It is this uncanny strangeness that leads people in the
community to become seized by anxiety. From this perspective, we can read the interpretations or explanations of the outcast figures that are given by people in the community as ways of covering up that anxiety; that is, as attempts to localize the anxiety and remove it from the community.

As well as preparing the way for insight into a Lacanian account of community—a thought of community that would not be based on the symbolic order as a field of totality, but that would instead be capable of registering its own incompleteness, its own relation to the void in meaning—the figure of the outcast in Wordsworth helps us to articulate a specific moment in the constitution of the subject which Lacan explores in terms of the concept of the gaze. How are we to understand Lacan’s conception of the subject? Lacan’s meditation on the subject can be examined by reconsidering his slogan “return to Freud,” because it turns out that “the return to Freud [has] to pass by way of a return to Descartes” (Dolar, “Cogito” 14). Indeed, Lacan gives what is called his “standard account” of cogito in his seminar on The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Here is the usual understanding of cogito: “a sense that immediately involves being and a being that immediately ‘makes sense,’ the grounding of being in sense (in thought), and vice versa” (Dolar, “Cogito” 22). Lacan’s critical reformulation of the Cartesian cogito begins with his definition of cogito as a forced choice between cogito (to think) and sum (to be). Insofar as we are
inside the symbolic order, we cannot help but choose “I think”; this actually amounts to Descartes’s choice that makes “the being of the subject dependent on thought and deducible from it” (Dolar, “Cogito” 18). It is this formulation that requires a more careful consideration, because, in Lacan’s view, “sum doesn’t follow once one has made the first step” (Dolar, “Cogito” 19).

In order to make sense of how Lacan problematizes the Cartesian cogito, let us take a look at Descartes’ procedure of a “methodical doubt.” According to this procedure, “consciousness must lose any worldly support, it must be cleansed of any objective counterpart…It must also eliminate the support in the signifier” (Dolar, “Cogito” 15). The final outcome of the procedure is nothing more than “a pure vanishing point without a counterpart, which can only be sustained in a minimal gesture of enunciation” (Dolar, “Cogito” 15). With regard to the pure vanishing point of the subject of enunciation, the question arises as to whether Descartes really allows the subject of enunciation to vanish. Descartes does not simply let it vanish, but rather introduces God as support for the evidence of the subject of enunciation, that is, the cogito. Here is Lacan’s own account:

When Descartes introduces the concept of a certainty that holds entirely in the I think of cogitation…one might say that his mistake is to believe that this is knowledge. To say that he knows something of this certainty.
Not to make of the *I think* a mere point of fading….He puts the field of this knowledge at the level of this vaster subject, the subject who is supposed to know, God. (*Four* 224)

For Descartes, in the end there is still a God who ultimately guarantees the *cogito* and the truth of its representation. This is the point which Lacan tackles head on; what if the *cogito* remains the pure vanishing point of the subject of enunciation? Dolar elucidates the essential disparity of thought and being involved in Lacan’s contestation of the Cartesian *cogito* as follows: “Thought depends on the signifier, which turns the subject into the empty point of enunciation, instead of founding his/her being. In the place of the supposed certainty of the subject’s being, there is just a void” (“Cogito” 19).

Let us go into Lacan’s contestation of the *cogito* in further detail. In the symbolic order, one cannot help choosing thought “insofar as it makes sense”; more importantly, however, “there is a thought that doesn’t [make sense], and this will emerge as the unconscious” (Dolar, “Cogito” 19). Thus Lacan elaborates:

If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other
words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges in the field of
the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance
of being, induced by the very function of the signifier. (Four 211)

Left with the choice between being and sense (meaning), we are bound to choose
sense, or more specifically, “the signifier of sense and knowledge, which
schematically condenses and represents the entire chain of signifiers” (Dolar,
“Cotigo” 20). What really matters here is that at the very moment we choose sense,
we are necessarily cut off from the part of non-sense, “a senseless signifier, which
reemerges as the incomprehensible, nonsensical message of the unconscious—‘this is
not me,’ ‘I was not there’ ” (Dolar, “Cogito” 20). We could thus argue that, even
though they are produced by the subject him/herself, the nonsensical messages or
formations of the unconscious are accompanied by “This is not me,” “I was not
there.” This brings us to the more general question of the relationship between cogito
and the unconscious. Dolar clarifies this by means of a simple question and answer:
“[I]s there an unconscious outside cogito? Lacan’s wager is that there is not”
(“Cogito” 14). This is to say that the unconscious “emerges with and within cogito, as
its invisible reverse side” (Dolar, “Cogito” 21; emphasis added).

For Lacan, cogito as a point where “signification and being would coincide” is
a kind of mirage which “tries to get rid of, or to disavow, the essential disparity of
signification and being” (Dolar, “Cogito” 22). The part which is lost with the choice of thought (meaning), namely, the dimension of being returns to haunt the dimension of signification. Importantly, Lacan introduces a way of formulating the subject’s confrontation with the dimension of being, which is his elaborate conceptualization of the gaze. In her book The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two, Alenka Zupančič’s explanation of the Lacanian concept of the gaze begins with her comment on the nonrelationship between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge: “the constitution of the dividing line between subject (of seeing, of representation, of knowledge) and the world of objects coincides with a part of the subject passing onto the side of objects, thus introducing a fundamental asymmetry in the subject-object relationship” (104-05). The experience of being under the gaze points to the subject’s encounter with his or her own fragmentary remainder passing onto the side of objects; or in Lacan’s words, his or her encounter with “the division of subjectivity” (Four 185). Alternatively, as Mladen Dolar elaborates, it can be said to indicate the situation in which the subject is confronted with the dimension of being which is lost with the choice of thought (meaning); more precisely, he or she is confronted with a being which is “heterogeneous to signifiers and their play, their differentiability,” and which is irreducible to “the perceived being that one can lay one’s hands on and which one can manipulate, or which can be submitted to scientific investigation” (“Cogito” 26).
What is even more crucial in respect to the experience of the gaze is that it involves the subject’s identification with the object which actually amounts to his or her own part passing onto the side of objects; “It is the subject,” Lacan writes, “who determines himself as object” (*Four* 185). This means that the subject experiences the gaze, the loss of the object, the emergence of lack, but then he or she tries to overcome that lack by turning himself or herself into an object.

Lacan’s discussion of the gaze is particularly useful for reconsidering the speaker’s encounter with the outcast figures described in several episodes of *The Prelude*. For example, concerning the speaker’s encounter with the blind beggar in the Blind Beggar episode, the concept of the gaze provides a clue to read the encounter not simply in relation to the beggar, but also in relation to the speaker. The speaker’s encounter with the blind beggar can be understood as the speaker’s encounter with his own lack which is followed by his identification with the blind beggar. In this context, “identification” is not meant in the usual sense of sympathetic identification with the suffering other; rather, it signifies that the speaker encounters his own lack, and then responds with a perverse identification with the object. Importantly, this is not “perversion” in a strict clinical sense; what is indicated here is a perverse aspect of all subjectivity or a perverse feature of the scopic drive itself.

Another important issue to stress with regard to Wordsworth’s poems dealing
with the encounter with the outcast is that they have as their central focus the problem of how one can speak well of, or transmit, the truth of the outcast. If the outcast can be considered as what marks the limit of the symbolic order or the void in the symbolic order, as we have already said, then the problem of speaking well of or transmitting the truth of the outcast corresponds to the problem of “finding a symbolic containment for the void” or the limit (Shepherdson, Limits 91). Charles Shepherdson’s discussion of traumatic memory, offered in his essay “Emotion, Affect, Drive,” is helpful in the context of this ethical issue. According to him, the concept of trauma raises “the question of ‘events’ that were never experienced as such, but that nevertheless become part of the subject’s existence and continue to have effects,” thereby obliging us “to speak of ‘unprocessed’ or even ‘unsymbolized’ experience, which can only lead to the enigma of an experience that is never experienced, never given an adequate place in the order of historical memory” (Limits 91). What is ultimately at issue here is that the traumatic event which “never took place, in the sense that it never came to be properly inscribed in any symbolic chain,” far from being simply forgotten, “remains and is even transmitted” (Shepherdson, Limits 92). Thus the question arises as to how the traumatic event can be transmitted. To this question, we might answer that the traumatic event which is not integrated into the symbolic order can only have the status of a disruption or break in the symbolic order.
However, Shepherdsom asks us to pursue this question a little further from a Lacanian point of view; that is, he attempts to define more clearly the limits of the symbolic order entailed in the problem of transmitting the traumatic event. In this connection, it is necessary to recall the Lacanian notion of the real, since Lacan, in his attempt to formulate the real, develops a more nuanced understanding of the limits of the symbolic order. For Lacan, the real is a result of the symbolic, but it is narrated as if it were an original state that was lost or a lost object, which Shepherdsom articulates by asserting that the real should not be understood as “pre-existing reality” but as an “innermost core” which “only acquires its repressed or traumatic character in relation to the familiar order of representation” (“Intimate” par. 45). Shepherdsom’s insistence that the real obtains its traumatic character only in relation to the symbolic order allows us to see more clearly the precise reason why the traumatic event is by no means something like “a natural, prediscursive foundation which the symbolic could either approximate or betray” and why it “cannot be confused with what one might imagine ‘actually happened’”; the reason is that the traumatic status of the event “depends upon the return, after the fact, of an event whose peculiar character consists in the fact that it never simply ‘took place’” (Shepherdsom, Limits 94).

Can we describe the encounter with the outcast in Wordsworth’s poems in the same way that Shepherdsom articulates the traumatic event? The traumatic status of
the event of the encounter with the outcast is attributed to the process in which the narrator or speaker of each poem belatedly returns to the event and attempts to speak of it or construct a narrative about it. The outcast does not belong to a pre-linguistic domain; the point is, rather, that the outcast acquires his or her strange status as a void or rupture within the field of meaning as a result of the operation of representation. This is why we should be most alert to many moments in Wordsworth’s poetry when the narrator or speaker finds himself haunted by uncontrolled, spectral voices which remain inexplicable in his narrative of the outcast—for example, Martha’s cries (“The Thorn”), the chattering or rumbling of/from the body (“Goody Blake and Harry Gill”), and Margaret’s tears and sighs (The Ruined Cottage). In Shepherdson’s words, the event of the encounter with the outcast is “imprinted upon the subject without becoming part of the subject’s experience,” and it “remains and is even transmitted, but it is not handed down in the manner of ordinary historical memory” (Limits 92).

This leads us to formulate more specifically the difference between the villagers’ representation of Martha and the narrator’s representation of her in “The Thorn.” The first thing to note here is that the narrator of “The Thorn,” who is an outcast like Martha but at the same time remains in the community, represents her and tells her story, as the villagers do. Yet his representation is different from that of the villagers; he witnesses Martha’s unintelligibility but he does not wish to domesticate
or interpret it, whereas the villagers strive to explain her by producing a story of guilt
or crime. The villagers’ suspicion, gossip, and explanations of Martha can be regarded
as their attempt to give meaning to their “unprocessed” or “unsymbolized” experience
of Martha, and thereby to integrate her into their horizon of meaning, which suggests
that they assume that the traumatic event of Martha can be “handed down in the
manner of ordinary historical memory,” in the words of Shepherdsom (Limits 91, 92).
On the contrary, the narrator wants to preserve and even transmit Martha’s traumatic
status as a void or rupture; to put it another way, he tries to capture something of her
enigmatic unrepresentability and transmit it in language to the community. Moreover,
if one extends this argument to Wordsworth’s poetry more generally, one could go so
far as to say that Wordsworth, as a “man speaking to men,” is engaged in a new kind
of speaking, a poetic discourse that transmits anxiety or the real or the moment of
“resistance to meaning,” just as the narrator transmits the truth of Martha. This means
that the function of “the poet” and “poetic discourse” in Wordsworth corresponds to
the function of the narrator in “The Thorn.”

In Chapter One, I reread three poems included in Lyrical Ballads—“The
Thorn,” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” and “We Are Seven”—taking as a guideline
for analysis Lacan’s account of the “not-all,” by which he means the incompleteness
of any signifying work, the incapacity of signification to tell the whole truth. The
important point to note here is that the uncontrolled, spectral sound which characterizes each poem—Martha’s unrepresentable cries (“The Thorn”), the unsignifiable chattering or rumbling of/from Harry’s body (“Goody Blake and Harry Gill”) and the little girl’s cry which shows that she will not count death (“We Are Seven”)—indicates the void which remains inassimilable into any signification of the poem, but at the same time each of them functions as a condition of possibility for the poem’s construction. Concerning “The Thorn,” I concentrate mainly on how the narrator’s representation of Martha can be distinguished from the villagers’, which is developed into an elaboration of the relationship between the community and the outcast in a way that goes beyond the “masculine” logic explored earlier. My reading of “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” begins with a question: what if Harry’s bizarre symptom expresses a more fundamental ontological character of human existence? This brings us to another question regarding the way in which the ontological character of human existence is represented in the poem, because the ontological character of human existence is described as a pathological or exceptional state, which can be considered as a way of containing that ontological fact. In my reading of “We Are Seven,” I try to understand the little girl, who can neither count nor even register death, in terms of Lacan’s remarks on feminine jouissance. The little girl, who doesn’t seem traumatized by death, leads us to dwell upon the possibility that
feminine jouissance could allow a different relation to death.

Chapter Two deals with the speaker’s sudden encounters with three outcast figures introduced in The Prelude: a blind beggar, a discharged soldier and a drowned man. In each episode, the speaker is fascinated by the outcast figure. The moment of fascination needs to be examined more closely, since, on the basis of Lacan’s account of the gaze, it can be considered as the moment in which the speaker encounters the lack in the Other and then responds by a perverse identification with it. The Blind Beggar episode allows us to define more clearly the experience of being under the gaze. The Discharged Soldier episode can be read as the speaker’s failed attempt to defend himself against his originary condition of being under the gaze. In my reading of the Drowned Man episode, the scene in which the boy is faced with the dead man is reviewed in terms of Lacan’s reading of the wolf dream in Freud’s case history of the Wolf Man; at stake in Lacan’s reading of the wolf dream is the subject who is fascinated by the sight of the wolves. In addition, this episode directs our attention to the question of how such a traumatic event as the encounter with the drowned man can be remembered. My reading of the Winander Boy episode departs from Paul de Man’s attention to the autobiographical origin of the poem and proceeds in the direction of considering the impossible experience of my looking at the grave in which I lie: the subject’s gaze present at his own death.
In Chapter Three, I read *The Ruined Cottage*, the story of Margaret transmitted by the Pedlar to the narrator, through Lacan’s psychoanalytic ethics of speaking well. How does the Pedlar, as the prototype of the Poet Wordsworth describes in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, speak of Margaret, another abandoned and suffering woman? Lacan’s psychoanalytic ethics of speaking well allows us to understand the way in which the Pedlar preserves and transmits the truth of Margaret without covering up her fundamental unintelligibility; the Pedlar, in his telling of the history of Margaret, constantly announces “something more” or a surplus *jouissance* irreducible to the history. For this reason, I draw attention to the Pedlar’s enigmatic response to Margaret’s tears and sighs, inscribed in his story of Margaret.

A Lacanian perspective helps to shift our attention, when we look at various encounters with the outcast in Wordsworth’s poetry. It allows us to give greater weight to the impossibility of adequate or complete representation, the peculiar role of poetic discourse in disrupting the standard interpretations of these outcast figures. And Wordsworth’s account of these figures also produces a way of thinking about community that displaces familiar models of unity or coherence, which are commonly thought to be fundamental to “democracy” and political theory. A Lacanian perspective is particularly important in bringing out two distinct models for the outcast—one that is based on the “masculine” logic of the exception and the other
which is based on a “feminine” model of incompleteness. This perspective provides an account of sexual difference that is significantly different from the usual models of gender identity that have structured a number of prominent commentaries on Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s concern with destitute or socially marginalized figures, particularly at the moment of the French revolution, also encourages us to attend to the social and political dimension of “subjective existence,” and his interest in the unique function of poetic speech helps us to see more clearly what Lacan means by the ethics of speaking well.
CHAPTER ONE

Responding to the Spectral Voice of the Outcast: *Lyrical Ballads*

1. “The Thorn”

“The Thorn” is a poem which pertains to the question of the problematic relationship between a wandering woman and community. The narrator’s report of the wandering woman named Martha begins with a series of questions asked, in a rather breathless way, by his interlocutor:

‘Now wherefore thus, by day and night,

‘In rain, in tempest, and in snow,

‘Thus to the dreary mountain-top

‘Does this poor woman go?

‘And why sits she beside the thorn

‘When the blue day-light’s in the sky,

‘Or when the whirlwind’s on the hill,

‘Or frosty air is keen and still,

‘And wherefore does she cry?—

‘Oh wherefore? Wherefore? tell me why

‘Does she repeat that doleful cry?’

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2 “The Thorn” in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798, 78-88. References to “The Thorn” are cited hereafter by line in my text.
It can be said that “The Thorn” is nothing but the narrator’s (failed) attempt to give answers to these questions concerning Martha. Who on earth is Martha? Martha is a woman who was once a community member, but has been driven out of her mind after being abandoned by her fiancé Stephen Hill. Six months after her abandonment, she was witnessed to climb to the mountain-top which was assumed to be the place where she killed and buried her own child. What is interesting here is that the narrator’s account of Martha is based on information or gossip offered by her neighbors ignorant of the motives behind Martha’s actions, which is demonstrated by phrases repeatedly used like a sort of mantra; for instance, “they say,” “many swear,” “some say,” “all and each agree” and so on (133, 173, 216, 218).

In this context, Alan Bewell takes up the issue of witchcraft belief or witchcraft accusation, reviewing “The Thorn” in his essay “A ‘Word Scarce Said': Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth’s ‘Experimental’ Poetry of 1797-1798.” Why has Martha haunted a mountain-top site outside the village for twenty years? Nobody actually knows the reason, as the narrator himself says: “I cannot tell; I wish I could;/ For the true reason no one knows” (89-90). But it is significant that everybody in the village has an opinion about Martha or Martha’s conduct. Their opinions about Martha converge on her guilt as an infanticide. In this connection, Bewell gives his attention to the scene in which villagers heard “[c]ries coming from the mountain-
head” that were both “plainly living voices” and “voices of the dead” and that were assumed to be Martha’s cries (171, 172, 174). For bearing in mind “the mountain-head” as the usual site for nocturnal sabbats, it is not surprising that villagers would “conclude that she had entered into a compact with the devil and murdered her child at the sabbat” (Bewell 380). But in this scene, we cannot fail to notice the essential fear or anxiety that villagers feel toward Martha as an enigma which renders problematic any neat distinction between living voice and dead voice. It might be said that the villagers’ anxiety about Martha urges them to hastily announce her as a witch committing infanticide.

Besides the scene introduced by Bewell, there is another scene which brings to the surface the villagers’ construction of Martha through a process of pure conjecture. Insisting that Martha, suspected of an infanticide, should be brought to public justice, some of the villagers decide to dig up the moss heap to find the bones which would be used as evidence. However, at the very moment when they set to work, they are faced with some supernatural intervention:

And for the little infant’s bones

With spades they would have sought.

But then the beauteous hill of moss

Before their eyes began to stir;
And for full fifty yards around,

The grass it shook upon the ground. (234-39)

This event forces villagers to give up their project. What we should take seriously in this event is that the villagers share “what must be thought of as a kind of hallucination” (Simpson xiv). Are villagers afraid of not finding what they expect and thus confirming that they have misjudged as to Martha or Martha’s crime? Probably for this reason, despite their failure to find the infant’s bones, all of the villagers who concern themselves with the project may “still aver/The little babe is buried there” (240-41). In fact, it might be said that some decisive solutions to questions about Martha’s crime could be given through the villagers’ direct confrontation with Martha herself. Yet, interestingly, they never try to come face to face with her: “I never heard of such as dare/Approach the spot when she is there” (98-99). Rather it seems that they want Martha to be just spied on from a distance and so to remain obscure or enigmatic. Thus at issue in “The Thorn” is nothing less than the problematic relationship between Martha and the village community which simultaneously excludes and includes her. This is why Bewell, with respect to “The Thorn,” places his specific emphasis on the social dynamics of witchcraft accusation; according to him, “witchcraft accusations were rarely spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment charges made by individuals, but instead reflected a community consensus, reached over a
long period of time” (380).

To understand more fully what is at stake concerning the status of Martha in the community, it is necessary to cast some light on the narrator of this poem. For the narrator presents himself as a newcomer to the community:

For one day with my telescope,

To view the ocean wide and bright,

When to this country first I came,

Ere I had heard of Martha’s name,

I climbed the mountain’s height. (181-85)

In the note attached to “The Thorn,” Wordsworth makes it clear that the narrator is “a Captain of a small trading vessel…who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live.” At issue here is the possibility that the narrator, as an outsider with an itinerant past of his own, is exposed to the danger of becoming isolated from his adopted community like Martha. But even if the narrator enters the community as a stranger, he chooses to be engaged in gathering and presenting bits of story about Martha, thereby gradually integrating himself into the community. In fact, at times, the narrator professes that he

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3 See Commentary in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, 139.
cannot believe what he has been told; he says that “I cannot tell; I wish I could;/For the true reason no one knows” or that “But kill a new-born infant thus!/I do not think she could” (89-90, 223-24). But nonetheless he never ceases to repeat rumors and gossips which he has heard. The narrator himself, as if he were not content with the half-knowledge offered by villagers, even goes to measure the size of the pond, one of natural objects that characterize the spot occupied by Martha: “I’ve measured it from side to side:/’Tis three feet long, and two feet wide” (32-33). Moreover, there is another issue that is worth noting with respect to the narrator: he has an interlocutor who is also new to this village. For example, at various points, the narrator gives information and suspicions with regard to Martha as if he makes answers to questions asked by someone eager to learn about her, which suggests that constructing the story about Martha is an ongoing process. As Toby Benis makes explicit, “The Thorn” implicitly shows that it is the mechanics of the community-building process that requires the outcast to remain isolated (see Benis 111).

In order to have a better understanding of the relation between the community-building process and Martha as a quasi-vagrant who occupies an exceptional space out of the community, it will be useful to take a look at two pairs of logical formulae of sexuation which Lacan provides for a radical rethinking of the question of exception in his seminar on *Encore*. Rather than tackling head on the complexity or
possible obscurity of Lacan’s formulations, let us make a detour through Shepherdson’s carefully detailed reading of them. The “masculine” side consists of two formulations: “All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier” and “There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier.” The first formulation, “All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier,” implies that “the ‘normal’ or ‘phallic’ position is defined through the proposition that all subjects, being unmoored from nature, are destined to find their way through the symbolic order” (Shepherdson, “Philosophy” 137). The second formulation, “There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier,” should be understood in a certain relation to the first one; that is to say, it means that there must be at least one man who has escaped the law of symbolic castration, while enforcing it on all other members. Freud’s myth of the father of the primal horde from *Totem and Taboo* can be connected with this issue of exceptionality. According to Shepherdson’s succinct account, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud explains that “the sons all agree to abide by the law (to accept symbolic castration), precisely in contrast to the ‘primal father,’ who stands as the exception to the rule, in relation to which the law is to be secured,” and he goes on to say that “the primal father must always be killed, since his expulsion from the community by murder insures that the symbolic community will be established” (‘Philosophy’ 138).

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This is to say that it is only insofar as there is a radical exception to the symbolic community that the community can be established. In light of these two formulations on the “masculine” side, Martha of “The Thorn” deserves emphasis, because she persists with the structural necessity of being the exception to the community. In sum, it is in terms of the exception falling out of the law or community that a line can be drawn between the inside and the outside, the native and the stranger, the friend and the enemy; more specifically, a strict and recognizable difference between “us” and “them” makes possible the community which is characterized by its totality and the homogeneity of its members.

This is not the whole story of “The Thorn,” however. As was indicated earlier, the narrator, who was once an outsider of the community, is engaged in constructing the story about Martha like other villagers, which shows how the narrator—himself a wanderer and a newcomer—takes advantage of the story of Martha to integrate himself into the community. It follows that the ‘inside’ knowledge of the story of the community’s own ‘outsider’ functions as the best mark of his membership. The narrator implicitly declares his membership in the community by telling the story of Martha’s exclusion. It might be said that Martha marks a kind of essential, constitutive outside for the community, or taking a step further, that she is more ‘inside’ the community than any other single member, in the sense that she, by her
exceptionality, gives the community its coherence and consistency.

This is why we should examine Lacan’s alternative logic for “feminine” sexuation. On the “feminine” side, there are two formulations as well: “Not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration” and “There is no subject that is not subjected to the phallic signifier or the symbolic law.” When it comes to the first formulation, “Not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration,” the phrase “not all” requires more careful consideration. Indeed, Lacan attaches considerable importance to the phrase “not all,” as shown in the following passage:

[W]hen any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner “women,” it is on the basis of the following—that it grounds itself as being not-whole [not-all] in situating itself in the phallic function. That is what defines what? Woman precisely, except that Woman can only be written with a bar through it. There’s no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There’s no such thing as Woman because, in her essence…She is not-whole [not-all]. (Encore 72-73)

Reinhard’s commentary on this passage helps us to specify the status of the not-all (not-whole) in Lacan’s argument. According to him, “the ‘not-all’ does not mean that not all women are under the law of the phallus…. Nor does it mean that not all of a
woman is castrated, that some part of her being or her body remains unscathed, free of the signifier’s cut” (57-58). He goes on to say that whereas there is a unified category “all men,” guaranteed by the exceptionality, women are radically singular, which in turn suggests that “[n]o authentic positive characterization of Woman in general is possible” and that women are “not examples of a class or members of a closed set, but each one an exception” (58).

Let us move on to the second formulation of the “feminine” side, “There is no subject that is not subjected to the phallic signifier.” It appears that, on the logical level, the implication of this formulation is not different from that of the formulation on the “masculine” side, “All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier.” Yet we should be very careful to distinguish between these two formulations. Shepherdson, in this connection, observes that the second formulation on the “feminine” side does not have “a universal proposition, a statement that could be distributed across all subjects (‘All men,’ etc.)” (“Philosophy” 139). As the feminine version of subjection to the law, the formulation “relies on the particular (‘There is no woman who is not’ etc.)” (Shepherdson, “Philosophy” 139). What is at stake here is, after all, the difference between a universal quantifier “all” and a quasi-existential “there is.” As we have seen above, there is no way of characterizing “women in general,” which is to say that woman, as “a subject with a predicate that would cover the field of ‘all women,’ and
allow us to capture her essence as a social or biological totality,” does not exist (Shepherdson, “Philosophy” 140). But “there is” femininity; in other words, “it is ‘possible’ that ‘there is’ something of femininity, which has precisely the character of not being fully inscribed in the signifier—a being in the mode of ‘not-being-written’” (Shepherdson, “Philosophy” 140).

When Lacan, in the opening part of Encore, says that “I realized that what constituted my course [according to McNulty’s paraphrase, what guided Lacan’s steps in his formulation of the ethics of psychoanalysis] was a sort of ‘I don’t want to know anything about it’,” what he has been avoiding is nothing other than the savoir about femininity or feminine jouissance (Lacan, Encore 1; McNulty 210). Concerning the savoir about femininity expounded in Encore, McNulty draws our attention to a homonym in French between the dit femme meaning “what is called woman” and diffâme meaning “defamed” (McNulty 216). In fact this was already pointed out by Lacan himself; in Encore, he argues that “[s]he is called woman (on la dit-femme) and defamed (diffâme)” and that “[t]he most famous (fameux) things that have come down to us about women in history are, strictly speaking, what one can say that is infamous (infamant)” (85). Translating the French word infamant into “defamatory” instead of “infamous,” McNulty goes on to make the claim that the word “defamation,” in this context, indexes the failure to speak well of woman, that is, “the signifier’s failure to
name ‘all’ of her” (216). Here we need to attend to the phrase “speak well of,”
because it suggests that McNulty is engaged with “the duty to be Well-spoken, to find
one’s way in dealing with the unconscious, with the structure” (Lacan, *Television* 22).
What is crucial for the ethics of speaking well that McNulty highlights in respect to
feminine *jouissance* is that it does not involve “finding an equivalent” for the
feminine *jouissance*, “making a translation,” or “forcing words on its silence” (216).
This ethics of speaking-well does not imply saying everything, but rather speaking in
a manner that gives due attention to the unspeakable.

Before going any further, it is necessary to examine what the concept of
feminine *jouissance* implies. According to Lacan, “[t]he fact remains that if [a
woman] is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely in the following respect:
being not-whole, she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic
function designates by way of *jouissance*” (*Encore* 73). It could be said that woman is
not-whole or not-all in the sense that she cannot be entirely reduced to the phallic
function. More precisely, feminine *jouissance* testifies to “what remains—unnegated
and uncancelled—after the law or prohibition makes its cut,” that is to say, to the
defect or lack in the signifier (McNulty 210). To sharpen the sense of what is at stake
with feminine *jouissance*, McNulty distinguishes phallic *jouissance* from feminine
*jouissance* (*Other jouissance*). She defines the phallic *jouissance* as “a meaningful
pleasure,” taking note of Lacan’s play on the word “jouissance”: “who doesn’t ‘get’ the meaning [sens] along with the pleasure [joui]?” (Lacan, Television 16; McNulty 215). Feminine jouissance, on the contrary, is “the refuse of phallic jouissance, the ‘beyond meaning’ refused by the phallic signifier” (McNulty 215). The important thing to stress concerning the relationship between the phallic signifier and feminine jouissance is that the feminine jouissance refers to “the failure of the signifier to guarantee or speak all of the truth, without renouncing it altogether”; for this reason, Lacan insists that woman is “not all” inscribed within the phallic function, rather than saying that woman is “not at all” inscribed (McNulty 223).

In “The Thorn,” Martha appears, at first sight, to function as an exception that guarantees the constitution of a unified group or community into which the narrator tries to integrate himself. Building upon the “feminine” side of Lacan’s formulation of sexuation, however, the question arises as to whether there is no such thing as the transcendental exceptionality which can be clearly separated and excluded from the community; or, in the context of “The Thorn,” whether one should insist that Martha is “not all” inscribed within the community, instead of saying that she is “not at all” inscribed. In the words of Zupančič, Martha is by no means one who can be “eliminated by being isolated” and excluded from the community and then “retroactively posited as the unfathomable condition” of the community, like the
primal father in Freud (Shadow 146). We are now in a position to spell out the peculiar topology which is embodied by Martha, namely, the topology of extimacy, the simultaneous inclusion/exclusion; indeed, as to this term “extimacy,” Lacan maintains that “[p]erhaps what we described as the central place, as the intimate exteriority or ‘extimacy,’ that is the Thing, will help us to shed light on the question or mystery that remains” (Ethics 139).

What is noteworthy in this context is that “The Thorn” is unfolded through a first-person narration, but not through a third-person narration that assumes a “vantage-ground” from which to control the whole narrative. This commits us to a search for the possibility that “[t]he narrator colours the story he tells by his own involvement with it, and the mingled facts and conjectures take their life from the play of his mind” (Jacobus 247). Moreover, the narrator is described as the only one who comes face to face with Martha, the problematic figure from whom the community implicitly tries to keep a certain distance. The reason why significance should be ascribed to the narrator’s direct contact with Martha is that, although local curiosity or suspicion revolves around Martha, no member of the community will confront her: “I never heard of such as dare/Approach the spot when she is there” (98-99). When the narrator, as an old sailor who first came to this village, had not yet heard of Martha’s name, he came upon Martha at some lonely, stormy mountain
ridge:

For one day with my telescope,

To view the ocean wide and bright,

When to this country first I came,

Ere I had heard of Martha’s name,

I climbed the mountain’s height:

A storm came on, and I could see

No object higher than my knee.

………………………………

I looked around, I thought I saw

A jutting crag, and off I ran

…………………………

Instead of jutting crag, I found

A woman seated on the ground. (181-87, 192-93, 197-98)

What constitutes the critical moment in this scene is the narrator’s mysterious initial response to Martha:

I did not speak—I saw her face,

Her face it was enough for me;

I turned about and heard her cry,
'O misery! O misery!' (199-202)

The narrator, in fact, does not mention his encounter with Martha until the seventeenth stanza, which leads readers as well as his interlocutor to expect that the encounter would help to explain Martha’s enigmatic actions in some way. Yet, ironically, far from resolving the uncertainty with regard to Martha, the encounter makes her much more elusive. Why did the narrator, on seeing Martha’s face, turn away from it? We cannot find any specific answer to this question in the poem. Rather, it could be said that the whole poem corresponds to the narrator’s powerful responses to his encounter with Martha or a series of attempts to articulate the encounter’s effect upon him.

It is necessary to pay scrupulous attention to three natural objects which characterize the place haunted by Martha, so that we can understand better what is at stake in the enigmatic figure of Martha and in a certain relationship of the narrator with Martha. For such natural objects as a thorn, a pond, and a hill of moss surrounding Martha are placed in the same condition as her in that they partake of ambiguous properties which defy binary opposition. More specifically, the thorn is “both infantile and ancient”: “It looks so old and grey./Not higher than a two-years’ child” (Benis 94; 4-5). Another thing to point out here is that the thorn resembles a man, in David Bromwich’s phrase, “a peculiarly disfavored or wretched man”; it is
“reduced to knots and joints like a skeleton, bereft of every sign of youth” (106). And the pond is “neither a proper pond nor dry land”: “You see a little muddy pond/Of water, never dry” (Benis 94; 30-31). The moss heap also looks like “an infant’s grave,” but it is described as “so fair” (52, 55). As to these natural objects, Bromwich notes that many precise measurements are scattered in the description of them. Here is his summary of the three objects:

[The thorn] stands on a mountain’s highest ridge, “not five yards” to the left of the path; three yards farther to the left is a muddy pond, which is never dry, and yet so small it ought to be occasionally dry:

“I’ve measured it from side to side:’Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.” And beside the thorn, one other thing—a hill of moss, “Just half a foot in height,” of “lovely tints” in network as if made by a lady’s hand—a hill, we are told, “like an infant’s grave in size.” (106)

This is to say that villagers including the narrator endeavor to make comprehensible the enigmatic natural objects which cannot be reduced to any oppositional way of thinking. Like Martha, though, those three natural things won’t be sized up so easily and cannot be clearly comprehended, which is why the interlocutor, even if he was already told of the narrator’s direct encounter with Martha at the place surrounded by the thorn, the pond, and the hill of moss, cannot help but ask the following questions
once again: “But what’s the thorn? And what’s the pond?/And what’s the hill of moss to her?” (210-11).

Keeping in mind the thorn, the pond, and the hill of moss which cannot be resolved into intelligible binaries, let us return to the scene where the narrator stumbles upon Martha. What is of particular interest to us in this scene is the narrator’s mysterious initial response to Martha: “I did not speak—I saw her face,/Her face it was enough for me;/I turned about” (199-201). What is wrong with Martha’s face? The poem does not offer any information which helps us to properly answer to this question. Yet the word “face” has a special resonance in the context of the discussion of the relationship between the narrator and Martha, since it allows us to make a detour through Slavoj Žižek’s comparison between the Levinasian face and the neighbor’s face in the Freudian/Lacanian sense. On Žižek’s account, the Levinasian notion of the face is summed up as “the transcendental form of neighbor as radical Other” who “addresses me with the unconditional call and thus constitutes me as an ethical subject” (“Neighbors” 145). Žižek argues that the Levinasian face, which embodies “an Other as the abyssal point from which the call of ethical responsibility emanates,” needs to be supplemented by the topic of the neighbor in its Freudo-Lacanian sense (“Neighbors” 163). Unlike the Levinasian face which is “a harmonious Whole of the dazzling epiphany of a ‘human face’,” the neighbor’s face
in Lacan “stands neither for my imaginary double/semblant nor for the purely symbolic abstract ‘partner in communication,’ but for the Other in his or her dimension of the [r]eal”; more specifically, it is a “distorted face, a face in the grip of a disgusting tic or grimace” (Žižek, “Neighbors” 162). In “The Thorn,” Martha’s face makes the narrator instinctively recoil and turn about without saying anything, which reminds us of a reaction shown when one confronts the neighbor’s monstrous face.

Another reason why we should consider the scene where the narrator confronts Martha is that it shows that Martha is the Other in her dimension of the real with whom no symmetrical or reciprocal dialogue is possible; when the narrator came upon Martha, he “did not speak,” and only after he “turned about” from her did he “[hear] her cry” (199, 201). The ambiguity of the real, according to Žižek, is not only embodied as the monstrous face but as “the extreme/impossible point at which opposites coincide,” which also directs us to those three natural things constituting Martha’s space that cannot be assimilated to any oppositional way of thinking (Žižek, “Neighbors” 162). The narrator, after his first and only encounter with Martha, never takes a risk of confronting her, and besides he even advises the interlocutor to be careful not to meet her:

You must take care and chuse your time

The mountain when to cross.
For oft there sits,

..................

A woman in a scarlet cloak. (58-60, 63)

Despite his effort to keep Martha at a proper distance, though, she remains as what
“hystericizes and provokes” the narrator, more precisely, as the repeated doleful cry
(Žižek, “Neighbors” 162).

“Oh misery! oh misery!/Oh woe is me! oh misery!” This cry, which emerges
in the scene where the narrator first talks about Martha to the interlocutor, is repeated
in the last stanza once again; but, as said above, it is in the initial encounter with
Martha that he first heard the cry. With reference to these compulsively repeated
phrases, Bewell comments that “[w]ith few words at her disposal, and these primary
interjections, Martha Ray clings to the words that approximate her pain best” (384).

As for Mary Jacobus, “Martha’s refrain-like cry becomes cumulatively expressive”
(249). Jerome Christensen approaches those phrases from a slightly different
perspective; for him, the cry “oh misery” is, above all, “the sign and instance of
excess” over all mere experience (282). He observes that “[t]he ‘oh misery’ is the cry
of deviation without origin in face or wind, a cry which does not belong to man,
woman, or storm, its excess is the dramatic incapacity of experience to explain
passion, and thus it appears to successfully communicate the narrator’s feelings for
the thorn” (282). Let us take Christensen’s comment as a starting point for reconsidering the cry “oh misery.” At stake here is the question of by whom the cry is repeated; by Martha herself or by the narrator or by Martha in (and beyond) the narrator?

An account of the last stanza of “The Thorn” Wolfson gives in her essay “Lyrical Ballads and the Language of (Men) Feeling: Wordsworth Writing Women’s Voices” bears directly on this question. Acutely aware that the narrator has heard Martha’s cry not once but “full many a time,” Wolfson contends that the narrator’s imagination seems “not only inspired by but possessed by this spectral woman’s voice” (247; “Language” 45). This means that “her repetition has become his,” or going even further, that the poem “concludes with the woman’s voice inside the balladeer’s” (Wolfson, “Language” 45). Wolfson considers the relationship between the narrator and Martha as an example of “blurring of gender distinction under the influence of passion” which resonates intertextually in Lyrical Ballads (“Language” 34). The narrator, says Wolfson, is fascinated with “the voice of female suffering,” which exposes him to a “perilous transgressiveness” (“Language” 42). Thus Wolfson brings the issue of feminization of man to the surface, and she even goes on to say that the narrator “enacts classic female hysterics”; more specifically, as symptoms of hysteria shown in the narrator, she points out “blocked speech—‘I cannot tell; I wish I
could’,” and “possession by other voices—his fixated repetition of her cry, ‘Oh woe is me! oh misery’,” and “his notorious garrulity” (“Language” 42). Wolfson’s analysis seems to be useful and provocative up to a point. But the problem is that it assumes a rigid and knowable division between man and woman in order to articulate the feminization of man or the blurring of gender distinction.

It is for this reason that we should bring our thought to bear on the strange “there is” of femininity and the notion of neighbor as Lacan elaborates it. Lacan’s point that there is something of femininity which has precisely the character of not being fully inscribed in the signifier and Žižek’s discussion of the unbearable proximity of the neighbor as the bearer of a monstrous Otherness invite us to consider Martha as what is in and beyond the narrator. The cry “oh misery” can be reconceptualized as a sound coming from inside the narrator but at the same time as a spectral sound which cannot be dominated or controlled by the narrator. And what concerns us in the present context is that “the text of ‘The Thorn’ always marks Martha Ray’s cries in quotation marks,” which implicitly suggests that the narrator tries to distance himself from the spell of the song that he rehearses (Wolfson, “Language” 45, 46). However, paradoxically, it can be argued that the narrator’s marking Martha’s cries in quotation marks attests to his inability to properly assimilate Martha or her cries into his own story. This unassimilable voice, as we shall
see, hints at an ethical relation and a conception of community that is crucial to
Wordsworth’s other poems as well.

2. “Goody Blake and Harry Gill”

“Oh! what’s the matter? what’s the matter?/What is’t that ails young Harry
Gill?” An attempt to give an answer to this question constitutes the poem entitled
“Goody Blake and Harry Gill.” Harry suffers from a bizarre symptom, which is
relentless “chattering”: “That evermore his teeth they chatter,/Chatter, chatter, chatter
still” (3-4). In this respect, we can paraphrase the opening question “what is’t that ails
young Harry Gill?” into “what has made Harry so cold that his teeth chatter?” Another
figure named Goody Blake is introduced in the third stanza, which is followed by a
description of the miserable plight that she is in. This allows us to see that Harry’s
disease has something to do with Goody. Who, then, is Goody Blake? Interestingly,
she is described in words which contrast sharply with those used for Harry. Harry, a
drover, is “lusty” and “stout”; he has “a certain surplus of energy and flesh,” as
implied in “His cheeks were red as ruddy clover,/His voice was like the voice of
three” (Langan 119; 19-20). The ruddiness and bodily warmth distinguishes Harry
from Goody, because she is an old, poor weaver who lives alone and, above all,

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5 “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” in Lyrical Ballads 1798, 1-2. References to “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” are cited hereafter by line in my text.
suffers from the bitter cold, unable to afford local fuel prices. The problematic relationship between Goody and Harry begins to assert itself when Harry decides to catch Goody who has pilfered kindling from his hedge. It is in the very scene of his fiercely capturing her that Harry catches his death of cold.

How are we to understand Harry’s bizarre illness? Firstly, Bewell observes that “Harry’s disease manifests a double relation”: “It is an accusation, and thus a projection of his own coldheartedness upon the old woman”; but at the same time, “it is also a form of punishment, and thus reflects, at the level of his body, the inceptive stages of conscience and guilt, the sense that he has violated the primitive law of charity” (372). Secondly, Wolfson, in regard to Harry’s disease, explains that he is possessed by Goody’s pain; in other words, “Goody’s revenge takes possession not just of Harry’s body but his very voice” (“Language” 40). Here is an example:

No word to any man he utters,
A-bed or up, to young or old;
But ever to himself he mutters,
‘Poor Harry Gill is very cold.’ (121-24)

According to Wolfson’s account, this scene in which Harry is speaking only to himself shows us that he has become one of the men in the world of *Lyrical Ballads* who are exiled from male rhetorical culture and are aligned with socially marginalized
females (see “Language” 40). Thirdly, Adela Pinch focuses on the “strange scene” where Goody, overcome by Harry’s attack, falls on her knees and prays:

And kneeling on the sticks, she pray’d

To God that is the judge of all.

She pray’d, her wither’d hand uprearing,

While Harry held her by the arm—. (95-98)

What Pinch primarily has in mind is that “it is hard to tell whether the hand Goody raises is attached to the arm Harry holds” (90). This confusion of body parts, says Pinch, “seems appropriate” in the sense that “Goody’s utterance” in the prayer scene, after all, “turns his body into hers” (90).

These comments concentrate more clearly on the changes Harry has undergone since the prayer scene. Let us now examine in detail what changes Goody’s prayer causes to Harry. Harry, on hearing Goody’s prayer, begins to feel the bitter cold: “Young Harry heard what she had said,/And icy-cold he turned away” (103-04). He cannot keep off or even mitigate the bitter cold, and more importantly, he is destined to remain bitterly cold through his life: “And all who see him say ’tis plain,/That, live as long as live he may,/He never will be warm again” (118-20). In the last stanza, Harry, as if he talked about another, mutters to himself, “Poor Harry Gill is very cold” (124). It is noteworthy that those two adjectives, “poor” and “cold,” which
Harry uses to describe his own condition, are the words that repeatedly appear with regard to Goody before their encounter. In fact, with even a bit of attention to the poem, we can easily see that Harry, after his encounter with Goody, bears some resemblance to Goody. For instance, the phrase “Harry’s flesh it fell away” is reminiscent of Goody’s “wither’d hand” raised to pray, and Harry’s jaws and teeth clattering “[l]ike a loose casement in the wind” direct us to the lines describing Goody, “when the ice our streams did fetter/Oh! then how her old bones would shake!” (117, 97, 116, 41-42). In this connection, Pinch notes that Harry, who once had “the voice of three,” becomes uncommunicative, after hearing Goody’s prayer: “No word to any man he utters./A-bed or up, to young or old;/But ever to himself he mutters” (Pinch 90; 121-23). This leads us to reconsider the emphatic solitude underlined in the description of Goody, and besides, to recall Martha of “The Thorn” who always cries to herself. And all these changes shown in Harry after his encounter with Goody, to use Pinch’s phrase, testify to “a painful disintegration of a man into a chattering old woman” (90-91).

Pinch formulates the relationship between Harry and Goody as the “painful disintegration of a man into a chattering old woman” or “the miraculous transformation of Harry’s body into a woman’s” (90-91, 94). This formulation brings us to Wolfson’s point that “Goody’s revenge takes possession not just of Harry’s body
but his very voice” (“Language” 40). Here we need to attend to the word
“possession,” because two meanings of the word—to have or seize and to be
controlled or dominated by a spirit—can be applied to the relationship between Harry
and Goody. Harry is supernaturally possessed by Goody or Goody’s pain at the very
moment when he pronounces that he has uncontestedly possessed her; indeed, as
Bewell delineates, Harry, almost like a predatory animal, “springs” on her and
“fiercely” grabs and shakes her, crying “I’ve caught you then at last!” (Bewell 371;
92). Wolfson’s and Pinch’s comments on “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” therefore,
make legible the essential possibility of inversion or reversal between Harry as
appropriative, aggressive masculine subject and Goody as marginalized feminine
subject. Before going any further, let us turn to the scene followed by Goody’s prayer.
After her prayer, Goody drops out of the text, which allows us to focus exclusively on
Harry. Yet can we just say that Goody has completely disappeared from the scene?
Goody is absent, but at the same time she is present within Harry in the form of
relentless chattering of his jaw and teeth, which might be, of course, formulated as the
transformation of Harry or Harry’s body into “an automatic, seemingly agentless
generator of metrical sound” (Pinch 94). However, a Lacanian perspective would
displace this framework (imaginary reciprocity or reversibility) and lead us to the
rather different question concerning the relationship between the subject and his or
her other(ness).

Lacan’s argument of the body and the drive enables us to link the relation between Harry and Goody to the issue of the subject as always already exposed to his or her own impossibility which is concealed for the most part, but brought to light by these extreme figures. Significantly, Harry’s chattering or the unintelligible sound which ceaselessly echoes in the whole poem functions as a hinge that opens onto a psychoanalytic reading of the relation between Harry and Goody. The first thing to note here is that Harry’s chattering doesn’t result from common cold. Nothing can protect Harry himself from the terrible cold; more specifically, “Good duffle grey, and flannel fine,” and “a blanket on his back,” and “coats enough to smother nine” are “all in vain, a useless matter” (6-8, 113). And Harry is always shivering with cold, regardless of the change of season; “In March, December, and in July,/‘Tis all the same with Harry Gill” (9-10). These specific descriptions imply that Harry’s bizarre symptoms are by no means reducible to the natural rhythms of the biological organism and its environment. It is precisely here that we should be alert to the distinction between body and organism presupposed by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis; the body, as they articulate it, is not natural fact governed by biological laws. According to Shepherdson’s account, “[t]he geography of the body is…distinguished from the anatomy of the organism,” which signifies that the body
must be “understood in terms of its susceptibility to the signifier—its peculiar porousness and vulnerability with respect to the order of meaning” (“Elements” 133). Harry’s spontaneous, uncontrollable chattering springs from the cold that can scarcely be considered as bearing on the natural rhythm of biological organism, which provides a clue to review Harry’s condition in terms of Lacan’s concept of drive.

Freud’s and Lacan’s elaboration of the drive require us to distinguish instinct from drive, which has everything to do with the foregoing distinction between organism and body. Let us start off with the definition offered by Dylan Evans in An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis: “[W]hereas ‘instinct’ denotes a mythical pre-linguistic need, the drive is completely removed from the realm of biology,” which stresses that the “drives differ from biological needs in that they can never be satisfied, and do not aim at an object but rather circle perpetually round it” (46). And then Evans adds that “the real purpose of the drive is not some mythical goal of full satisfaction, but to return to its circular path, and the real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit” (46-47). In order to understand more clearly the way in which the concept of drive becomes problematic, it is necessary to take a look at what Freud says about the drive. Adrian Johnston articulates the most problematic aspect of the drive which Freud discusses in his essay “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”:
The definition of drive outlines a compound formation consisting of source, pressure, aim and object. Drives are not some internal biological reality welling up from the chaotic depths of the id. The aims and objects forming an integral pole of the drive are not the result of a pre-given natural telos. Nor are drives merely an external social construction. The unmasterable “demand for work” cyclically reiterated by the source and pressure of Trieb renders dubious any efforts to transform human motivation into a simple consequence of intersubjective, sociohistorical mediation. *(Time 143)*

Shepherdson, in his essay “The Elements of the Drive,” focuses primarily on the uniqueness of the concept of drive as well; according to him, “while the drive is distinguished from instinct and detached from its natural foundations, it is not entirely inscribed in the circuit of the signifier” *(“Elements” 141)*. He goes on to say that Freud, by using the concept of drive, “seeks to isolate, not an ‘outside’ to representation, a domain of natural immediacy that no representation would affect (the familiar notion of ‘instinct’), but rather a point within the domain of representation that remains essentially foreign, excluded, and impossible to present” *(“Elements” 143)*. What especially interests us in Shepherdson’s discussion is that he highlights that “the concept of the ‘drive’ always has a bodily significance”; at stake
here, of course, is nothing less than the concept of body as “a concrete, material domain which cannot be reduced to the level of organic life” (“Elements” 133, 134).

Harry’s chattering is intimately embedded within the question of drive insofar as it is not just attributable to the level of organic life—Harry always suffers from the terrible cold which cannot be protected by any clothes, regardless of the change of season—but it is a symptom which still manifests itself through Harry’s body. Pinch conceives of Harry’s chattering as “the involuntary voice of the body” which is “no more capable of producing meaning than the clattering of ‘a loose casement in the wind’ ” (94). More significantly, the unintelligible sound of the body is involuntarily or compulsively repeated. There is much emphasis on Harry’s chattering as a kind of compulsive insistence in the second stanza. For example, Harry’s teeth “chatter, chatter still,” “[i]n March, December, and in July,” and “[a]t night, at morning, and at noon,” and “[b]eneath the sun, beneath the moon”; it is very interesting, in this context, that the phrase “all the same” is repeatedly used with regard to Harry’s bizarre condition (9-16). The crucial point to be made here is that the compulsive repetitiousness, involved in Harry’s chattering, is one of the most salient features that characterize the concept of drive. Freud, in his essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” hints at the possibility that the death drive could be considered as a description of drives in general, which means that the death drive represents not so much a separate
drive category in itself, but that, to a certain extent, it portrays all drives; this is why Johnston argues that Freud provides a metapsychological theory of drives at its most speculative level in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (see Johnston, Time 125). It is against this background that one should locate Žižek’s argument on the death drive. Does Freud’s remark on the drive suggest that “all drives inherently tend toward inorganicity” and that drive is “a reflection or embodiment of the individual’s mortality”? (Johnston, Time 368). As for Žižek, “the compulsive repetitiveness” that Freud associates with the death drive or the “blind insistence” of the drive is “closer to being an immortal, undead revenant that continually returns to haunt the subject”:

This notion of a spectral undead existence also allows us to account for the fundamental paradox of the Freudian/Lacanian death drive: like the Kierkegaardian sickness unto death, the death drive is not the mark of human finitude, but its very opposite, the name for ‘eternal (spectral) life,’ the index of a dimension in human existence that persists for ever, beyond our physical death, and of which we can never rid ourselves.

(Žižek, Ticklish 293-94)

This is to say that if it is possible to place on the level of the drive the insistent chattering which overwhelms Harry, the chattering can be considered as something like “an immortal, undead revenant that continually returns to haunt” Harry. Indeed,
people that see Harry whose jaws and teeth clatter “like a loose casement in the wind” say “‘tis plain,/That, live as long as live he may,/He never will be warm again” (116, 118-20). Doesn’t this redirect our attention, in the words of Žižek, to the drive as the “dimension in human existence” “of which we can never rid ourselves”?

An attention to the drive as “a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic,” or in Johnston’s phrase, to “the quasi-somatic force of the drives” takes us a step further into Lacan’s formulation of the category of the real (Freud 14: 121; Johnston, Time 369). Shepherdson points out that bound up with the category of the real and the object a is the theory of drive: “This ‘lack in the Other’ has decisive consequences for the theory of the drive, which will bring into play not only the imaginary and symbolic, but above all the category of the real, and the object a, which mark…a point of incompleteness in the structure of representation” (“Elements” 131).

Concerning the real as the point of aporia within the domain of representation, Shepherdson makes clear that “the ‘real,’ however lacking or ‘impossible’ it may be, …can nevertheless make a difference in the structure of the body” (“Elements” 141). The real is “not just an abstract ‘impossibility’,” but, to use Lacan’s phrase, “an ‘embodied aporia’ or an ‘aporia incarnate’ ” (Shepherdson, “Elements” 141; Lacan, Écrits 265).

Another reason why the relationship between the domain of representation and
its aporia, that is, between the symbolic and the real becomes problematic is that the real should not be understood “as a ‘prelinguistic reality,’ but as an effect of the symbolic law that is nevertheless not reducible to a symbolic phenomenon” (Shepherdson, “Elements” 143). In this connection, Shepherdson recounts two versions of the real in his essay “The Intimate Alterity of the Real”: a “presymbolic real” and a “postsymbolic real.” In the case of the presymbolic real, the real “precedes the symbolic and exists independently” whereas in the case of the postsymbolic real, it is “a residue or surplus-effect” which “comes into being only as a result of the symbolic operation that excludes it” (“Intimate” par. 34). In the course of his analysis, Shepherdson questions whether the disruptive character of the real is due to the real in itself, which leads him to regard the first version of the real as inadequate; it is because the real should not be understood as “pre-existing reality” but as an “innermost core” which “only acquires its repressed or traumatic character in relation to the familiar order of representation” (“Intimate” par. 45). In addition, Shepherdson locates the key to an understanding of the second version of the real in the concept of object \( a \). The object \( a \) which seems to be “a left-over that remains from the past, or the return of an original state,” on his reading, turns out to be “a product of the law, a surplus-effect of the symbolic order, which disguises itself as an origin” (“Intimate” par. 62, 63). Lorenzo Chiesa, by the same token, lays great emphasis on the issue of
“the simultaneity between the initial fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a void, a *nihil* (the Thing) in the primordial real,” evoking Lacan’s following remarks in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*: “[T]he fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical” (Chiesa, “Ethics” 9; Lacan, *Ethics* 121). Commenting on the example of the vase discussed by Heidegger as a work of art constructed around a void, Lacan observes: “The introduction of this fabricated signifier that is the vase already contains the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. And the notion of the creation *ex nihilo* is coextensive with the exact situation of the Thing as such” (Lacan, *Ethics* 122).

This appreciation of Lacan’s formulation of the symbolic and the real enables us to review the problematic relation between Harry and Goody from a slightly different perspective. For, on the basis of Lacan’s formulation, we can say that Wordsworth’s poem “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” is not so much the story that explains what causes Harry’s bizarre symptom, as one which is constructed as a defense against the ontological nature of Harry as a subject who is left fundamentally split, divided. The question then becomes: what if the first two stanzas of the poem delineate the originary condition in which Harry is situated, more specifically, Harry whose teeth chatter, possessed by Goody that inhabits him from within?; or what if the last stanza suggests that the possibility of uttering, namely, the possibility of the
so-called normal communication in the symbolic order derives from the repression of his originary condition? The story, constructed as a response to, or a defense against, Harry’s originary condition, falls back on a clear or straightforward opposition between Harry as a lusty and stout drover and Goody as an old, poor weaver who lives alone and suffers from the cold. The word “hedge,” repeatedly mentioned, attains a great deal more importance in this respect, because it brings to the fore this opposition between Harry and Goody. For Harry, the hedge “has a certain value in protecting fields from natural and human depredations,” and it “tends to represent the exclusionary principle of property” (Langan 116). This attitude toward the hedge leads Harry to define Goody’s breaking of the hedge as a violation of a property boundary or as, in Wordsworth’s word, an act of “trespass” (66).

3. “We Are Seven”

The issue of “the simultaneity between the initial fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a void, a nihil (the Thing) in the primordial real,” discussed with respect to the relationship between Harry and Goody, resonates in a dialogue featuring an adult questioner and the contrary child of “We Are Seven” (Chiesa, “Ethics” 9). “We Are Seven” starts off with a question: “A simple child, dear brother
Jim,” “What should it know of death?”⁶ According to Wolfson, this question “seems no question at all, but rather an invitation to share the speaker’s bemused condescension” (Questioning 44). As an answer to the question, the speaker introduces an interview with a little cottage girl who is eight years old. The interview which could be construed as the conflict between two ways of counting the dead begins as follows: “‘Sisters and brothers, little maid, ’How many may you be?’ ‘How many? Seven in all,’ she said” (13-15). Here it is important to remember that the girl “looked at” the speaker, “wondering,” when she says “seven in all” (16). Indeed, Wolfson observes that her wondering “poses a kind of baffled counterquestion—a signal of the gap that opens” between the speaker and the girl (Questioning 45). The gap between the speaker and the girl presents itself explicitly in the speaker’s question, given as a response to the girl’s counterquestion and an unexpected answer from the girl:

‘And where are they, I pray you tell?’

She answered, ‘Seven are we,

‘And two of us at Conway dwell,

‘And two are gone to sea.

‘Two of us in the church-yard lie,

⁶ “We Are Seven” in Lyrical Ballads 1798, 1.4. References to “We Are Seven” are cited hereafter by line in my text.
'My sister and my brother,

'And in the church-yard cottage, I

'Dwell near them with my mother.'(17-24)

This answer from the girl prompts us as well as the speaker to recall the speaker’s question the tone of which “blends marvel and annoyance,” offered in the first stanza:

“What should it know of death?” (Wolfson, Questioning 45; 4). From the seventh stanza on, the speaker tries to convince the girl that she must not count the dead siblings. He stresses that two siblings who lie in the church yard should be strictly distinguished from others who dwell at Conway or are gone to sea, and from the girl herself who runs about and whose limbs are alive; the speaker’s resistance to the girl’s addition, says Wolfson, is reflected in the rhyme of “alive” with “five” in the ninth stanza (Questioning 45). Yet the speaker fails ultimately to persuade the girl, and their dialogue ends up with the standoff which is also mirrored in the rhyme of “heaven” with “seven” in the last stanza; in Wolfson’s words, “[t]he adult’s final cry that a sister and a brother ‘are in heaven’ is countered by [the girl’s] insistence that ‘we are seven!’” (Questioning 46).

Let us discuss in more detail two different ways of considering death which are epitomized in terms of the dialogue between the speaker and the girl. In the case of the speaker, two dead siblings of the girl should be separated from other siblings,
that is, death should be divided and subtracted from life. And it is the very opposition of life and death that the girl calls into question; more specifically, she perceives death as “(at worst) displacement,” as shown in her syntax: “‘in heaven’ seems no different from ‘at Conway’ or ‘to sea’” (Wolfson, Questioning 45). It can be said that for the girl, the difference between life and death is cancelled out; in other words, the existence of her dead siblings’ graves serves as proof of their continuing existence. As Frances Ferguson says, for the girl, “[b]eing farther away than if one were at sea reconciles itself with its exact opposite, its proximity: ‘Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door’” (165). In relation to the girl who “will not let herself be lessoned (and lessened) so” and “persists with her refrain, ‘O Master! we are seven’,” Celeste Langan writes that she “behaves as if none could die” (Wolfson, Questioning 46; Langan 86). This amounts to saying that she refuses to “regard ‘nothing’ (as ‘not-being,’ death may serve as its phenomenal equivalent) as altering the ‘all’ of existence” (Langan 86).

Zupančič, in her book The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two, undertakes the analysis of the Nietzschean theory of double affirmation in conjunction with the Lacanian notion of “not-all.” According to her, the Nietzschean theory of double affirmation is all the more remarkable in that it “endeavors to mobilize Nothing(ness) or negativity in the form of Nothing(ness) as interval or
minimal difference of the same” (Shadow 136) Invoking the title of Malevich’s painting “white affirmation on white background” as an example, she defines double affirmation as the creation of a minimal difference; “[t]his minimal difference or hiatus between two affirmations, this ‘crack’ created by the very redoubling of affirmation,” she writes, “is what activates negation/negativity without transforming it into something that one could take for a direct object of one’s will” (Zupančič, Shadow 136). What she discerns in Nietzsche’s thought of double affirmation is that negativity, as Nietzsche articulates it, is “not the opposite, obverse side of every positive entity, neither does it function itself as a singular entity,” which compels her to formulate two conceptions of Nothing(ness): “the first positing the Nothing as something, and the second positing it as difference or interval” (Zupančič, Shadow 136, 137). Here the first conception of Nothing(ness) carries us to the strange case in which the lack of an object itself becomes an object; whereas in the second conception, the lack “exists solely in the form of the inherent difference of an object, that is to say, in the form of the object not fully coinciding with itself” (Zupančič, Shadow 136).

If death, as Langan argues, could be assumed as the phenomenal equivalent of nothing in “We Are Seven,” the speaker views death as strictly equivalent to the opposite side of a positive entity or of life, namely, to “something” that must be
separated from life. Those two dead siblings of the girl correspond to the nothingness or the void or the number zero which must not be counted when the girl gives an answer to the speaker’s question, “How many may you be?” Can we say then that the girl never gives up including within life those two dead siblings who, in the speaker’s view, must be subtracted from life as the nothingness or the number zero? Or can we say that the girl indicates death within life which disrupts, displaces, and desituates the very opposition of life and death? In this connection, let us reconsider Langan’s comment remarking the girl’s refusal to regard “nothing” as altering the “all” of existence. While the speaker excludes the nothingness so as to keep the “all” of existence intact or to keep the field of life totalized—“Then ye are only five,” “But they are dead; those two are dead!/Their spirits are in heaven!”—the girl points to the possibility that the nothingness or the void is always already included within the “all” of existence, thereby making the “all” of existence not-all or not-whole—“Nay, we are seven!” (36, 65-66, 69). The girl, in fact, describes specific scenes regarding two siblings’ death; for example, “‘The first that died was little Jane;/In bed she moaning lay,‘” “‘Together round her grave we played,’” “‘My brother John was forced to go,/‘And he lies by her side’” (49-50, 55, 59-60). But nevertheless, she still replies, “O Master! we are seven” rather than “we were seven” or “my parents had seven children,” to the speaker’s question, “How many are you then, if they two are in
Heaven?” (64, 61-62). As Wolfson indicates, the graves of her brother and sister offer more visible companionship (“Their graves are green, they may be seen”) than do her living but absent siblings (Questioning 45; 37). She adds:

‘My stockings there I often knit,
‘My 'kerchief there I hem;
‘And there upon the ground I sit—
‘I sit and sing to them. (41-44)

One might say that for the girl, her two siblings, Jane and John, were already dead, but have not yet been dead. In sum, what is at issue in the girl’s reply, “we are seven!” is that it includes the void or the in-between which is irreducible to the opposition of life and death or of past and present.

It is the space of in-between that Zupančič would explore in terms of what she calls the “third possibility” (Shadow 137). She refers to the example of the conceptual couple truth/appearance so as to get the precise idea of what the third possibility is; “truth and appearance are not in any kind of relationship; truth is everything that is not appearance (and vice versa). Their intersection is empty, whereas their union produces the couple Truth-Appearance” (Shadow 133). Here Zupančič’s discussion in question concerns the idea that the couple of Truth and Appearance can be constituted only “on account of the exclusion of the third possibility”; in other words, “[w]e
exclude the third possibility in order to make people accept the first one, since the
second (or the other) one is always ‘bad,’ forbidden, or despicable (evil as opposed to
good, appearance as opposed to truth…)” (Shadow 133). How, then, should we
understand “the inclusion of the third possibility” which Zupančič subtly draws on in
bringing Nietzsche into dialogue with Lacan? The inclusion of the third possibility
“aims precisely at restoring and affirming the status of the Other” (Zupančič, Shadow
133). Of crucial importance here is the concept of the Other as what is not simply “a
derivation or a negative determination of the One”; in other words, “the Other can
never be One (yet another One), but is always-already two (i.e. two at the same time)”
(Zupančič, Shadow 133). Zupančič’s further point is that the Lacanian notion of “not-
all” is based on nothing other than the inclusion of the third possibility, which leads
her to endeavor to tease out the implication of the Lacanian thesis that “there is no
Other (of the) Other” (Shadow 137). The important point to stress in this Lacanian
thesis is that it “aims not at the exclusion of the third, but, on the contrary, at its
inclusion”; implied in the Other is the Other (of the Other), on account of which the
Other remains as the Other, that is to say, the Other remains “not-all” or “not-whole”
(Zupančič, Shadow 137-38). The inclusion of the space of in-between or the third
possibility results in the inner difference of the same or the noncoincidence of the
same with itself that is evocative of the second conception of Nothing(ness).
One of the important reasons Wolfson summons Wordsworth’s text “We Are Seven” in the course of her analysis of the interrogative mode in the Romantic poetry is that Wordsworth, in the face of two orders that seem to be self-enclosed and irreconcilable, allows us no easy alignment (see Questioning 46). The poem ends with the standoff between the speaker and the girl; “[t]he adult can neither persuade nor bully the little girl with his logic; nor can her simplicity prevail” (Wolfson, Questioning 46). However, taking into account Zupančič’s articulation of the Nothing(ness), the ending of the poem cannot be merely read as leaving pointedly unresolved the tension between “the obstinate naïveté” of the girl and “the obstinate sophistication” of the speaker; it can be also read as demonstrating that the speaker’s endeavor to conceive death as the opposite term of life (nothing as something) always already includes the possibility of death within life, intimated by the girl’s tenacity (nothing as interval or minimal difference of the same) (Ferry 84). And the first question of the speaker to the girl requires more careful consideration in this respect: “‘Sisters and brothers, little maid,/‘How many may you be?’” (13-14). With reference to the word “you” in this question, Ferguson elucidates the “equivocation about the relation between one person and many persons” (164). According to her account, “[t]he possibility for the word ‘you’ to apply in the singular or the plural continues to operate unchecked and strangely undisambiguated”; the word “you,” consequently,
“conflate[s] possession with existence, ‘having’ sisters and brothers with ‘being’
sisters and brothers” (164). Interestingly, to the speaker’s question “How many are
you?,” the girl gives her reply “we are seven,” as if “it were just a version of ‘I am
seven’,” which leads Ferguson to assert that “her being seven in being one is to her as
readily apparent as the fact that she has thick curly hair” (61; Ferguson 165). Two
opposite terms—having/being, possession/existence, singular/plural—which should
be strictly distinguished, manifest themselves on the same level.

4. Responding to the Spectral Voice of the Outcast

Wolfson notes that the interrogative mode serves as “an active power of
dislocation,” which makes Romantic poetry a space involving “a restless play of
possibilities” (Questioning 19, 20). All three poems which we have examined above
consist of exchanges of question and answer. What is ultimately at stake in each of
these poems is that the narrative constructed as the answer to the question is internally
disrupted and dislocated, namely, that the narrative as the answer to the question
perpetuates the question, far from laying it to rest. In “The Thorn,” the narrator
attempts to respond to his interlocutor’s question “wherefore? wherefore? tell me
why/Does she repeat that doleful cry?,” but his attempt ends with his confession, “I
cannot tell how this may be” and with his repetition of Martha’s cry “‘Oh misery! Oh
misery! ‘O woe is me! oh misery!’ (87-88, 243, 252-53). To the question “What is’t that ails young Harry Gill?” the narrative of “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” gives the following answer: it is old Goody Blake who ails young Harry Gill (2). However, it turns out that open to question is this seemingly unquestionable answer; for Goody cannot be understood on the basis of the opposition of presence and absence, thereby shaking the pertinence of the question “what is…?” In “We Are Seven,” the eight-year-old cottage girl will not give up the void or the in-between irreducible to the opposition between life and death, which makes the adult speaker, who asks a question “A simple child…What should it know of death?,” embarrassed and surprised (1, 4). After reading these three poems, we find ourselves haunted by uncontrolled, spectral voices which still remain inexplicable; “‘Oh misery! Oh misery!/‘Oh woe is me! oh misery” (“The Thorn”); “Chatter, chatter, chatter still” (“Goody Blake and Harry Gill”); “Nay, we are seven!” (“We Are Seven”).

What if these “uncontrolled vocal excesses” arising out of the in-between give rise to the “restless play of possibilities,” emphatically underlined by Wolfson? (“Language” 41). From a Lacanian perspective, the “restless play of possibilities” should not be understood in connection with hermeneutic pluralism. For what is ultimately at stake in Lacan’s discussion of the notion of femininity or the savoir of “not-all” is the inherent impasse or impossibility, entailed in the operation of
interpretation. Moreover, the inherent impossibility of interpretation could not be excluded and posited as the condition of possibility of interpretation. If we deal with the inherent impossibility as the Thing itself or fetish in psychoanalytic sense, this means that we, once again, go back to Lacan’s logic of masculinity or phallic jouissance which depends on an exception. Lacan’s logic of femininity, as Shepherdson articulates it, “holds open a possibility beyond the affirmation or negation of our normal discourse” (“Philosophy” 147). The point is that the possibility ‘beyond’ the affirmation or negation of our normal discourse is included ‘in’ the normal discourse as its inherent impossibility, thereby making the normal discourse not-all or not-whole. This is why we should respond to the “uncontrolled vocal excesses” coming from three exceptional figures: Martha, Goody and the eight-year-old cottage girl.
CHAPTER TWO

Encountering the Impossible Gaze of the Outcast: *The Prelude*

1. The Blind Beggar Episode

The Blind Beggar episode stages the speaker’s strange encounter with a blind beggar. Before specifying his meeting with the blind beggar, the speaker draws attention to the background against which the beggar manifests himself. Let us begin with the first sentence of this episode:

> As the black storm upon the mountain top
> Sets off the sunbeam in the valley, so
> That huge fermenting mass of human-kind
> Serves as a solemn back-ground, or relief,
> To single forms and objects.\(^7\)

According to Geraldine Friedman, this sentence provides “a contrastive model of ‘set[ting] off by the foil’ ” on which the entire episode is based; more precisely, the emergence of “single forms and objects” from the city’s “huge fermenting mass of human-kind” is described in terms of the sunbeam/the black storm contrast (Friedman 125, 127; 1850. 7. 623, 621). The fact that the single blind beggar is placed against the plurality of the crowd is underlined by another contrast “once”/ “How oft”; in the

\(^7\) Book 7 in *The Prelude* 1850, 619-23. Citations from *The Prelude* are hereafter given, as required, by year, book (or part), and line.
words of Friedman, “the sole instance of visionary salience, signaled by ‘once’ in line 635, is set against the usual experience of blindness, signaled by ‘How oft’ in line 626” (127-28). We can add to this list the “unmoving man”/ “moving pageant” contrast; especially with respect to the beggar’s immobility, it is necessary to note a series of phrases—“stood, propped against a wall,” “[h]is steadfast face” (1850. 7. 647, 637, 640, 648).

Geoffrey Hartman also comments on the first sentence of the Blind Beggar episode, focusing likewise on “the power of contrast” implied in it; according to him, the first sentence “merely strengthens the mystery of the ‘power of contrast,’ and it does not explain why the poet is caught by precisely this single form” (241). He argues that, in order to understand why the speaker is caught by the blind beggar, we have to examine “the real and hidden contrast,” which is one “between the blind man’s face and his label” (241). But the relationship between the blind man’s face and his label soon turns out to be “not in contrast” in the sense that the beggar’s steadfast face and sightless eyes are “as much a surface as the paper he wears” (242). This leads the speaker to give his attention to “the power behind the beggar’s fixity of stance” which is interpreted as “the engulfing solipsism of Imagination” by Hartman (242).

Why is the speaker caught precisely by the blind beggar? Let us take as our starting point this question which remains unanswered in Hartman’s argument. To
clarify what is at stake concerning the question, it is first necessary to look more
closely at the scene in which the speaker, all of a sudden, is confronted with the blind
beggar:

I was smitten

Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)

Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,

Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest

Wearing a written paper. (1850. 7. 637-41)

It is a beggar whom the speaker encounters unexpectedly and is fascinated by in some
way. Before exploring this encounter with the beggar, we need to sketch out some
important points about the status of the beggar in relation to the society. Benis
indicates that a beggar, even though he might have a home, would be defined as a
vagrant or a quasi-vagrant “simply for going through the streets to beg, a livelihood
his poverty and his handicap would make it exceedingly difficult to forgo” (204). In
this respect, the topos of the vagrant provides a clue to pose the question of the status
of the beggar with some intensity. In his book *Romanticism on the Road: The
Marginal Gains of Wordworth’s Homeless*, Benis considers an encounter with the
homeless as one of the most common occurrences in the tumultuous Romantic era and
in Wordworth’s poetry, and he makes the further claim that Wordworth’s rather
obsessive interest in the homeless distinguishes him from other writers of his
generation (see Benis 1). On Benis’s view, the labels “homeless” and “vagrant” can be
used interchangeably in that both signify either those who lack housing or those with
vexed relationships to the community; the latter becomes the sense which people in
the Georgian period represented in the poetry of Wordsworth would recognize (see
Benis 12). Why does Benis attach so much importance to the homeless or vagrant as
those with vexed relationships to the community? The Georgian era occurred amid
political and economic uncertainty due to the French Revolution, the war with the
revolutionary France, and industrialization or enclosure, which urged authorities in
England to regulate the physical wanderings of the homeless and to police their
ambiguous legal status. What is noteworthy is that vagrancy statutes of the eighteenth
century make vagrancy into a catch-all category, as is shown in the following passage
from Benis’s text:

   From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, people liable to be
   punished under vagrancy law included persons refusing to work for
   customary wages; bearwards; unlicensed peddlers; gypsies; wandering
   scholars; players; persons collecting ends of yarn or cloth; persons
   possessing tools used in burglaries; poachers; hedge-pullers; unlicensed
   dealers in lottery tickets; and ultimately, anyone on the road without
Doesn’t the fact that “anyone on the road without adequate cause” was regarded as a vagrant paradoxically testify to the difficulty that the society experienced in pinning down vagrancy?

This examination of the discourse on vagrancy brings us to the more general issue of the political dimension of human experience. In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt foregrounds the opposition between the categories of “friend” and “enemy” as the essential logic of the political; according to him, “the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” (26). The friend-enemy opposition which establishes the foundation of the political world is based on the assumption of a strict and recognizable difference between interior and exterior, between us and them. However, what if Wordsworth’s treatment of the beggar shows that the friend-enemy polarity is an inherently unstable opposition?

The analysis of bare life or the life of *homo sacer* presented by Giorgio Agamben intervenes in the very opposition friend/enemy. “The fundamental categorial pair of Western politics,” Agamben writes, “is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, zoē/bios, exclusion/inclusion” (8). While zoē is bare life which should be excluded from the political, bios is political or social life
that is governed by laws. As Andrew Norris points out, “it is only political life that is truly lived in language,” whereas “bare life is mute, undifferentiated, and stripped of both the generality and the specificity that language makes possible” (41). And what is really crucial for Agamben is that “Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life” (7). He insists that “[t]here is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion” (8; emphasis added).

Bare life, as Agamben defines it, is bound up with the life of homo sacer (sacred man); the term of homo sacer denotes a criminal whom the state deems worthy of death, but whom it bans from being either legally executed or religiously sacrificed (see Agamben 8-11). Norris also provides a succinct reformulation of the term: what Agamben calls homo sacer is “both within and without legal order” (47). This implies that homo sacer is inside the legal order insofar as his death can be allowed by that order; but he is outside the legal order insofar as his death can constitute neither an execution nor a sacrifice (see Norris 47). Agamben’s commentary on homo sacer as a limit figure, in this connection, is worth noting: “What emerges in this limit figure is the radical crisis of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and exclusion, between what is outside and what
In the Blind Beggar episode, can we consider the beggar as an instance of the limit figure or homo sacer? Building upon Benis’s explanation of vagrancy statutes of the eighteenth century, the beggar is included among “people liable to be punished under vagrancy law,” in the sense that he goes through the streets to beg, instead of “work[ing] for customary wages” (Benis 2). Of significance here is the fact that the blind beggar is both a vagrant “on the road without adequate cause” and an “unmoving man” who “with upright face, [s]tood, propped against a wall” (Benis 2; 1850. 7. 639-40, 647; emphasis added) Concerning the beggar’s immobility, Friedman describes it as “nightmarish fixation” which contrasts sharply with “mad flux” intimated by the phrase “the moving pageant” (Friedman 147n22; 1850. 7. 637). The blind beggar, after all, is none other than one who remains immovable at the heart of the “mad flux” or irreducible to the flux, which results in attention to the blind beggar as an unmoving vagrant difficult to be assimilated to any oppositional way of thinking. Here we can go a bit further by adding that the blind beggar is an unmoving vagrant in the sense that he has always been there in the society, but he has never had his proper place in it. And the phrase “a sight not rare” which the speaker uses to depict the view of the blind beggar deserves emphasis in the present context, since the phrase amounts to saying that the speaker has often met figures similar to the blind
beggar, but nevertheless they have not been of particular interest to him (1850. 7. 638).

Read in this way, the blind beggar could be considered as a figure who remains at the zero-degree of social existence, more specifically, as a figure “who is included within the sphere of political existence by virtue of his radical exclusion, whose presence within the order of the human is paid for by his deprivation of any symbolic representation” (Santner 100).

Moreover, the blind beggar as the paradoxical figure who exists within the symbolic order by his deprivation of any symbolic significance invites us to scrutinize the “written paper” he wears “upon his chest” (1850. 7. 641, 640). In relation to the written paper which explains “whence he came, and who he was,” Benis requires us to note that the blind beggar cannot help but depend on other people to write and read it (1850. 7. 642). The method of self-presentation, “prone to misunderstandings and inaccuracy,” is “the only way he can apprehend his story, through the filter of other people, with their judgments and prejudices” (Benis 204). This compels us to maintain that the written paper upon the blind beggar’s chest, rather than representing the truth about the beggar or allowing us to encounter the beggar’s own voice, shows how the society defines him or pins down his vagrancy.

Let us now move on to another point which the speaker refers to in respect to the written paper: “an apt type/This label seemed of the utmost we can know,/Both of
ourselves and of the universe” (1850, 7, 644-646). How should we account for the speaker’s contention that the written paper, explaining who the blind beggar is, points to the utmost we can know of ourselves and of the universe? To clarify what is at stake in this question, it is necessary to examine Agamben’s attempt to elaborate the peculiar topology which characterizes the homo sacer in connection with the concept of political sovereignty. Agamben’s discussion begins with Schmitt’s definition of the sovereign as one “who decides on the state of exception” (Agamben 11). What exactly does the state of exception mean here? Agamben insists that the exception is “a kind of exclusion,” and then he adds that “the exception is truly, according to its etymological root, taken outside (ex-capere), and not simply excluded” (17, 18). His insistence is supported by the following formulation: when “what is excluded from the general rule is an individual case,” “what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule’s suspension” (17, 18). This is to say that the “state of exception is…not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension” (Agamben 18). The dimension of exception is related to the sovereign’s power “to suspend the validity of the law,” or in Norris’s phrase, his “legal authority to decide who shall be removed from the purview of law, as in a state of martial law or the Schmittian state of emergency” (Agamben 15; Norris 46). Sovereignty is thus defined as “the law’s threshold with the nonlegal,” to
put it differently, as “the point at which the law enters into relation with that which has no legal standing” (Norris 46). And here Agamben takes one more step by elaborating the possibility that the dimension of exception immanent in the concept of sovereignty could have a fundamental bearing on the homo sacer. The homo sacer is none other than one who “has been banned” (Agamben 28). For Agamben, a ban corresponds to an exposure to the state of exception inherent in the concept of sovereignty. His argument on a relation of ban proceeds as follows:

He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (28-29)

Now we can elucidate more adequately what the homo sacer, as the figure who is both within and without legal order, means. The homo sacer is not merely set outside the law, but rather he is abandoned by it, which means that the homo sacer is deprived of his symbolic significance and political capacity by the law. But what is ultimately at issue here is that this state of abandonment makes the law possible, which is why one should contend that the homo sacer still persists within the law as its disavowed
core. As Agamben notes, “once brought back to his proper place beyond both penal
law and sacrifice, homo sacer presents the originary figure of life taken into the
sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the
political dimension was first constituted” (83).

In the Blind Beggar episode, the written paper upon the beggar’s chest
announces whence he comes and who he is; in other words, it is the beggar’s history
that the written paper tells. The beggar’s history corresponds to the story of how he
became a beggar or the record of how he was excluded from his community, deprived
of his symbolic significance and political capacity. As we have seen, to the extent his
story cannot be written and read without the assistance of other people, it becomes
more problematic. The beggar’s history thus highlights the way in which the
community defines or pins down his life, or to use Agamben’s term, the way in which
the community “abandons” him. This is rendered particularly evident by the fact that
the label telling the beggar’s history reveals “the utmost we can know,/Both of
ourselves and of the universe,” which puts even more sharply the possibility that the
beggar’s history could show how our universe or the symbolic order which we belong
to establishes itself (1850. 7. 645-46). This is to say that the beggar’s history
“preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political
dimension [pointing to us and our universe] was first constituted” (Agamben 83).
This, however, is not the whole story. For a comment on the phrase “the view of a blind beggar” which is offered only in passing by Friedman enables us to approach another level implied in the Blind Beggar episode. “[T]he ambiguity between subjective and objective genitive in the phrase ‘the view (a sight not rare)/Of a blind Beggar’ gives the Beggar sight,” Friedman writes (140). At issue here is nothing less than the uncanny situation where the blind beggar at whom the speaker looks stares right back at him, which opens up an interesting path that leads us to read this poem on the basis of Lacan’s theory of the gaze.

The first thing to note with regard to Lacan’s theory of the gaze is that it should be distinguished from Sartre’s account of the gaze; according to Shepherdson, Sartre’s account of the gaze where “the voyeuristic subject is suddenly surprised by the look of the other” concerns itself with “the peculiar way in which the relation between two subjects can vacillate between ‘objectification’ and ‘intersubjectivity’” (“Pound” 72). The Lacanian notion of the gaze, as Shepherdson formulates it, is “not a property of the subject, but at the same time, it is not a property of objects, a natural phenomenon, a feature of the empirical world, or even a characteristic of light” (“Pound” 79). The gaze can be irreducible to the opposition between subject and object and besides, it is what “precedes the domain of the visible and opens it up to our look” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 79). What emerges most clearly from
Shepherdson’s argument is that the gaze should be understood as the object of the scopic drive and thus as “a very specific moment in the constitution of the subject” (“Pound” 75).

If we read “the view of a blind beggar” as the object of the scopic drive, namely, as object a, how can we interpret the comment on the blind beggar’s eyes presented by the speaker?: on “sightless eyes, I gazed,/As if admonished from another world” (1850. 7. 648-9). We have to be careful not to mistake the blind beggar, who seems to admonish the speaker, for “something like a Platonic divine being who remains unseen, invisible, but who looks at us and directs our vision toward the splendor of the phenomenal world” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 81). Lacan writes that “[t]here is no need for us to refer to some supposition of the existence of a universal seer” (Four 74). The gaze is not a property of the spectator or subject, but it is also distinct from the idea of a divine Other who looks at us. As Lacan says, “[t]he spectacle of the world…appears to us as all-seeing. This is the phantasy to be found in the Platonic perspective of an absolute being” (Four 75). This suggests that the experience of the gaze should not be specified in terms of “the idea of a ‘Platonic’ universal seer, a sort of ‘substance’ or primordial ‘element’ which would precede the subject and serve as its place of birth, its origin, chora” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 81).

The reflection on the gaze as object a can be embedded in Shepherdson’s
account of the Lacanian notion of the real; according to him, the real cannot be merely
considered as the pre-existing place that precedes the subject and serves as its origin.

As Shepherdson has already stressed, the real should not be understood as “pre-
existing reality” but as an “innermost core” which “only acquires its repressed or
traumatic character in relation to the familiar order of representation” (“Intimate” par.
45). It follows that the object a, which seems to be “a left-over that remains from the
past, or the return of an original state,” is actually “a product of the law, a surplus-
effect of the symbolic order, which disguises itself as an origin” (Shepherdson,
“Intimate” par. 62, 63). Shepherdson observes that the notion of the gaze, which
introduces the real as a dimension that is both a surplus-effect and limit of the
symbolic order, takes Lacan a step further in the direction of reformulating his
conception of the subject.

In order to clarify Shepherdson’s point, we would do well to make a detour
through Condillac’s presentation of the origin of sight which is reckoned as a kind of
mythological version of Lacan’s theory of the field of vision by Zupančič. In her
essay “Philosophers’ Blind Man’s Buff,” Zupančič points out that the strange
obsession with the blind characterizes many important philosophers of late-
seventeenth- and eighteenth-century including Locke, Berkeley and Condillac. And
then she presents a more detailed reading of Condillac’s ficticious experimental model.
Here is Zupančič’s description:

The model invented by Condillac is that of a statue; a statue internally “organized” just as we are, but covered on the outside with marble and animated by a spirit that induces no ideas in it. The marble that covers the surface of the statue does not allow it to use any of its senses.

Condillac reserves for himself the power and “liberty to open them the way we choose to the different impressions to which they are susceptible.” Thus, it is the author who will, bit by bit, scrape the marble off the “body” of the statue in order to clear (in different combinations) the way for different senses and observe “what is going to happen.” (“Blind” 42)

Condillac’s meditation on the ficticious model, especially his formulation of the way in which touch concerns itself with sight gives a clearer indication of what is at stake with regard to the Lacanian concept of the gaze. On Condillac’s account, the purely visual dimension can be said to consist only of light and colors, which makes the eye need touch “in order to learn the movements proper to sight, to connect its perceptions with the edges of the rays and thus to judge distances, magnitudes, positions, and figures” (Zupančič, “Blind” 43). It is in response to this situation that Condillac introduces a distinction between seeing and looking: “The statue doesn’t need to learn
how to see, but it has to learn how to look….It seems that we don’t know that there is a difference between seeing [voir] and looking [regarder]” (qtd. in Zupančič, “Blind” 43). When the statue is limited only to the sense of sight without any experience of touch, it sees nothing, because what the statue sees is “a part of itself qua thing” (Zupančič, “Blind” 43). Concerning the specific way in which the touch is intertwined with the sense of sight, Zupančič goes on to say that the touch teaches it “how to look, that is, to make it conceive the consciousness of what it sees as a consciousness of something other than itself, of something which is ‘exterior’ ” (“Blind” 43).

Condillac’s meditation on the ficticious model thus gives us a new approach to the blind beggar who remains motionless. For if only motion allows touch to “teach” sight how to look or if touch and motion give him the distinction between self and other, this means that the motionless beggar cannot see.

Significantly, in her book The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two, Zupančič expands this point in respect to the origin of sight, commenting on how Condillac’s distinction between how to see and how to look establishes a context for a further exploration of the moment of the constitution of the ego. As already indicated, the statue is nothing but a net of light and colors before learning how to look or “how to put things in perspective”; and the very passage from seeing to looking, that is, from “net of light” to “(perspectival) depth of field” is conceptualized
as the moment of the constitution of the ego by Zupančič (Shadow 104). This is to say that “the constitution of the ego (and of its limits) corresponds to the statue abandoning a portion of itself (and of its life) to the outer world, to the world of objects that are themselves constituted in this very same gesture” (Zupančič, Shadow 104). Condillac’s narrative of the fictitious model of a statue can thus be summed up as one in which the statue, a “thing that sees” is transformed into “a looking subject” by expelling something that, through this act of expulsion, becomes an object; this, as Zupančič stresses, consists in the process through which the Lacanian concept of the gaze as object a—“the gaze that is always outside, and constitutes the blind spot of our vision”—is constituted (Shadow 104). What Zupančič asks us to note in her attempt to bring Condillac’s model to bear on the issue of the gaze is “a fundamental asymmetry in the subject-object relationship”; more specifically, “the constitution of the dividing line between subject (of seeing, of representation, of knowledge) and the world of objects coincides with a part of the subject passing onto the side of objects” (Shadow 104-05).

Now it is time to look more closely at the experience of being under the gaze. It points to the subject’s encounter with his or her own part or fragmentary remainder passing onto the side of objects; or in Lacan’s words, his or her encounter “with the division of subjectivity” (Four 185). When it comes to the experience of the gaze,
Lacan says that “[i]t is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity” (Four 185). Based on the general theory of how the gaze operates for any constitution of the subject, Lacan turns to something more precise, that is, a perverse aspect of subjectivity. Here, the subject experiences the gaze, the loss of the object, the emergence of lack, but then tries to overcome that lack by turning himself into the object. What exactly does it mean for the subject to determine himself as object? On Shepherdson’s account, it is “precisely in the encounter with its own lack, its own radical division, and as a unique attempt to circumvent that division,” that “the subject determines himself as object” (“Pound” 84). Shepherdson goes so far as to say that it is here that we can see more clearly how object a functions in Lacan: the object a functions as “a paradoxical ‘object of lack,’ a localization of lack, a ‘particularization’ which allows the lack in the Other to be veiled at the very moment of its manifestation” (“Pound” 84). And then he brings into sharp focus the way in which the lack in the Other is veiled at the very moment of its manifestation: the lack in the Other or the symbolic order is veiled in terms of the process in which “the subject offers himself up as the object that shows itself to be missing in the Other” (“Pound” 84). This amounts to saying that in the experience of the gaze, the subject “identifies with the object that would make the Other complete,” which entails what Lacan calls “the annihilation of the subject” (“Pound” 84).
In this context, the speaker’s encounter with the blind beggar can be read as the speaker’s encounter with his own lack or as the speaker’s identification with “the primordially lost ‘Thing’ which makes the symbolic order incomplete” (we have already examined the blind beggar as what makes the symbolic order incomplete, that is, as what marks the limit of the symbolic order, in conjunction with the figure of the homo sacer) (Shepherdson, “Pound” 84). The speaker’s relation to the beggar can now be read not simply in relation to the beggar (who he is, what his legal status is, what his sign says), but also in relation to the speaker himself. For if the speaker “identifies” with the beggar, this does not mean the usual sympathetic identification with the suffering other. It rather means that the speaker encounters his own lack, and then responds through a perverse identification with the object. The important point to stress here is that it is not “perversion” in a strict clinical sense but a perverse aspect of all subjectivity.

Let us return to the question which serves as a starting point of the discussion of the blind beggar episode: why is the speaker caught precisely by the blind beggar? Shepherdson claims that Lacan’s account of the experience of being under the gaze as the subject’s sacrificial movement of identification with the object which makes the symbolic order incomplete in fact emerges from his attempt to answer the enigmatic question “Is there no satisfaction in being under [the] gaze?” (Lacan, *Four 75*). What
if the very satisfaction that attends the experience of being under the gaze is

intimately related to the reason the speaker is caught or “smitten” by the blind beggar?

“Caught by the spectacle” of the blind beggar, the speaker says, “my mind turned
round/As with the might of waters” (1850. 7. 643-44). Regarding the metaphor used
in these lines, Hartman writes that its natural basis is “the action of a watermill and/or
the Latin ‘(re)volvere’,” and that the phrase “turned round” suggests “the dizziness of
a suddenly disoriented mind” (394n33). Can we see this scene as one in which the
speaker, confronted with the blind beggar as the void or lack within the symbolic
order, is overwhelmed by some anxiety? What if the dizziness implied in the phrase
“turned round” is symptomatically related to this anxiety? Interestingly, the profound
anxiety the subject feels in the face of the void within the symbolic order involves a
peculiar temptation which urges the subject to engage in the sacrificial movement in
which he identifies himself with the void within the symbolic order. The speaker thus
loses his position, his stable grounding, and he is made dizzy and “disoriented.”

According to Lacan, the peculiar temptation is “something to which few subjects can
resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell” (Four 275). In sum, what is
most remarkable about the experience of being under the gaze is the satisfaction
which emanates from the subject’s identification with the void within the symbolic
order, or in the words of Shepherdson, “that peculiar pleasure in which we
simultaneously see the annihilation of the subject, the fading or aphanesis of the subject” (“Pound” 84). In this sense, the last scene of the Blind Beggar episode intimates the pleasure in which the speaker sees himself identified with “that unmoving man” (1850. 7. 647). It can be said that the very peculiar pleasure serves as the reason why the speaker is caught by the blind beggar.

This discussion of the Blind Beggar episode on the basis of Lacan’s account of the gaze also invites us to rethink the scene in which the speaker walks through the streets before he encounters the blind beggar. Going forward with the crowd amid the overflowing streets, the speaker says to himself, “The face of every one/That passes by me is a mystery!,” which forces him to ceaselessly look, “oppressed/By thoughts of what and whither, when and how” (1850. 7. 628-29, 630-31). Why, then, do people seem mysterious to the speaker? Here it is important to remember what Zupančič makes central to her analysis of the concept of the gaze; it bears directly on “a fundamental asymmetry in the subject-object relationship,” which signifies that “the subject finds itself on the opposite side of objects or things (seeing them, exploring them, learning about them) only insofar as there is a ‘thing from the subject’ that dwells among these objects or things” (Shadow 105). Zupančič reformulates the fundamental asymmetry in the subject-object relationship as “a structural disjunction between the ‘object of knowledge’ and the way we are inscribed in it” (Shadow 105).
If this is the case, concerning the Blind Beggar episode, can’t we say that the reason why people on the street remain mysterious to the speaker lies in the fact that the speaker is himself inscribed in those people he is observing and exploring?

There is one more thing to say about this formulation; it is that the way the subject is inscribed in the object he tries to learn about is “something other than the question of the point of view from which we look (or speak or judge)” (Zupančič, *Shadow* 105). The point of the gaze by no means coincides with the subject’s point of view (our perspective). Rather, our perspective becomes possible only if the gaze, a small part of ourselves that we have lost, is established “outside” as a lost object that henceforth appears as a blind spot in the field of objects. Zupančič makes the claim that when we say that “all our knowledge is subjectively mediated and necessarily partial,” we reduce the problem to “that of the relationship between the ‘I’ (or the ego) as the geometrical point of seeing (the ‘point of view’) and the object as the screen of this very ego,” ignoring “the gaze as the blind spot constituting the place of the subject within the observed picture of things” (*Shadow* 106). In the Blind Beggar episode, the speaker does not cease looking or exploring the crowd, “oppressed/By thoughts of what and whither, when and how” (1850. 7. 630-31). This scene, on Zupančič’s account, should not be read as one in which the speaker can never embrace or comprehend the crowd as a whole because his endeavor to learn about it is
“subjectively mediated and necessarily partial” (Shadow 106). Rather what drives him to ceaselessly attempt to comprehend the crowd is something in the object of comprehension or knowledge that keeps escaping his grasp, namely, his own gaze. Thus we have two distinct formulations: on the one hand, the speaker ceaselessly looks to see who they are (“what and whither, when and how”), which corresponds to the level of knowledge; but on the other hand, he becomes dizzy, unstable, anxious, full of mystery. This is why the scene tells us the limit of what we know about the object—but also about “ourselves.”

2. The Discharged Soldier Episode

The Discharged Soldier episode deals with the speaker’s encounter with another vagrant. Unlike the Blind Beggar episode which focuses primarily on the abruptness that marks the meeting of the speaker and the blind beggar, this episode contains a detailed meditation on how the speaker seeks to defend himself against anxiety arising from his sudden encounter with a discharged soldier. The Discharged Soldier episode begins with the scene where the speaker walks a road all by himself, which restores his worn-out mind and leads him to say, “O happy state! what beauteous pictures now/Rose in harmonious imagery” (1805. 4. 392-93). However, at “a sudden turning of the road,” he comes across “an uncouth shape” who proves to be
a discharged soldier later (1805. 4. 401, 402). For the speaker, the sudden appearance of “an uncouth shape” seems to come as a surprise as suggested in the word “sudden,” but he soon has time to “mark him well,” by “slipping back into the shade/Of a thick hawthorn,” without being seen himself (1805. 4. 403, 404, 405). First of all, the soldier’s unusual height and extreme thinness strike the speaker’s eyes: “A foot above man’s common measure tall,/[…]/A man more meagre, as it seemed to me,/Was never seen abroad by night or day” (1805. 4. 406-09). This, along with a description of his mouth, “his mouth/Shewed ghastly in the moonlight,” makes him look like a specter, or as David Ellis writes, like “some walking skeleton or corpse” (1805. 4. 410-11; Ellis 51). The speaker notes that he is “clad in military garb,/Though faded yet entire,” and that he has “no attendant, neither dog, nor staff,/Nor knapsack,” which hints that “there is nothing to ‘localize’ the soldier or attach him to his environment” (1805. 4. 414-15, 416-17; Ellis 51). The speaker appears to identify the soldier as a vagrant who cannot be localized, but at the same time he is embarrassed by the extreme immobility of the soldier. His embarrassment is emphasized by his repetitive comments about the immobility: “yet still his form/Kept the same steadiness, and at his feet/His shadow lay, and moved not”; “I wished to see him move, but he remained/Fixed to his place” (1805. 4. 423-25, 429-30). The soldier’s ambiguous posture is also worth taking note of in this context: propped by a milestone, “his
figure seemed/Half sitting, and half standing‖ (1805. 4. 412-13). It can thus be argued that the soldier is located somewhere between sitting and standing, fixity and mobility, life and death, which leads Hartman to call him a “[b]orderer dwelling between life and death” (224-25). There is yet another, even more disturbing aspect of the soldier which is the strange sound issuing from his lips: “From his lips meanwhile/There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain/Or of uneasy thought”; or again, the soldier “still from time to time/Sent forth a murmuring voice of dead complaint,/Groans scarcely audible” (1805. 4. 421-23, 430-32). The speaker decides to stop scrutinizing the soldier, just after describing his murmuring sounds for the second time, as if he can no longer tolerate the inarticulate sound from the soldier’s lips which acts as a kind of calling toward the speaker himself or as if he realizes that the longer he looks, the more enigmatic the soldier becomes.

Coming out of “the shady nook” and hailing the soldier, the speaker first asks him to speak of his history (1805. 4. 436). To this request, the soldier responds by telling a soldier’s tale:

That in the tropic islands he had served,

Whence he had landed scarcely ten days past—

That on his landing he had been dismissed,

And now was travelling to his native home. (1805. 4. 446-49)
Ellis maintains that the tale of service in the tropics places the discharged soldier in a context which is “reassuringly familiar” and that the traveler’s staff, which turns out to have been lying there “neglected in the grass” after all, can act as “at least one of the usual accoutrements of a traveller on the road in Wordsworth’s day” (Ellis 54; 1805. 4. 463). Yet the problem is that, although the speaker can identify the enigmatic “uncouth shape” as a discharged soldier and he can have a seemingly normal communication with him, he never completely gets out of his initial shock and puzzlement.

As a response to the speaker’s hail, the soldier tries to salute the speaker, which is “not exactly comforting,” as Ellis indicates; more specifically, the soldier still remains immobile, fixed to his place after several awkward motions for his salutation (54). The more important thing to point out concerning the discharged soldier’s response is the way he talks in that it renders problematic the speaker’s attempt to properly describe and account for him. Indeed, the speaker mentions the discharged soldier’s way of speaking several times. Firstly, in the scene in which the soldier tells his own history, the speaker describes him as follows:

[H]e in reply

Was neither slow nor eager, but, unmoved,

And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,
A stately air of mild indifference. (1805. 4. 441-44)

Secondly, while the speaker ushers the discharged soldier to a laborer’s cottage, he details the way in which the soldier answers to his question:

Solemn and sublime

He might have seemed, but that in all he said

There was a strange half-absence, and a tone

Of weakness and indifference. (1805. 4. 473-76)

Thirdly, after hearing the discharged soldier’s response to his parting admonition, the speaker says:

At this reproof,

With the same ghastly mildness in his look,

He said, ‘My trust is in the God of Heaven,

And in the eye of him that passes me. (1805. 4. 492-95)

These three scenes show that it is the discharged soldier’s way of speaking, in particular, the profound insensibility or indifference felt in it that thwarts the speaker’s attempt to explain away who the discharged soldier is.

Of crucial importance in this respect is that, even when he is in conversation with the soldier, the speaker is still overwhelmed by the same immobility (‘Was neither slow nor eager, but, unmoved’) and ghostliness (‘With the same ghastly
mildness in his look”) as he witnessed before coming out of hiding (1805. 4. 442, 493; emphasis added). During their walk toward the laborer’s cottage, the speaker is once again astonished by the soldier, because “his tall/And ghastly figure” appears to move “without pain,” which Ellis pinpoints as the scene where “[t]he soldier moves along the earth as if he didn’t belong to it” (1805. 4. 467-68, 466; Ellis 54). The “ill-suppressed astonishment” due to the “ghastly figure” moving “without pain” urges the speaker to impatiently ask questions about his experience in the tropics: “Nor while we journeyed thus could I forbear/To question him of what he had endured/From hardship, battle, or the pestilence” (1805. 4. 467-68, 469-71). As already mentioned, however, the soldier’s strange tone of “weakness and indifference, as of one/Remembering the importance of his theme/But feeling it no longer” prevents the speaker from keeping up his conversation with the soldier (1805. 4. 476-78).

Ellis articulates the encounter between the speaker and the discharged soldier as the soldier’s “threatening, ghost-like intrusion into [the speaker’s] previously agreeable world of dream or vision” (52). This is in part supported by the repetitive use of the word “ghastly” with reference to the soldier’s appearance. But what is interesting is that Ellis’s argument ends with his assertion that the speaker’s impression of the soldier’s ghostliness is “finally and completely dispelled” at the end of the episode, when the soldier thanked the speaker “in a voice that seemed/To speak
with a reviving interest,/Till then unfelt‖ (Ellis 55; 1805. 4. 498-500). According to Ellis, in the last scene, the speaker can be certain that “he [has] been dealing with a fellow man”; indeed, the speaker refers to the soldier as “the poor unhappy man” here (Ellis 55; 1805. 4. 501; emphasis added). What matters for Ellis is thus “the transition from [the speaker’s] initial alarm to the point where he can even reprove the soldier for not doing enough to help himself,” which implies that Ellis concludes the Discharged Soldier episode as “a case of exorcism which leaves [the speaker] … self-satisfied and relieved” (56).

But what if the Discharged Soldier episode cannot be considered simply as an exemplary case in which the speaker succeeds in exorcising the soldier’s ghostliness? With even a bit of attention to the scenes after the speaker and the soldier arrive the laborer’s cottage, we can see that the problem of the soldier’s ghostliness is still not completely settled for the speaker. As Ellis argues, the speaker here treats the soldier as if he were a fellow man, describing him as “a man/By sickness overcome,” “my comrade,” and “the poor happy man”; but at the same time, he is still haunted by “the same ghastly mildness in [the soldier’s] look” (1805. 4. 484-85, 488, 501, 493; emphasis added). This leads us to think of the possibility that the speaker calls the soldier “the poor unhappy man” so as to conceal his own realization that he fails ultimately to understand the soldier and to assimilate him into common humanity
We could recall at this point the speaker’s description of the soldier’s voice: his voice as what “seemed/To speak with a reviving interest,/Till then unfelt” (1805. 4. 498-500; emphasis added). For the word “seemed” makes explicit that the speaker does not convince himself of the way he defines the soldier. As a matter of fact, the speaker repeatedly uses the word “seemed” or “appeared” whenever he tries to explain the soldier from the moment he watches him from the shady nook to the last scene in which they part: “A man more meagre, as it seemed to me,/Was never seen abroad by night or by day”; “his figure seemed/ Half sitting, and half standing”; “As it appeared to me/He travelled without pain”; “Solemn and sublime/He might have seemed” (1805. 4. 408-09, 412-13, 465-66, 473-74; emphasis added).

Consequently, the speaker’s answer to the question “What is the discharged soldier like?” or “Who is he?” still remains less than reassuring even at the moment when he could be said to exorcise the soldier’s ghostliness.

Let us now examine the Discharged Soldier episode from a different perspective, one that eventually calls into question the speaker’s status as a detached observer who keeps a certain distance from the soldier as the observed object. As we have seen above, Lacan’s theory of the gaze sheds important light on the way in which the subject is inscribed in the thing he or she is observing, which Samuel Weber reformulates in terms of his concept of theatricality. The concept of
theatricality, as Weber defines it, designates the situation where “there is no longer the possibility of a stable separation from that which is under consideration” (Legend 19). It should, by the same token, be distinguished from “theory” in the traditional sense which presupposes “a distance that ostensibly permits one to view the object in its entirety while remaining at a safe remove from it” (Weber, Theatricality 3).

To sharpen the sense of what’s at stake with regard to the concept of theatricality, Weber, in his essay “Uncanny Thinking,” undertakes his reading of E.T.A. Hoffman’s tale “The Sandman” which is well known for Freud’s analysis in his writing on the uncanny. Let us focus specifically on the scene which Weber calls the primal scene of “The Sandman,” namely, one in which Nathanael discovers who the Sandman is. Nathanael talks about an encounter he experienced as a young boy: the encounter with the mysterious Sandman who regularly visited his house. The Sandman’s identity remained concealed from Nathanael for a long period, because whenever the Sandman visited his house, Nathanael was forced to go to bed by his parents. But one day Nathanael decided to watch his parents’ meeting with the Sandman, hiding himself “behind the curtain of an open wardrobe standing right next to the door, in which [his] father’s clothes hung” (qtd. in Weber, Legend 10). Weber singles out this scene as the moment when Nathanael “reactions with the scopophilic desire to see the Sandman and thereby to discover just who he really is” (Legend 10).
“Unseen” behind his father’s clothes, Nathanael finally “saw” the Sandman who was identified as the old lawyer, Coppelius.

The important point to stress here is that at the precise moment when Nathanael discovers who the Sandman is, in Weber’s words, when he locks the Sandman into place “as an object of sight, and also as an object of recognition,” he cannot answer properly to the question “What is the Sandman really like?” (Legend 11, 12). Weber contends that the reason Nathanael cannot give a proper answer resides in the fact that “what the Sandman turns out to be like is that to which he should be most unlike,” or more precisely, in the fact that “[w]hat he is like is above all the inhuman” (Legend 12). For example, what revolts Nathanael in this scene is the Sandman’s eyes depicted as “a pair of piercing green catlike eyes,” “[a] strange hissing noise” “escaping through clenched teeth,” and “his large, gnarled, hairy fists” (qtd. in Weber, Legend 12).

What, then, is it that Nathanael watches from his place of hiding? It is the scene in which the Sandman and Nathanael’s father are involved:

Then, Nathanael’s father opened the folding doors of a wall closet; but I saw that what I had long taken to be such was in fact not a wall closet at all, but rather a black crevice…in which there stood a small oven. Coppelius approached it and a blue flame crackled up…over the hearth.
All sorts of strange utensils…stood around. Oh God!—as my old father bent over toward the fire he appeared completely different….A gruesomely convulsive pain seemed to have twisted his soft and honest features into a detestably repulsive and diabolical image. He looked like Coppelius. The latter swung the glowing red tongs, plucking out of the thick smoke brightly blinking masses upon which he then meticulously hammered. To me it was as if human faces appeared all around, but without eyes—instead, disgusting, deep black holes. “Bring the eyes here…here!” cried Coppelius in a muffled, threatening voice. I screamed, and seized…by panic, I plunged from my hiding-place onto the floor. (qtd. in Weber, Legend 13; emphasis added)

In examining this scene, Weber’s emphasis is not on “the violence of a certain disassemblage, which provokes fear and loathing,… but which also evokes fascination and desire,” but on the moment when Nathanael “leaps out of his hiding place and throws himself at the Sandman’s feet” (Legend 14). The moment when Nathanael “plunged from [his] hiding-place onto the floor” is of major importance to Weber in that it paves the way for rereading Hoffmann’s tale in terms of the concept of theatricality. On Weber’s account, Nathanael, by leaping out of his hiding place, “forsakes his role of spectator, seeing but unseen, and takes the plunge…onto the
stage, into the theater, abandoning himself to the dangerous sight of others, despite (and perhaps because) of the risks such exposure entails” (Legend 14).

The Discharged Soldier episode, of course, does not have such a nightmarish scene as found in Hoffmann’s story. But we need to read the Discharged Soldier episode in the light of Weber’s elaboration of the primal scene of “The Sandman,” since the scene in “The Sandman” could be said to epitomize the implications of the concept of theatricality, which leads us to see more clearly what is at stake in the encounter between the speaker and the soldier. The speaker of the Discharged Soldier episode, on seeing the “uncouth shape” at “a sudden turning of the road,” hides himself in “the shade/Of a thick hawthorn” so that he can “mark [the uncouth shape] well,/ [himself] unseen,” which is reminiscent of Nathanael’s scopophilic desire “to see the Sandman and thereby to discover just who he really is” (1805. 4. 401-05; Weber, Legend 10). Weber accentuates the scopophilic desire as the “defensive and reactive desire” which is founded upon “the ostensibly hidden and protected security of an unseen viewing position” (Legend 10, 14). From his place of hiding, Nathanael discovers that the Sandman is the old lawyer, Coppelius. But things become much more complicated by this discovery. For Coppelius as the Sandman disrupts and displaces the very opposition of the human and the inhuman, as shown in Nathanael’s description of his feline traits. More problematically, Nathanael, after identifying the
Sandman as Coppelius, witnesses his father who looks like Coppelius in the unexpected nightmarish scene. As Weber points out, Nathanael tries to put an end to the specter of the Sandman by discovering who he is, but he is eventually situated in a position where he cannot decide whether the Sandman as Coppelius is a human being or not and further where he cannot clearly tell his father from the Sandman. Doesn’t the speaker in the Discharged Soldier episode also endeavor to put an end to the specter of the discharged soldier? He examines in detail the soldier’s appearance from unusual height and thinness through ambiguous physical posture to military uniform. But even after this examination, far from putting an end to the specter of the soldier, he still remains haunted by the soldier’s ghostliness which cannot be assimilated to the opposition of life and death or of fixity and mobility.

Just as Nathanael throws himself from his hiding place into the space where the Sandman and his father stand, so the speaker of the Discharged Soldier episode leaves the unseen viewing position in the shade of a thick hawthorne and exposes himself to the sight of the soldier. Of course, differently from Nathanael who involuntarily plunges himself onto the floor, the speaker seems to move on the basis of his own decision:

Without self-blame

I had not thus prolonged my watch; and now,
Subduing my heart’s specious cowardise,
I left the shady nook where I had stood. (1805. 4. 432-35)

But in this context, it is necessary to take a closer look at what happens just before he makes his decision to stop his watch:

I wished to see him move, but he remained
Fixed to his place, and still from time to time
Sent forth a murmuring voice of dead complaint,
Groans scarcely audible. (1805. 4. 429-32)

This is the speaker’s second description of the soldier’s murmuring sound. Why does the speaker repeatedly go back to the sound? Isn’t it because the murmuring sound is impossible for him to understand, or it by no means has any sense necessary to be understood by him? The speaker delineates the sound as “dead complaint” and as “[g]roans scarcely audible” (1805. 4. 431, 432). But what if this delineation results from his attempt to confer some meaning upon the semi-articulated sound without any sense, or to use Dolar’s phrase, upon “the voice without qualification”? (Dolar, Voice 169). This possibility is clarified by the “as-if” phrase used in the first description of the murmuring sound: “From his lips meanwhile/There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain/Or of uneasy thought” (1805. 4. 421-23; emphasis added). And isn’t this why the speaker looks in astonishment at the soldier who travels “without pain” when
they walk together toward the laborer’s cottage? (1805. 4. 466). The speaker’s seemingly abrupt decision to stop his watch and to address the soldier can be in this respect considered as his effort to conceal that he has already been spellbound by the soldier’s murmuring sound which is unbearable and so irresistible.

What happens to the speaker after he throws up his role of spectator and takes the plunge into the exposed space? The important point to retain here is that, even though he is no longer situated at a safe remove from the soldier, the speaker does not abandon his attempt to keep him at a proper distance; the construction of a narrative is furnished as his another strategy to establish a safety distance from the soldier. Based on the soldier’s answer to the question of “what he had endured/From hardship, battle, or the pestilence,” the speaker tries to construct his narrative about the soldier (1805. 4. 470-71). This is to say that the speaker strives to assimilate the specter of the soldier into “a soldier’s tale” and thereby to assume a position from which he can objectively watch and determine or judge, remaining impervious to the disturbing aspects of the soldier (1805. 4. 445). But this attempt, too, ends in failure, because the soldier’s way of speaking plunges the speaker into new difficulties.

Both Nathanael of Hoffman’s tale and the speaker of the Discharged Soldier episode redirect our attention to the question of detached spectator. For Nathanael, the position of detached spectator, on Weber’s reading, is what he “seeks to assume but is
forced to abandon under the impact of the spectacle he first witnesses, then enters” (Legend 20). The Discharged Soldier episode shows that at the very moment when he is forced to abandon the position of detached spectator, the speaker still exerts himself to keep the position by means of narrative construction. Interestingly, in the course of concluding his exploration of “The Sandman” and issues connected with it, Weber makes an enigmatic remark about the position of detached spectator: “In taking the plunge, however involuntarily, [Nathanael] abandons a distance that has never really protected or prevented him from participating in the scene” (Legend 20; emphasis added). How do we come to terms with this remark? Does this suggest that Nathanael has already participated in the scene from the outset? How, then, should we understand the distance which appears to separate Nathanael from the scene?

Weber’s remark offers a preliminary clue to “the most elementary theatricality of the human condition” elaborated by Žižek in his essay “Neighbors and Other Monsters” (177). According to Žižek’s account, it is the most elementary theatricality of the human condition that is implicated in Lacan’s definition of the Freudian drive as reflexive, as the stance of “se faire…,” more specifically, in his articulation of visual drive as “the drive to make oneself seen” but not as “the drive to see” (“Neighbors” 177). “Our fundamental striving,” Žižek writes, “is not to observe, but to be part of a staged scene, to expose oneself to a gaze” (“Neighbors” 177). This gaze,
of course, should not be interpreted as “a determinate gaze of a person in reality” (“Neighbors” 177-78). Rather, it corresponds to “the nonexistent pure Gaze of the big Other” which is easily misconstrued as divine; as Žižek notes, it is “a gaze of no one, a gaze freely floating around, with no bearer” (“Neighbors” 178). With Lacan’s conception of the gaze in his mind, Žižek maintains that the “two correlative positions, that of the actor on the stage and that of the spectator” are by no means “ontologically equivalent or contemporary”; this is to say that “we are originally not observers of the play-stage of reality, but part of the tableau staged for the void of a nonexistent gaze, and it is only in a secondary time that we can assume the position of those who look at the stage” (“Neighbors” 178). In the Discharged Soldier episode, the relationship between the speaker and the soldier can be reformulated as a kind of defense against this ontological condition, in the sense that the speaker describes the encounter with the soldier as if he can assume the position of detached spectator who looks at the soldier on the stage. Even when he is helplessly exposed to the soldier, he says as if he could overcome the fear and anxiety due to the proximity of the soldier, in terms of narrative construction which ultimately amounts to the introduction of a new distance.

3. The Drowned Man Episode

In the Drowned Man episode, the speaker recollects an event which happened
when he was “a child not nine years old”: it is the unexpected encounter with the drowned man (1805. 5. 474). Let us first give a brief overview of how the boy is confronted with the corpse and how he deals with the fear caused by the confrontation. It is the boy’s chance crossing of an open field that triggers off the process which leads him to encounter with the drowned man: “I chanced to cross/One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,/Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite’s Lake” (1805. 5. 456-58; emphasis added). Wolfson draws attention to the fact that the speaker does not claim that he is “led” or “guided” there but that he “chanced” to cross the field (“Illusion” 920). Interestingly, the word “chance” is evocative of the speaker’s encounter with the soldier in the Discharged Soldier episode, because his encounter is also marked by “chance”; “It chanced a sudden turning of the road/Presented to my view an uncouth shape” (1805. 4. 401-02; emphasis added). Just as, in the Discharged Soldier episode, the “beauteous pictures” rising “in harmonious imagery” the speaker has previously enjoyed emphasizes the abruptness which is characteristic of his chance meeting with the soldier, so the boy of the Drowned Man episode is “entrusted to the care/Of that sweet valley,” which puts into relief the contingency suggested in his encounter with the drowned man (1805. 4. 392, 393; 1805. 5. 451-52).

The boy’s chance crossing of the open field is followed by what Wolfson calls

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8 When it comes to the boy “entrusted to the care/Of that sweet valley,” Wolfson offers a slightly different interpretation; according to her, “‘entrusted to the care’ declares responsive nurturing, making the ‘chance’ wanderings that ensue seem less random than they otherwise might” (“Illusion” 928).
his “obscurely motivated ‘chance’ observation”: “through the gloom/I saw distinctly
on the opposite shore/A heap of garments” (Wolfson, “Illusion” 920; 1805. 5. 459-61).

Assuming that those garments belong to a swimmer, the boy waits for him or her to
come, keeping his eyes on them, but no one appears: “Long I watched,/But no one
owned them” (1805. 5. 462-63). The boy’s watching reminds us of the speaker in the
Discharged Soldier episode who scrutinizes the soldier to discover who he is.

Moreover, the boy’s watching begins when “[t]wilight was coming on,” which
enables us to construe it as a very strained act of attention (1805. 5. 459). With respect
to the description of the “heap of garments” which is the object of the boy’s intense
looking, it is necessary to compare 1799 poem with 1805 revision, since it allows us
to glimpse the boy’s response to the situation. In 1799 poem, the heap of garments is
placed “on the opposite shore,/Beneath a tree and close by the lake side,” “as if left by
one/Who there was bathing”; as Wolfson writes, this is something like a map for a
mysterious spot and a logical conjecture anyone might deduce (1799. 1. 267-68, 268-
69; Wolfson, “Illusion” 929). The specific details about the spot where the heap of
garments is placed, however, are eliminated from the 1805 version. And in the 1805
text, the phrase which emerges as some logical conjecture from the details about the
spot—“as if left by one/Who there was bathing”—is converted into “left as I
supposed/By one who there was bathing,” which has the effect of emphasizing “the
boy’s subjective intervention,” thereby deepening “the sense of mystery and anxiety” the speaker should come to terms with (1805. 5. 461-62; Wolfson, “Illusion” 929; emphasis added).

The next day the boy watches a group of people search the lake for the person who is presumed to be an owner of the garments, and finally he is faced with the drowned man who is grappled up:

At length, the dead man, ’mid that beauteous scene

Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright

Rose with his ghastly face, a spectre shape—

Of terror even. (1805. 5. 470-73)

What interests us here is the way the speaker describes the corpse’s appearance from the lake, because “the dead man” rising “bolt upright” from the lake’s surface has a special resonance, considered in conjunction with the leaping fish the boy saw while he waited for the swimmer the previous night (1805. 5. 470, 471). The dead man rising “bolt upright” is anticipated by the “up-leaping” fish which “snapped the breathless stillness”; in Wolfson’s reading, this is supported by the speaker’s use of definite article “the” in the phrase “the dead man” in the sense that the definite article “the” denotes “something already known and identified” (1805. 5. 465-66; Wolfson, Formal 109). Peter Manning also makes similar remark about the relationship
between the fish’s leaping and the dead man’s rising: “[T]he rising of the corpse amidst the beauteous scene merely repeats more darkly the leaping fish disturbing the stillness” (10). Wolfson makes the further claim that the dead man’s rising “bolt upright” is linked to the boy’s movement before he chances to cross the field: “I was roving up and down alone” (1805. 5. 455; Wolfson, “Illusion” 929; emphasis added). The idea that the dead man’s rising from the lake repeats the fish’s and the boy’s movement is worth taking seriously in that it complicates the opposition of motion and stillness and ultimately life and death.

How, then, does the boy respond to the dead man rising from the lake as if he or she were alive? To this question, we can hardly answer in precise terms, because the speaker’s description ends with the very scene in which he is faced with the dead man’s “ghastly face” (1805. 5. 472). The last part of the poem is devoted to the speaker’s retrospective interpretation of the event recollected from his own boyhood, which opens with this sentence: “And yet no vulgar fear,/Young as I was, a child not nine years old,/Possessed me” (1805. 5. 473-75). The speaker’s assertion that “no vulgar fear…possessed me” requires more careful consideration, since it suggests the possibility that the speaker could rather be swept over by the vulgar fear which he disclaims (1805. 5. 473, 475). In order to have a better understanding of the assertion, Wolfson evokes Hillis Miller’s comment about the rhetoric of Wordsworth’s praise of
London from Westminster Bridge: a “paradoxical power to create as a shimmering mirage lying over their explicit assertions the presence of what they deny” (Miller 306).

Can we not bring Freud’s concept of negation to bear on this issue? “The content of a repressed image or idea,” Freud says in his essay “Negation,” “can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is negated” (19: 235). He sharpens his point about the concept of negation by showing how his patients bring forward their associations during the work of analysis; for instance, when one patient says to the analyst, “[y]ou ask who this person in the dream can be. It is not my mother,” the analyst can emend it to “So it is his mother” (19: 235). Negation, as Freud defines it, is “a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed,” which allows us to read the “no” of “no vulgar fear,” mentioned by the speaker of the Drowned Man episode, as the “hall-mark of repression” (19: 235, 236). Thus, when the speaker of the Drowned Man episode says, “No vulgar fear…possessed me,” this could be interpreted as “I was overwhelmed by vulgar fear, but I prefer to repress the fear.” Wolfson also goes so far as to say that the threat which is implicitly displayed in the syntax of “no vulgar fear” is “heightened by the fuller description…[given] to the centerpiece of memory,” namely, by the description of “the ghastly face” of the corpse in the 1805 version; whereas the sight is simply described as “Rose with his ghastly face” in the 1799 text,
the phrase “a spectre shape—/Of terror even” is added to it in the 1805 text (Wolfson, “Illusion” 928; 1799. 1. 279; 1805. 5. 472-73). According to Wolfson, the added phrase “a spectre shape—/Of terror even” is to be read as disclosing some potential impression and effect which the ghastly face of the corpse leaves upon the boy himself (“Illusion” 928).

What is it that impels the speaker of the Drowned Man episode to insist that he was not possessed by vulgar fear, even after he witnessed the ghastly face of the dead man? Here is his answer:

[M]y inner eye had seen

Such sights before among the shining streams

Of fairyland, the forests of romance—

Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw. (1805. 5. 475-78)

Wolfson, citing Wordsworth’s words, paraphrases this as follows: “[A]n imagination nurtured by books can turn even the most extreme shapes of terror into what Wordsworth calls ‘the calm existence that is mine when I/Am worthy of my self’” (Wolfson, “Illusion” 928; 1805. 1. 360-61). And she uses this as a guiding thread of analysis of textual changes which Wordsworth’s revisions of “The Drowned Man of Esthwaite” occasion. What is of particular importance to Wolfson in her study of the process of revision is the fact that, in the 1805 text, the Drowned Man episode is
reinstalled into Book 5 entitled “Books,” which could be viewed as “an actual ‘re-
vision’ of the 1799 text” and as “a decided reinterpretation of the significance of this 
episode in the growth of the poet’s mind” (“Illusion” 918). According to Wolfson’s 
reading, in the “First Part” of the 1799 poem, the Drowned Man episode is tied up 
with some “effects as cannot here/Be regularly classed”; among these effects, there 
are the poet’s encounter as a five-year-old with the gibbet and his waiting as a 
thirteen-year-old for horses to bear him and his brothers home for the Christmas 
holidays which anticipates directly his father’s death (see Wolfson, “Illusion” 920; 
1799. 1. 255-56). She argues that the relocation of the Drowned Man episode in the 
1805 text serves “to loosen its sequential relation” with those episodes which entails 
“intimations of mortality”; more specifically, in the 1805 text whose immediate 
framework is related to reading and books, the sight of death is assimilated to tales of 
“fairyland” and “romance,” which makes possible the translation of “the literal corpse 
into a literary figure” (“Illusion” 920, 921).

For all her emphasis on the effect of installation of the Drowned Man episode 
in Book 5 entitled “Books,” however, Wolfson soon asks us to bear witness to “the 
specter of death” which revives in the 1805 text “without any protective intercession 
and press against the effort to contain the Drowned Man as a mere example of how 
books mediate a confrontation with death” (“Illusion” 921). Among several instances
of “the specter of death” Wolfson gives us, there is the Winander Boy episode. The
significance here ascribed to the boy of Winander is due to Hartman’s remark that
“the stories of the Boy of Winander and of the drowned man reflect on each other. In
one a buried child appears, in the other a man engulfed” (see Wolfson, “Illusion” 921,
933n10; Hartman 232). Wolfson proceeds to argue that if we pay scrupulous attention
to the central preoccupation of Book 5 as a whole, we can by no means simply
observe that the relocation of the Drowned Man episode into Book 5 allows us to
translate the drowned man into a “merely literary image,” because the very occasion
of Book 5 relies heavily on an awareness of death (“Illusion” 921). Throughout Book
5, according to her, “books and death remain paired imaginings”; in other words, “a
book inspires the dream of the Arab, who is trying to save two books from destruction
by universal deluge,” she writes, “one of which, the symbolic book of poetry, scarcely
temper the knowledge of death but in fact prophesies it” (“Illusion” 921). Wolfson
also adds that “the poet’s ensuing diatribes against the bookish education of children
and the book-corrupted child prodigy hint at the spiritual death of the children of the
earth forecast by the dream” (“Illusion” 921). In the 1805 text, Wordsworth relocates
the Drowned Man episode into Book 5 so as to “hallow,” or in the words of Wolfson,
“include and restrain” the intimations of mortality intensified by the 1799 text and
context (Wolfson, “Illusion” 922). But Wolfson’s close reading of signs and senses of
death resonating in Book 5 leads her to conclude as follows: “Despite Wordsworth’s
determined assignment of the Drowned Man to ‘Books,’…the new context does not
fix stable terms of interpretation for his memory but perpetuates his original
indecisiveness about the incident’s dense core of import’” (“Illusion” 922).

Before going any further, we need to attend to the central premise upon which
Wolfson’s comprehensive account of the process of revision of the Drowned Man
episode is founded. The premise Wolfson repeatedly invokes in her argument is that
“a spirit” or an imagination nurtured by book can hallow and contain even the most
extreme shapes of terror, that is, the dead man’s ghastly face and specter shape. Let us
now approach this premise from a different perspective. What if the books do not
simply hallow the terrible scene which the boy witnessed, but the scene, or more
precisely, the memory of the drowned man as such is constructed on the basis of tales
of “fairyland” and “romance”?

In her essay “The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth’s Revisions of ‘The
Drowned Man of Esthwaite’ 1799, 1805, 1850,” Wolfson begins her argument with a
consideration of the fact that the speaker of the Drowned Man episode compares the
landscape which he, as a boy, encountered to “a dream of novelty” (1805. 5. 453). She
interprets the phrase “a dream of novelty” to mean what is “seemingly new, but
already present in the latent contents of the mind,” which in turn fashions a kind of
logic or pattern that underlies the narrative of the Drowned Man episode (“Illusion” 920). For example, the boy’s crossing of an open field bordering the lake is marked by contingency as shown in the phrase “I chanced to cross/One of those open fields” (1805. 5. 456-57). But here one should note that the fields bordering the lake are described as “shaped like ears,” because the metaphor which, as Wolfson says, seems to “intimate something to be listened for,” resonates strangely with “the trope of listening in the image of the long poles that ‘sound’ the depths of the lake to stir its contents into perceptibility” (1805. 5. 457; Wolfson, “Illusion” 920). The same logic or pattern, in Wolfson’s view, is applied to the relationship between “a fish up-leaping” which disturbs the “breathless stillness” and “the dead man” which “bolt upright/Rose”; in other words, the “fish up-leaping” that disturbs the calm lake appears to be a chance notation like the ear-shaped field, but in fact it can be regarded as “a prefigurative image for the corpse that rises ‘bolt upright’ from the lake,” which is in part demonstrated by the definite article “the” of “the dead man” that suggests “a consequence that had already been accepted” (1805. 5. 465, 466, 470, 471-72; Wolfson, “Illusion” 920). After analyzing in this way a certain logic or pattern which is uncovered in the narrative of the Drowned Man episode, Wolfson asks the following question: “How much of this symbolic interpretation of the lake and lakeside has the poet retrospectively imposed, and how much was already present in
the boy’s mind?” (“Illusion” 920). She comments that the narrative of the Drowned Man episode makes it difficult for us to answer to this question, which is “an index of [the poet’s] struggle with the significance of this episode throughout his revisions” (“Illusion” 920). But if we set Wolfson’s question apart from the issue of revision at stake in her argument, we can think of it as implying that the Drowned Man episode does not exclude the possibility of the adult speaker’s retrospective interpretation of his memory or that in the Drowned Man episode, the speaker’s memory of the traumatic accident is bound up with the fictional. And this establishes a context for the issue which is concerned with the possibility that the speaker’s memory of the drowned man can be constructed on the basis of tales of “fairyland” and “romance.”

To appreciate how the memory of certain traumatic experiences is intertwined with the problem of fictionality, it might be helpful to align the Drowned Man episode with Freud’s case history of the Wolf Man. At stake in the present context is Freud’s interpretation of the wolf dream that opens the path to the primal scene around which the whole case history of the Wolf Man revolves; it is the wolf dream that causes the Wolf Man’s infantile neurosis “which began immediately before his fourth birthday as an anxiety-hysteria (in the shape of an animal phobia), then changed into an obsessional neurosis with a religious content, and lasted with its offshoots as far as into his tenth year” (Freud17: 8). The wolf dream which the Wolf Man had on the
night before his fourth birthday is reproduced by the Wolf Man almost twenty years later during his analysis with Freud:

I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. (17: 29)

The wolf dream is proffered as an instance which endorses Freud’s idea about the relation between the fairy tales and the mental life of children in “The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales,” his essay written before the case history of the Wolf Man was published. In this essay, Freud claims that “[i]n a few people a recollection of their favourite fairy tales takes the place of memories of their own childhood” and that “[e]lements and situations derived from fairy tales are also frequently to be found in dreams” (12: 281). Indeed, the Wolf Man connects his wolf
dream with “the recollection that during these years of his childhood he was most tremendously afraid of the picture of a wolf in a book of fairy tales,” which is later identified as an illustration of the story of “The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats” (Freud 17: 29). Whenever he saw this picture in which “the wolf was standing upright, striding out with one foot, with its claws stretched out and its ears pricked,” he would scream for fear that the wolf should come and eat him up (Freud 17: 30, 16). In addition to the story of “The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats,” another story the Wolf Man heard from his grandfather exercises a decisive influence upon the wolf dream. Here is the story: a tailor suddenly saw a group of wolves during his walking in the forest and climbed up a tree to escape from them. A tailless wolf whose tail had been pulled off by the tailor proposed that they should climb one upon another till the last one could reach him (see Freud 17: 30-31). The Wolf Man tells this story in the course of answering to one of the questions Freud asks about the wolf dream, “How did the wolves come to be on the tree?” (17: 30). As the effect produced by these stories, Freud refers to the Wolf Man’s animal phobia which is distinguished from other similar cases by the fact that “the anxiety-animal was not an object easily accessible to observation (such as a horse or a dog), but was known to him only from stories and picture-books” (17: 32). Freud’s analysis of the wolf dream and fairy tales connected with it leads him to conclude that the wolf is “a first father-surrogate” of the Wolf
Man and that the fear of wolves has something to do with his relationship with his father (17: 32). Freud goes even further by claiming that the wolf dream is preceded by some “unknown scene” which has the following features: “A real occurrence—dating from a very early period—looking—immobility—sexual problems—castration—his father—something terrible” (17: 34). The “unknown scene” which forms the ultimate object of the analyst’s quest, namely, what is called “the primal scene” thus manifests itself.

Now the question arises as to why one should reconsider the Drowned Man episode in terms of Freud’s interpretation of the wolf dream that plays a decisive role in his construction of the primal scene which preoccupies much significant critical writing on the case history of the Wolf Man. Much of the analysis of the wolf dream, as we have seen, depends upon the fairy tales which the Wolf Man recollects; indeed, without recourse to the fairy tales, there seems to be no way Freud can answer to the specific questions about the content of the wolf dream such as “How did the wolves come to be on the tree?” and “Why were there six or seven wolves?” (17: 30, 31). And this alerts us to the possibility that the Wolf Man’s recollection of the wolf dream is not simply intertwined with the fairy tales, but the Wolf Man remembers as the dream an illustration in a picture book of a wolf or fairy tales which made him seized with fear. Bearing in mind Freud’s analysis of the wolf dream, let us reread the first
sentence of the Drowned Man episode, “Well do I call to mind the very week/When I was first entrusted to the care/Of that sweet valley” (1805. 5. 450-52). In this episode, the adult speaker also recollects that he, as an eight-year-old boy, witnessed the dead man rising from the lake. And he adds that he did not suffer from vulgar fear because he had already seen such terrible scenes in tales of fairyland and romance. It is here that our interpretation of the Drowned Man episode gets a new significant turn with Freud’s analysis of the wolf dream. What if the speaker remembers as an accident which he himself experienced the terrible scenes that he saw in tales of fairyland and romance?

But we have to be careful not to rush to a conclusion that the speaker never encountered the drowned man and that his memory of the drowned man consists only of the scenes which he saw in tales of fairyland and romance. This is the point which Freud implicitly emphasizes when he claims that the wolf dream still takes on a reality for the Wolf Man in excess of that created by the fairy tales, although various sources, such as a story which he heard from his grandfather and other fairy tales involving wolves he knew, went into its making. The important thing to note with respect to the reading of the Drowned Man episode in the light of Freud’s analysis of the wolf dream is rather the possibility that the symbolic reality the speaker experienced can be framed by the fictional, that is to say, the possibility that the
fictional can serve as a structure through which the speaker’s experience must be read.

The Drowned Man episode can thus be summarized as follows: the scenes in fairy tales which made the speaker as a child suffer from fear trigger off the enigmatic accident of his encounter with the drowned man, and then in order to defend himself against the feeling of fear caused by the encounter, the speaker goes back to the scenes in fairy tales once again. Or it might be said that the speaker tells only half the story when he insists that “a spirit hallowing what I saw” came from “[s]uch sights” “among the shining streams/Of fairyland, the forests of romance” (1805. 5. 478, 476-77).

The speaker of the Drowned Man episode asserts that, though he witnessed the dead man rising from the lake, he never experienced the “vulgar fear,” but as was indicated earlier, his assertion rather makes much more explicit the extent to which he was possessed by the fear. What, then, is it that causes the “vulgar fear”? To this question, we of course can give a simple reply of “his ghastly face, a spectre shape” (1805. 5. 472). Lacan’s reading of the wolf dream in the case history of the Wolf Man, however, takes us a step further in the direction of reconsidering the simple answer. Lacan’s reading of the wolf dream requires us to make a brief detour through the Wolf Man’s own additional remark about his wolf dream: “The only piece of action in the dream was the opening of the window; for the wolves sat quite still and without
making any movement on the branches of the tree, to the right and left of the trunk, and _looked at me_. It seemed as though _they had riveted their whole attention upon me_” (Freud 17: 29; emphasis added). Focusing on some salient features of the wolf dream, one can say that through a suddenly opened window, the Wolf Man saw six or seven white wolves sitting on a tree which looked intently at him as if they fixed their whole attention upon him. Keeping these features of the wolf dream in mind, let us turn to Lacan’s reading of it:

> In _The Wolf Man_, I would say, to give you the thread that will guide you through your reading, that the sudden appearance of the wolves in the window in the dream plays the function of the s, as representative of the loss of the subject. It is not only that the subject is fascinated by the sight of these wolves, which number seven, and which, in fact, in his drawing of them perched on the tree number only five. It is that their fascinated gaze is the subject himself. (_Four_ 251)

Lacan’s theory of the constitution of the subject which is predicated upon the concept of the gaze is once more summoned as a way of staging a number of issues arising out of the wolf dream. As Shepherdson argues, the experience of being under the gaze corresponds to the “primordial experience which is always a possibility of the subject, but one in which desire is lost, and the subject moves toward its own annihilation”
In order to come to a finer understanding of the subject’s movement toward his own annihilation, we would do well to take a look at Lacan’s following remark: it is “the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity” (Four 185). Here the division of subjectivity can be defined as the subject’s own part passing onto the side of objects for the constitution of the dividing line between subject and the world of objects, and the division of subjectivity establishes itself as the lack or void in the Other. In sum, what Lacan calls “the annihilation of the subject” happens insofar as the subject, in his encounter with the lack or void in the Other (which amounts to the subject’s own fragmentary remainder), determines himself as the object which “shows itself to be missing in the Other” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 84).

When Lacan describes “the sudden appearance of the wolves in the window in the dream” as “representative of the loss of the subject,” he points out that the subject is involved in the sacrificial movement in which he identifies himself with “the object that would make the Other complete” (Lacan, Four 251; Shepherdson, “Pound” 84). Furthermore, the subject’s sacrificial movement of identification with the object helps us to draw up the specific import of Lacan’s assertion that the wolves’ “fascinated gaze is the subject himself” (Four 251). The Wolf Man relates that in the wolf dream which was his “first anxiety-dream,” he had a “great terror” of “being eaten up by the
wolves” (Freud 17: 29). What is it that compels Lacan to argue that “the subject is fascinated by the sight of these wolves” at the precise point where the Wolf Man himself mentions the “great terror”? (Four 251; emphasis added). This question invites us to consider Shepherdson’s comment on the subject’s encounter with the void in the Other. According to Shepherdson, the subject, faced with the void in the Other, “can only be propelled into a profound and unnatural anxiety,” and more importantly, the anxiety “brings with it a peculiar temptation” under which the subject offers himself up as the object that would make the Other complete (“Pound” 84). Shepherdson’s comment is supported by Lacan’s succinct formulation: “At this level, we are not even forced to take into account any subjectification of the subject. The subject is an apparatus. This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, qua lost object” (Four 185). It can thus be argued that when Lacan writes that “the subject is fascinated by the sight of these wolves,” he bears in mind the possibility that the subject is placed under the peculiar temptation caused by his encounter with the void in the Other. In this context, we could go so far as to say that it is the scene in which wolves’ “fascinated gaze is the subject himself” that results from the peculiar temptation.

Let us relate Lacan’s reading of the wolf dream to our initial thread, the boy’s encounter with “the dead man” “with his ghastly face, a spectre shape” rising from the
lake (1805. 5. 470, 472). First of all, we have to take notice of how the speaker delineates the corpse’s appearance from the lake, because it offers a key to understanding what is at issue in the (non-)relationship between the boy and the dead man. As already shown, the dead man rising “bolt upright” is anticipated by the “up-leaping” fish and further by the boy himself “roving up and down,” which points to the situation where the simple opposition of motion and stillness, life and death is broken down (1805. 5. 471, 465, 455; emphasis added). This is why the “dead man” should be interpreted as the point where the opposition of life and death, as the founding opposition of the symbolic order, is disrupted and displaced, to put it another way, as the point which is in the symbolic order but remains irreducible to it. The word “ghastly” or “spectre,” used to depict the dead man’s appearance, also serves to highlight his peculiar status that troubles any neat distinction between life and death.

How does the boy respond to the dead man as the void or lack in the symbolic order? Wordsworth’s text implicitly shows that the boy, confronted with the dead man, is struck with “terror” and “vulgar fear” (1805. 5. 473). It is here that we should call to mind the fact that Lacan rereads the Wolf Man, who has a great terror of the wolves sitting on the tree in his dream, as the subject who “is fascinated by the sight of [the] wolves” (Four 251). According to Shepherdson’s analysis of the Lacanian concept of the gaze, this moment of fascination in the face of the void or lack in the Other has
everything to do with the subject’s sacrificial movement of determining himself as “the primordially lost ‘Thing’ which makes the symbolic order incomplete” (“Pound” 84). This leads us to read the boy of the Drowned Man episode as being fascinated by the sight of the dead man, or more radically, to insist that the dead man’s fascinated gaze is the boy himself. In other words, the boy is implicated in the movement of offering himself up as the object which enables the void within the Other “to be veiled at the very moment of its manifestation” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 84). At stake here is the boy as the subject who identifies with the dead man, namely, the void in the Other, fading or vanishing in this movement of identification (see Shepherdson, “Pound” 84).

4. The Winander Boy Episode

The Winander Boy episode consists of two paragraphs separated by a blank space. The first paragraph begins with a description of a boy who would “stand alone” “[b]eneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,” where he would blow “mimic hootings to the silent owls” and get their response (1805. 5. 393-94, 398). Paul de Man delineates a world introduced in the opening scene as both “responsive” and “interwoven,” which hints at “an intimate and sympathetic contact between human and natural elements” (6). As a commentary of this scene, he cites the following statement from the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: 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.”9 Yet the exchange of echoes between
the boy and the owls stops all of a sudden. And the boy, surprised by the sudden
silence, “hung/Listening”:

And when it chanced

That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,

Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung

Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize

Has carried far into his heart the voice

Of mountain torrents. (1805. 5. 404-09)

What is of particular interest to de Man here is the fact that Wordsworth uses the
unusual phrase “hung/Listening” instead of “standing listening.” The unusual phrase
“hung/Listening” is then linked to the phrase “uncertain heaven,” which leads de Man
to take into account the possibility that “the fundamental spatial perspective [can be]
reversed”: “At the moment when the analogical correspondence with nature no longer
asserts itself,” de Man says, “we discover that the earth under our feet is not the stable

9 See “Wordsworth’s Preface of 1800, with a Collation of the Enlarged Preface of 1802,” included in
an appendix in Lyrical Ballads 1798, 167. Although de Man, in his reading of the opening scene,
focuses on the intimate and sympathetic relation between man and nature, he also asks us to reflect
upon some strain which makes difficult “keeping up a belief in such an ‘interwoven’ world,” saying
that “‘[m]imic hootings’ is not the highest characterization imaginable for the human voice” and that
the cry of the owls is, by itself, “an eerie noise enough on a dark night” (6, 7). One should recall, in this
connection, Andrzej Warminski’s remark about the owls’ response; “Of course the excess of the owls’
response is already somewhat threatening—conveyed in the negatively-charged words
‘screams…concourse wild…jocund din’ and the potential for vertigo in ‘redoubled and redoubled’”
(992).
base...[we feel] as if we were left ‘hanging’ from the sky instead of standing on the ground” (1805. 5. 406-07, 412; de Man 7). According to him, “suddenly related to a sky that has its own movements, alien to those of earth and its creatures,” we are left with “a sudden feeling of dizziness, a falling or a threat of falling” (7).

As soon as the second paragraph begins, the speaker informs us of the boy’s death: “This boy was taken from his mates, and died/In childhood ere he was full ten years old” (1805. 5. 414-15). Crucially, the problematic word “hung” (hangs) reappears in the second paragraph as the predicate of a churchyard where the boy is buried: “the churchyard hangs/Upon a slope above the village school” (1805. 5. 417-18; emphasis added). This enables de Man to argue that the word “hung” (hangs) is “the thematic link between the two parts” and thereby that the boy’s hanging accompanied with the sudden silence is “a prefiguration of his death” (7, 8). Here it is significant that de Man, engaging in a careful analysis of the boy’s death, invokes the earliest version of the poem, written in the first person, in which the boy is identified with the speaker of the poem:

And when it chanced

That pauses of deep silence mocked my skill

Then, often, in that silence while I hung

Listening a sudden shock of mild surprise
Would carry far into my heart the voice

Of mountain torrents. (MS JJ 185-90; emphasis added)

Things become complicated with this autobiographical origin of the poem; for it drives us into an impossible experience, more precisely, the experience of my “looking at the grave in which I lie.” In the words of de Man, the Winander Boy episode is, “in a curious sense, autobiographical, but it is the autobiography of someone who no longer lives written by someone who is speaking, in a sense, from beyond the grave” (9). This provides a motif or a question around which de Man’s reading of the Winander Boy episode turns: how do we speak about and reflect on the unimaginable event of our own death? Reflection on the death of the ‘I’ which “lies truly beyond the reach of reflection,” in de Man’s view, “is only made possible by a linguistic sleight-of-hand” (9n9). It is through the linguistic devices of metaphor and metalepsis that the “posterior events that are to occur to the first person, I, (usually death) are made into anterior events that have occurred to a third person, the boy” (de Man 9-10n9). De Man goes on to specify that the metalepsis, defined as “the metonymic reversal of past and present,” comes to imply “a leap outside thematic reality into the rhetorical fiction of the sign” in this poem (10n9).

What if one attempts to explain from a psychoanalytic perspective the situation of confronting my own grave as an event of the past which is a central
preoccupation of de Man’s reading of the Winander Boy episode? Let us start off with
Freud’s reference to death in his essay “Thought for the Times on War and Death.”
Here he recounts two other relations to death: “The one which we may ascribe to
primaeval, prehistoric men, and the one which still exists in every one of us, but
which conceals itself, invisible to consciousness, in the deeper strata of our mental
life” (14: 292). Moreover, when it comes to one’s own death, Freud writes that it was
certainly “just as unimaginable and unreal for primaeval man as it is for any one of us
to-day” (14: 293). Ellie Ragland paraphrases this on the basis of the idea Lacan
provides in his seminar on psychosis: “No person can truly consider his own death
because neither death nor birth have a solution in the signifier. This gives existential
value to the neuroses” (102). This leads her to claim that death and birth are “mentally
unrepresentable” in the sense that they are “enigmatic at the level of cause and effect,”
to put it in a different way, that they “lie at a juncture of impasse in the real” (102).

According to Johnston’s account, the Lacanian concept of foreclosure both
illuminates and gives new resonance to the issue of one’s own death which can never
be understood in the signifier. The concept of foreclosure in question should be
construed as a specific defense mechanism in which “an element is rejected outside
the symbolic order just as if it had never existed” (Evans 65). Johnston emphatically
asserts that death “cannot be repressed in the standard sense of the term,” because
“repression involves the barring of an ideational representation (a Freudian Vorstellung) from the sphere of conscious cognizance” (Ontology 39). In other words, one’s own death doesn’t have “any correlative psychical inscription due to its absolute exclusion from the ontogenetic history of the living individual,” and in this sense, it cannot “be subjected to defense mechanisms suited for use against Vorstellungen” (Johnston, Ontology 39). It is for this reason that Johnston considers one’s own death as foreclosed rather than repressed. We can see even more clearly what he judges crucial in respect to “the subject’s understanding of his or her ownmost mortal finitude” in the following formulation: “adequate representational mediators for ontological-material finitude would be intrinsically missing/lacking in any and every unconscious” and thus the “finitude would be fundamentally foreclosed as a necessary point of absence within any and every psyche” (Ontology 38, 39). Thus the problem of the subject’s understanding of his or her own mortal finitude constitutes a provisional entry into the psychoanalytic notion of fundamental fantasy.

What is the fundamental fantasy? In their essay “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis offer a compelling account of how the notion of Urphantasien—this is translated into primal or original fantasy by Laplanche and Pontalis, and into fundamental fantasy by Žižek—is brought within Freud’s discussion of the origin of the subject. For Laplanche and Pontalis, the primal
or original fantasy is the notion which Freud first mentions in his text entitled “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease,” but it is used marginally in Freud’s study (see Laplanche and Pontalis 31n29). Laplanche and Pontalis indicate that the original fantasies are intimately related to “problems of origin which present themselves to all human being”; this is to say that “the primal scene pictures the origin of the individual; fantasies of seduction, the origin and upsurge of sexuality; fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference between the sexes” (19). It can be said that the problems of origin function as “a lowest common structural/functional denominator” in those original fantasies (Johnston, *Ontology* 33-34). Johnston attributes our obsession with matters of origin to the fact that we are “essentially finite being[s],” more precisely, “mortal creature[s] born … into a world not of [our] own making”; this is why we cannot but rely on the fantasy, in pursuing the question of origin (*Ontology* 34). In the context of this discussion which highlights that the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy affords us a new approach to the problem of origin, what is important is to get the precise idea of what the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy means. And Zupančič’s elaboration of the Kantian transcendental illusion which could be coupled with the fundamental fantasy, in this connection, may be helpful. Zupančič observes that the transcendental illusion is not “the illusion of something, it is not a false or distorted representation of a real object,” but rather “the
name for something that appears where there should be nothing”; to put it another way, the illusion “consists of ‘something’ in the place of ‘nothing,’ it involves deception by the simple fact that it is, that it appears” (“Comedy” 69). As mentioned above, finite subjectivity cannot construct knowledge of his or her mortal finitude, which means that there is a “rift of a necessary incompleteness within the fabric of knowledge” (Johnston, *Ontology* 34). The very rift or nothingness which is engendered by the subject’s finitude is “inevitably occluded by a fantasy as transcendental illusion wherein, literally, something appears ‘in the place of nothing’” (Johnston, *Ontology* 34).

Considering as an epitome of a fantasy of origins an individual’s imaginings about his or her own conception and birth, Johnston asks us to look more closely at Žižek’s articulation of a gaze present at the subject’s own conception:

The basic paradox of the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy consists in a kind of time loop—the “original fantasy” is always the fantasy of the origins—that is to say, the elementary skeleton of the fantasy-scene is for the subject to be present as a pure gaze before its own conception or, more precisely, at the very act of its own conception. The Lacanian formula of fantasy (S ◇ a) denotes such a paradoxical conjunction of the subject and the object *qua* this impossible gaze: the “object” of
If one paraphrases the “paradoxical conjunction of the subject and the object qua this impossible gaze” in terms of what has already been examined concerning the Lacanian concept of the gaze, one can say that it indexes the point where the subject is inscribed in or involved with the object; in this context, the object is nothing but the very scene or act of the subject’s own conception. And on Žižek’s account, implied within the subject’s fantasy of his or her own death is the same configuration as the subject’s fantasy about his or her own conception and birth. In his book *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters*, Žižek comments on a person entertaining the notion of his own death:

> When one indulges in fantasies about one’s own death, one always imagines oneself as miraculously surviving it and being present at one’s own funeral in the guise of a pure gaze which observes the universe from which one is already absent, relishing the imagined pathetic reactions of relatives, and so on. We are thereby again at the fundamental time-loop of the fantasy. (22)

With regard to the Winander Boy episode, placing his emphasis on the word “hung”
(hangs) as the thematic link between the two parts of the poem, de Man endeavors to tease out its specific implication; the word “hung” and the phrase “uncertain heaven” connected with it allow him to interpret the boy’s hanging as his hanging from the sky instead of standing on the ground. De Man goes on to argue that the “dizziness revealed in the ‘hung/Listening…’ has indeed resulted in a fall, has been the discovery of a state of falling which itself anticipated a fall into death” (8). This is, however, followed by his assertion that the fall “is steadied” when the uncertain heaven is received into the lake, because it is the precise moment “when sheer dizziness is changed into reflection” (8). The question now becomes: how can we reformulate a series of implications derived from the word ‘hung’ (hangs) on the basis of the account of fundamental fantasy? Concerning the dizziness felt in the hanging from the sky, one can read it as what originates from confronting with the hole or void of death, or to use Johnston’s phrase, with “the enigma of mortal finitude…[functioning] like an abyssal vortex” (Ontology 38). In de Man’s reading, when the uncertain heaven is received into the lake, the fall occurs, but it is “cushioned,” since reflection or meditation is enabled by the movement of falling. But based on the account of the fundamental fantasy, can’t we say that at the very moment when the uncertain heaven is received into the lake, the subject relentlessly falls into the void of death without the possibility of reflection? This also prompts us to redefine the blank space between
two parts of the poem as embodying the void or abyss of death. What, then, results from the subject’s falling into the abyss of death? The result is nothing but the fantasy-scene in which the subject is inscribed in the very scene of his own death: “I have stood/Mute, looking at the grave in which he [I] lies” (1805. 5. 421-22). This is reminiscent of the fantasy about one’s own death, as introduced earlier, where one is “present at one’s own funeral in the guise of a pure gaze which observes the universe from which one is already absent” (Žižek, Indivisible 22). The problematic scene of the Winander Boy episode where “I” am looking at the grave in which “I” lie can thus be seen as paradigmatic of the “paradoxical conjunction of the subject and the object qua this impossible gaze” (Žižek, Enjoyment 197).
CHAPTER THREE

Speaking Well of the Encounter with Margaret: *The Ruined Cottage*

At the beginning of *The Ruined Cottage*, the narrator chances upon “a ruined cottage, four clay walls/That [stare] upon each other,” toiling “with languid feet” “[a]cross a bare wide Common” in the heat of the summer day. And he finds that “an aged Man,” who turns out to be a Pedlar, stretches “on a bench” “[b]eside the door” of the cottage (B 36-37). The Pedlar, who sees “[t]hings which [the narrator] cannot see,” tells him the story of the cottage’s last inhabitant, Margaret (B 130). Margaret, who lived with her husband Robert and two children in the cottage, was left “[u]nutterably helpless” after Robert abruptly abandoned her to enlist in “a troop/Of soldiers going to a distant land” (B 314, 327-28). She awaited Robert’s return, repeating “the same sad question” about him to whomever she met, and she often wandered far among the fields, not taking care of her children (B 512). She, who “lingered in unquiet widowhood,/A wife, and widow,” eventually died as the “[l]ast human tenant of these ruined walls” (B 483-84, 528).

According to Karen Swann, Margaret is one of the “abandoned and suffering women who people sensational fiction and monthly-magazine poetry of the late eighteenth century” (84). But it is necessary to undertake a close reading of the

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10 *The Ruined Cottage* (MS. B), 30-31, 19, 18. Citations from *The Ruined Cottage* are hereafter given, as required, by B or D and line number. Among the two complete manuscripts, MS. B and MS. D, I will use MS. B as the main text for my argument and supplement it with passages from MS. D.
familiar figure of Margaret, or more precisely, the Pedlar’s story of his encounter with her, because this story enables us to prepare the way for insight into a poetic discourse that transmits the moment of resistance to meaning. Let us start with Hartman’s comment which attaches considerable importance to the narrative structure of The Ruined Cottage; according to him, the Pedlar’s tale, instead of “centering transparently on Margaret,” becomes “a story about the relation of teller to tale,” achieved by “the introduction of the poet as a third person, which allows the accent to fall on the way the [P]edlar confronts Margaret’s passion” (139). The complex narrative frame of The Ruined Cottage is examined by Swann as well, although in a different context. Bringing her thought to bear on the question of what distinguishes “Wordsworth’s poetry of suffering from the popular fiction his poems habitually engage,” she specifies that Wordsworth uses “a mediating narrative consciousness” so as to “interpose distance between the reader and the narrative of suffering,” thereby “encouraging a meditative rather than a stimulated response to painful events,” and that he invents a “complex narrative frame” which directs “attention to narrative acts themselves and thus invite[s] the public to reflect on its own investments in sensationalism” (84).

This consideration of the narrative frame of The Ruined Cottage directs us back to another Wordsworth poem about an abandoned and suffering woman, “The
Thorn,” for what is ultimately at stake in “The Thorn” is also the way in which a narrator (here, a retired captain) tells the story of a woman (here, Martha) to his interlocutor. Indeed, James Averill, defining “The Thorn” as “an experiment upon the formula of The Ruined Cottage,” asks us to take note of the similarities between the two poems; for instance, firstly, “[t]he central figure in each is a deserted woman who lingers around a spot made significant by her suffering,” and secondly, both poems “draw their titles from the place where the suffering occurs, suggesting the centrality of the physical objects that connect the present to the past history of the place” (171).

But what is more crucial to us is Averill’s remark about the narrative structure of “The Thorn”: with the narrative structure of The Ruined Cottage in mind, he points out that in “The Thorn,” a “Pedlar of the seas, the retired ‘captain of a small trading vessel,’ tells the story of female suffering to an increasingly involved auditor” (172). He goes on to say that in “The Thorn,” Wordsworth “recapitulates the elements that constitute The Ruined Cottage, its subject, narrator, and audience, and pushes them to extremity” (173). This means that The Ruined Cottage, unlike “The Thorn” which is marked by an unstable dramatic frame, can be described as “the carefully controlled fiction of two men talking in the noon shade about the sad events of an earlier time,” and the Pedlar of The Ruined Cottage can be regarded as one who “has the decency to talk about [Margaret] in a highly restrained blank verse, carefully pruned of excess
and sensationalism” (Averill 173).

Yet what if the Pedlar, far from being “cool and philosophically optimistic,” is a man, “obsessed, alternately fascinated and horrified by the dark truth to which he clings,” just as is the hysterical narrator of “The Thorn”? (Averill 173). We can problematize Averill’s rather simple exposition of the relation between “The Thorn” and *The Ruined Cottage* by reconsidering the question implicit in Hartman’s comment on *The Ruined Cottage*: how does the Pedlar confront Margaret’s passion? What should be taken into account with respect to the Pedlar’s confrontation with Margaret is that Margaret, who gave a “daughter’s welcome” to the Pedlar whenever he appeared, was turned into an enigmatic being who could not be penetrated into even by the Pedlar’s eye “which evermore/Looked deep into the shades of difference/As they lie hid in all exterior forms” (B 149, 94-96). Let us look more closely at a specific scene in which the Pedlar confronts Margaret, when he first visits the cottage after Robert’s disappearance:

Margaret looked at me

A little while, then turned her head away

Speechless, and sitting down upon a chair

Wept bitterly, I wist not what to do

Or how to speak to her. Poor wretch! at last
She rose from off her seat—and then—Oh Sir!

I cannot tell how she pronounced my name:

With fervent love and with a face of grief

Unutterably helpless and a look

That seemed to cling upon me, she inquired

If I had seen her husband. As she spake

A strange surprize and fear came o’er my heart

And I could make no answer. (B 306-18)

At this moment, language can only present experience as unintelligible; speech verges on silence. The Pedlar does not know “how to speak to her” and “cannot tell how she pronounced [his] name” (B 310, 312). He is placed in a situation in which a “strange surprize and fear” prevent him from properly responding to Margaret’s question about her husband; he seems to be overwhelmed by her “face of grief/Unutterably helpless” (B 317, 313-14). Discussing the Pedlar’s description that as Margaret “spake/A strange surprize and fear came o’er my heart,” Joel Faflak claims that it shows the possibility that “Margaret insists on being heard in other ways,” if “not by speech”; in other words, that “[t]he affect of her voice continues to mesmerize the Pedlar” (B 316-17; Faflak 89). There is another passage which Faflak tries to read so as to explore the spell-binding effect which Margaret’s speech and voice produce:
The story linger in my heart. I fear

’Tis long and tedious, but my spirit clings

To that poor woman: so familiarly

Do I perceive her manner, and her look

And presence, and so deeply do I feel

Her goodness, that not seldom in my walks

A momentary trance comes over me. (D 362-69)

What is interesting here is that Faflak asks us to attend not to this scene itself, but to the Pedlar’s response to it. Faflak argues that it is by “mus[ing] on” Margaret as “one/By sorrow laid asleep” that the Pedlar defends himself against the “momentary trance,” namely, the “mesmerizing suspension of reason” (D 370-71, 369; Faflak 90). Yet Margaret’s grief is inscribed in the Pedlar’s heart and soul despite “his attempt to distinguish intellect from the chaos of her unconscious”; this is why the Pedlar repeats “It would have grieved/Your very heart to see her” fourteen lines later as “it would have griev’d/Your very soul to see her” (Faflak 90; D 361-62, 375-76).

The scenes which Faflak takes up to examine the spell-binding effect of Margaret’s voice and speech upon the Pedlar also occupy Wolfson’s attention. She begins with Wordsworth’s comment, in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, on the
Poet’s capacity for sympathy: “So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes,…to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs.”

While the Pedlar tells of his confrontation and conversation with Margaret who took to wandering far after the loss of her eldest child, he confesses to the narrator that “I feel/The story linger in my heart. I fear/’Tis long and tedious, but my spirit clings/To that poor woman” (D 363-65). Wolfson sees this as the moment when the Pedlar’s own feelings are confounded and identified with Margaret’s, in other words, as the moment when “the lingering of a story in the heart and the clinging of imagination to what is absent suggest an intensity of response verging on the disorders of Margaret’s own imagination” (Questioning 106). Wolfson goes even further when she concerns herself with the scene in which the Pedlar, despite himself, was drawn into Margaret’s sighs: “While by the fire/We sate together, sighs came on my ear/I knew not how and hardly whence they came” (B 424-26). “The how and whence,” Wolfson writes, “bind them so together that it seems possible for [the Pedlar] to become Margaret’s surrogate” (Questioning 107). Indeed, the possibility that the Pedlar wanders far among the fields, repeating Margaret’s sad question about Robert—that the Pedlar can, in this sense, function as Margaret’s surrogate—is
reflected in Margaret’s last request: she “begged/That wheresoe’er I went I still would
ask/For him whom she had lost” (B 480-82).

How, then, does the Pedlar respond to this situation in which his own feelings
are confounded and identified with Margaret’s? To elucidate the Pedlar’s response,
Wolfson examines this passage:

This tale did Margaret tell with many tears:
And when she ended I had little power
To give her comfort and was glad to take
Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
To cheer us both. (B 333-37)

According to Wolfson’s account, here, “the very impotence of grief” compels the
Pedlar to “retreat from [grief’s] full expression and almost willfully to deny its call
upon his imagination” (Questioning 107). More significantly, the Pedlar’s confession,
“I had little power/To give her comfort,” immediately accompanies the “revisionary
gladness of building up ‘a pile of better thoughts’,,” which, in Wolfson’s view, derives
from the Pedlar’s needs more than Margaret’s (B 334-35, 338; Wolfson, Questioning
107). Wolfson further claims that the Pedlar takes “those words that disengage him
from [Margaret’s] tears”—“to take/Such words of hope from her own mouth”—and
then “ascribes those tears to an emotional source that eases his own mind,” saying that
“she looked around/As if she had been shedding tears of joy” (Wolfson 107; B 335-36, 339-40). The Pedlar, in danger of being confounded and identified with Margaret, seems to make desperate efforts to keep her at a proper distance. As Swann puts, the Pedlar’s “vigilance against overenear responses to suffering is prompted by the intensity of his identification with Margaret” (Swann 94n2). There is another scene which helps to understand the Pedlar’s identification with Margaret. This is when the Pedlar first visits the cottage after learning of Robert’s disappearance: “When I had reached the door/I found that she was absent. In the shade/Where now we sit I waited her return” (B 360-62). Swann notes that this is the moment when the Pedlar becomes involved in “an unsettling experience of abandonment”: “For an hour he wastes out his abandonment (‘Ere this an hour/Was wasted’) with ‘impatience,’ restlessly pacing to and fro (‘Back I turned my restless steps’), increasingly feeling the ‘desolation’ of the spot” (Swann 84-85; B 378-79). This scene shows us the Pedlar, deserted or abandoned like Margaret, or more radically, the Pedlar who has become Margaret.

Concerning the question of how the Pedlar confronts Margaret’s passion, one can say that, in the words of Faflak, “[t]he affect of [Margaret’s] voice continues to mesmerize the Pedlar,” or that the Pedlar is “so affected [by Margaret] that the burden of [her] mystery becomes his own,” as Wolfson indicates (Faflak 89; Wolfson, Questioning 106). Moreover, the Pedlar’s defensive gestures, entailed in his
confrontation with Margaret, make more explicit “the persistence of Margaret in his imagination” and his inability to explain away Margaret in a proper way (Wolfson, *Questioning* 107). Faflak, Wolfson and Swann thus focus eloquently on a series of passages in *The Ruined Cottage* which demonstrate that the fundamental unintelligibility or strangeness of Margaret plunges the Pedlar into a great difficulty: that of assuming a position as a storyteller which is sufficiently separated from Margaret as the object he seeks to describe. This difficulty in turn provokes him to some kind of anxiety. Nevertheless the Pedlar is still telling the story of Margaret or in some sense “representing” her. What is remarkable here is that he does not simply attempt to localize or remove the anxiety he experiences when he is faced with Margaret. Does this mean that he is striving to transmit the void in meaning which Margaret presents and the anxiety involved in it?

Before embarking on an analysis of this issue, let us make a detour through Kurt Fosso’s discussion of the Pedlar’s story of Margaret on the basis of Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia. In his essay “Community and Mourning in William Wordsworth’s *The Ruined Cottage, 1797-1798,*” Fosso argues that the history of Margaret transmitted by the Pedlar “initiates a complex mourning-work which serves to bind together him and the poem’s narrator as a memorializing community” (332-33). Fosso’s discussion alerts us to the idea that the tale of Margaret
is “preceded by a blocked and unfinished mourning,” making clear that Margaret’s troubled mourning acts as “the raison d’être of the poem as a whole, for the latter is occasioned and produced by the conversation of the two travelers at a ‘ruin’ owed to her ruinous inability to mourn and work through a mourning process” (333, 334). In the Pedlar’s description, Margaret’s suffering begins with Robert’s enlistment, seemingly caused by the hard economic conditions. However, Margaret’s tragedy, in Fosso’s view, is mainly ascribed to her uncertainty about Robert’s fate, rather than to his enlistment, his abandonment of her, or the hard economic conditions. Although Margaret keeps repeating “[t]he same sad question” about Robert until her death, she learns “[n]o tidings of her husband: if he lived/She knew not that he lived; if he were dead/She knew not he was dead” (B 512, 436-38). Margaret is thus condemned to linger “in unquiet widowhood,/A wife, and widow”; not having the alternative of wife “or” widow, she remains the wife “and” widow of “one thus unable to be mourned” (B 483-84; Fosso 334). This amounts to saying that her mourning of Robert “was and remains aporetic, unresolved, and oddly interminable” (Fosso 334). Recalling Freud’s account of mourning and melancholy, Fosso observes that Margaret’s troubled mourning results in “her melancholy and its symptomatic listlessness, self-neglect, and reveries of reunion—and, subsequently, in her decline and death” (334).

Fosso’s essay is centered primarily on how Margaret’s troubled mourning
“provides the text’s implicit basis for tale-telling, dialogue, and the travelers’ association as mourners” (334). In order to better understand the relationship between Margaret’s “broken” mourning and what Fosso calls “the reactivation of [the] broken mourning,” we would do well to review briefly Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholy (Fosso 336). According to Freud’s account in “Mourning and Melancholia,” mourning is defined as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (14: 243). “[A]lthough mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life,” Freud says, “it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment” (14: 243-44).

Compared with the work of mourning as the so-called normal response to loss, melancholia “contains something more than normal mourning”:

[Melancholia] is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved object; but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning. The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and comes into the open….If the love for the object…takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the
hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. The self-tormenting in melancholia...signifies...a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject’s own self in the ways we have been discussing. (Freud 14: 250-51)

Žižek, in his essay “Melancholy and the Act,” redefines, in terms of the structure of sublation (Aufhebung), Freud’s distinction between normal mourning which results in “the successful acceptance of a loss” and pathological melancholy in which “the subject persists in his or her narcissistic identification with the lost object”: “the work of mourning,” Žižek writes, “has the structure of sublation...through which we retain the notional essence of an object by losing it in its immediate reality,” whereas “in melancholy the object resists its notional sublation” (658, 659).

In The Ruined Cottage, if Margaret’s melancholic suffering, as Fosso implies, stems from “her ruinous inability to mourn and work through a mourning process,” then according to Freud’s account, Margaret, in her narcissistic identification with Robert, abuses and debases herself, or makes herself suffer and derives sadistic satisfaction from the suffering; in Žižek’s view, she remains unconditionally fixed on Robert as the lost object (Fosso 334; see Žižek, “Melancholy” 660). Regarding this
unconditional fixation, Margaret’s ceaseless repetition of the “same sad question” about Robert, which makes her life “a pathetic rehearsal of this vain inquiry,” has a special resonance (B 512; Wolfson, Questioning 106). How, then, are we to understand Fosso’s point that Margaret’s troubled mourning inaugurates “the rehearsals of mourning that compose the poem”? (337). What does Fosso mean by the phrase “rehearsals of mourning”? The “rehearsals of mourning” could be said to index “the ongoing mourning of mourning” which is initiated by Margaret’s unfinished work of mourning and then continues to be performed in the Pedlar’s story as transmitted to the narrator (Fosso 345).

Let us note the fact that The Ruined Cottage is the story of Margaret as transmitted by the Pedlar to the narrator; the question of transmission thus offers a key to understanding how the Pedlar invokes Margaret. To pursue this, we need to examine the scene in which the Pedlar suddenly stops telling the story of Margaret and then resumes it at the narrator’s request. What is of particular interest in this scene is the narrator’s response to the Pedlar’s story of Margaret. The narrator delineates the Pedlar’s story as follows:

He had rehearsed

Her homely tale with such familiar power,

With such a countenance of love, an eye
So busy, that the things of which he spake

Seemed present, and, attention now relaxed. (B 266-70)

This tale induces “a heartfelt chillness in [the narrator’s] veins,” and soon

“impelled/By a mild force of curious pensiveness,” the narrator begs the Pedlar to resume his story (B 271, 276-77). Faflak argues that the narrator’s responses here suggest “the mesmerizing effects of the Pedlar’s telling in the [n]arrator” that is reminiscent of the scene in which the Pedlar is mesmerized by Margaret’s voice (88-89). Interestingly, the Pedlar, accepting the narrator’s request, gives a compelling depiction of his own story of Margaret as a “tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed/In bodily form” (B 292-93). This leads Fosso to pose a question which is especially important for grasping what is at stake in *The Ruined Cottage* as a tale transmitted by the Pedlar to the narrator: “[H]ow [is it] that a silent tale of ‘things’ that resist or exceed a clothing of words can be ‘rehearsed’ in such a way that it induces chills and ‘curious pensiveness’ in the listener”? Or similarly, “How can ‘silent suffering[s]’ be ‘rehearsed’ and conveyed?” (341). To this question, Fosso answers that Margaret’s “inarticulate sufferings arise from a grief that cannot speak its loss save as melancholy fantasies and distracted wanderings,” but that “it is just such grief that carries over from past to narrative present as a potential that both initiates and acts upon the two mourners’ mourning of nonmourning” (341-42). Noting that Margaret’s “broken”
mourning causes the narrator to feel “impotence of grief,” Fosso claims that this “impotence of grief” should be understood as “a paradoxically potent impotency whose interminable character lies precisely in its troublesome status as a ‘mourning’ in quotation marks and at a ‘distance’ from its object” (D 500; Fosso 342). The Pedlar’s narrative as well as the narrator’s, as a kind of “elegiac history,” is bound to keep a distance from its object, Margaret; it seeks to close this distance but cannot, and this is why these narratives are regarded as “a medium characterized by loss” (Fosso 342). The “unreachable and nonrecoverable character” of the loss, as Fosso articulates it, implies that the Pedlar and the narrator, through their work of mourning of Margaret or through their representation of Margaret, “can approach only at infinity, without ever actually being able to reach” Margaret or her truth (Fosso 342; Zupančič, Shadow 147).

But one can develop a more nuanced account of the Pedlar’s and the narrator’s work of mourning of Margaret by examining Lacan’s famous thesis, developed in Television, Encore and elsewhere, that the truth is “not-whole (or not-all).” Let us first give an overview of Zupančič’s elaboration of this idea, which begins with her attention to Lacan’s analysis of the statement “I am lying” (see Lacan, Four 138-40). Here is her brief summary of Lacan’s analysis of this statement:

Everytime we say “I am lying,” in a conversation, we are positing
something like: (It is true that) “I am lying.” But the moment we try to eliminate this from what was said, and formulate it as a statement at another meta-level, we get: “It is true that I am lying,” which again contains and states something more: “It is true that it is true that I am lying,” and so on….In short, if we eliminate the level of enunciation from the statement by formulating this enunciation itself as a statement, placing it on a different level, then the original problem only multiplies.

(Shadow 140-41)

By means of the example “I am lying,” Lacan sheds important light on the possibility that “a statement is, in itself, always-already twofold,” that is, the possibility that “the subject in his/her speech constantly announces his/her elusive dimension without even wanting or noticing it” (Zupančič, Shadow 139; Pfaller 226-27). Bearing in mind the configuration implied in the statement “I am lying”—the level of enunciation as an excess sticking to the level of the statement—we can reformulate the thesis that truth is “not-whole” in the following way: “[W]hat makes the truth not-whole is not some fraction or share of lie in it” nor even some statement that has not yet been made but that might, with further speech, complete the truth (Zupančič, Shadow 140). Rather, truth is “not-whole” because the symbolic order includes and produces a dimension that is unspeakable, which is to say that what prevents us from saying the whole truth.
is “not a lack, but an excess, a surplus that sticks to whatever we say” (Zupančič, *Shadow* 141). The crucial claim to be maintained here is that truth is always both the statement and the surplus over it; as Zupančič indicates, we should not “reduce the truth entirely to knowledge or the statement,” nor “locate truth exclusively in this surplus” or in a (surplus) *jouissance* (*Shadow* 142).

We are now in a position to review the Pedlar’s work of mourning in terms of the relationship between the statement and the surplus over it, or in other terms, between knowledge and *jouissance*. Considered in this context, the truth of Margaret could be said to consist of both the Pedlar’s statement or knowledge of her and the surplus *jouissance* over that. But in Fosso’s reading, the surplus *jouissance* that “silently accompanies” the Pedlar’s statement about Margaret—that emerges with and through his knowledge of Margaret—is “eliminated by being isolated and retroactively posited” as the unfathomable ground or condition of the knowledge of her; that is, as “the text’s implicit basis for tale-telling, dialogue and the travelers’ association as mourners,” to use Fosso’s own phrase (Zupančič, *Shadow* 146; Fosso 334). At this point, Fosso’s reading should be supplemented by the ethics of speaking well which preoccupies Lacan’s attention in *Television*, since the ethics of speaking well makes clear that the surplus *jouissance* cannot be separated or eliminated from the Pedlar’s statement or knowledge of Margaret. How, then, can we speak well of the
surplus jouissance? This is the question which McNulty asks, saying that the surplus jouissance motivates the performance of Lacan’s interview in Television from the beginning: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real” (see McNulty 215; Lacan, Television 3). If “not all” of the truth can be “brought under the aegis of the signifier,” how should one “find one’s way in dealing with” something more? (McNulty 216; Lacan, Television 22). Problematizing any swift answer to this question, McNulty insists that “what is certain” with regard to jouissance is that “the ethics of [speaking well] will not involve finding an equivalent for it, making a translation, or forcing words on its silence” (216). She also directs our attention to the term “gay savoir” that Lacan uses to characterize the ethics of speaking well in Television. The term “gay savoir” is made by inserting into the word savoir the meaning of which is knowledge the “ça” which is “the French translation of Freud’s es, or ‘id’”—in other words, which points to “that part of the real that eludes the signifier” (Lacan, Television 22; McNulty 206). Of significance here is that the term “gay savoir” puts even more sharply the idea that knowledge always already includes within itself surplus jouissance which it cannot fully delimit.

Thus, we are led by the Lacanian conception of truth and by the ethics of
speaking well to pose a question concerning the Pedlar’s tale of Margaret: if the Pedlar tells “the history of the ruined cottage’s last inhabitant, Margaret,” as Fosso writes, can we say that the Pedlar, in his telling of the history of Margaret, also constantly announces “something more,” or a surplus *jouissance* irreducible to that history? In this connection, it is necessary to take a closer look at the scene in which the Pedlar first hears from Margaret of Robert’s disappearance. Margaret details to the Pedlar all that happened in reference to Robert’s disappearance: about two months earlier, Robert left without “tak[ing] a farewell of” her, and on that day she found “*[w]ithin her casement*” a “purse of gold,” he sent a stranger to inform her that he “joined a troop/Of soldiers going to a distant land” (see B 318-32). But this is not all. There is something more that uncannily accompanies and overlaps Margaret’s description; at stake here is nothing less than her tears, and the Pedlar’s anxiety caused by them. On seeing the Pedlar, Margaret “turned her head away/Speechless, and sitting down upon a chair/Wept bitterly,” which led him to confess that “I wist not what to do/Or how to speak to her” (B 307-10). Then, “with a face of grief” and “a look/That seemed to cling upon” the Pedlar, she asks if he saw her husband, which makes a “strange surprize and fear” come over the Pedlar’s heart (B 313-15, 317). After hearing the whole story of Robert’s disappearance, the Pedlar says that “[t]his tale did Margaret tell with many tears” and that “when she ended I had little power/To
give her comfort” (B 333-35). It might be argued that in this scene, Margaret, as Faflak claims, insists on “being heard in other ways,” if “not by speech” (89). But here we can go a step further by saying that Margaret’s tears, which cannot be reduced to her speech but still remain overlapped with it, continue to mesmerize the Pedlar.

There is another scene which is worth reconsidering in the context of this discussion of “something more” in and beyond the story of Margaret as transmitted by the Pedlar; in this scene, we should notice Margaret’s sighs. Margaret, who returns to the cottage late from her wandering, details her helpless situation to the Pedlar while spreading their “evening meal” “on the board”: first she says that she “lost her eldest child” who was “a serving-boy/Apprenticed by the parish,” and then she confesses that she has “done much wrong” to herself and to her “helpless infant” and that she has “slept/Weeping” and “waked” “weeping” (B 402, 403, 404-05, 406-08). Here Margaret’s description of her situation involves her sigh, which the Pedlar cannot properly understand or explain; this forces him to leave her hastily, as implied in the following passage:

    [S]till she sighed,

    But yet no motion of the breast was seen,

    No heaving of the heart. While by the fire

    We sate together, sighs came on my ear;
I knew not how and hardly whence they came. (B 422-26)

Margaret’s tears and sighs are overlapped with and infiltrate her story of Robert’s disappearance and of her helpless situation, and in turn the Pedlar’s own enigmatic response to her tears and sighs is inscribed in his telling of Margaret’s story. To help us clarify what is at issue here, we may note an example Zupančič mentions to elaborate the relationship between knowledge and jouissance: the situation in which “we demand from a witness that she tell the ‘whole truth’” (Shadow 141). Zupančič points out that in this situation, “we actually expect two things from her: that she should tell the truth about what she knows, and that she should tell us something that will allow us to make a judgment” about her jouissance; this means that the witness is confronted with “the impossible demand to formulate her own place or position in knowledge that she is stating” (Shadow 141). Can we say that the Pedlar responds to this same impossible demand in a certain way? Doesn’t the Pedlar, in his story of Margaret, inscribe or formulate his own place—that is, his jouissance?

If this is the case, how then does the narrator respond to the Pedlar’s story?

The 1797 B manuscript of The Ruined Cottage ends with the Pedlar’s description of Margaret’s death: “here she died,/Last human tenant of these ruined walls” (B 527-28). This leaves us wondering how the narrator responds to the Pedlar’s whole story of Margaret. What Fosso regards as the “consoling conclusion” is added to the 1798 D
manuscript; this conclusion opens with a description of the narrator’s response to the Pedlar’s story of Margaret:

> The old Man ceased: he saw that I was mov’d;
> From that low Bench, rising instinctively,
> I turned aside in weakness, nor had power

> To thank him for the tale which he had told. (D 493-96)

Interestingly, the narrator’s response to the Pedlar’s story recalls the Pedlar’s response to the tale that Margaret told “with many tears”: “when she ended,” the Pedlar says, “I had little power/ To give her comfort” (B 333-35). We are thus required to consider the question of what it is that moves the narrator—what, precisely, causes the narrator to turn aside in weakness with no power to thank the Pedlar for his tale. If we take seriously the idea that the narrator’s response to the Pedlar’s story is parallel to the Pedlar’s response to Margaret’s tears which silently accompany her story, one could say that what impels the narrator to turn aside in weakness has something to do with the Pedlar’s own enigmatic response, as inscribed in his story of Margaret; that is, the surplus jouissance which makes his story not-whole.

> “[R]ising instinctively” “[f]rom that low Bench,” the narrator stands “leaning o’er the garden-gate”; presumably he is watching the ruined cottage (D 494, 497). Yet he then states that he “[r]eview[s] that Woman’s suff’rings,” instead of mentioning the
ruined cottage (D 498). Does this imply that the narrator re-views the ruined cottage as a trace or remnant of Margaret’s suffering? The narrator’s obscure commingling of the ruined cottage and Margaret here affords us an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between the ruined cottage and Margaret, or more precisely, her suffering. The ruined cottage is deeply built into the story of Margaret; as Hartman says, it serves as “something too central” in this poem (138). Indeed, the narrative of *The Ruined Cottage* begins with the narrator’s encounter with “a ruined cottage [house], four clay [naked] walls/That stared upon each other,” and ends with more remarks about the ruined cottage: the last scene of MS. B does not inform us simply of Margaret’s death, but rather of the death of Margaret as “[l]ast human tenant of these ruined walls,” and MS. D also concludes with a scene in which the Pedlar and the narrator, “casting…a farewell look/Upon those silent walls,” go together toward a “rustic inn” (B 30-31, 528; D 31-32, 535-36, 538).

Averill, too, sees the ruined cottage as “a spot made significant by [Margaret’s] suffering”; according to him, “the correlative of Margaret’s disintegration is the encroachment of natural entropy upon her garden; the state of the garden is the measure of order in Margaret’s small world” (171, 176). In connection with this, we should read several scenes in which the Pedlar conjectures from the state of the garden the extent to which Margaret has changed. For instance, when the Pedlar
first visits the cottage after hearing of Robert’s departure, he waits for Margaret to return from her wandering, looking around the cottage; he recalls that “I turned aside/And strolled into her garden. It was changed” and “[t]he spot though fair seemed very desolate” (B 370-71, 386). This foreshadows Margaret’s change as is shown in the Pedlar’s description of Margaret’s return to her cottage: “Her face was pale and thin, her figure too/Was changed” (B 396-97; emphasis added). During another visit to the cottage, the Pedlar again attempts to measure Margaret’s change by observing her circumstances: “She seemed not changed/In person or appearance, but her house/Bespoke a sleepy hand of negligence” (B 438-40). In fact, from the very moment when the Pedlar begins his story of Margaret, the relationship between Margaret and the ruined cottage, or more specifically, the way in which Margaret cannot be strictly distinguished from the ruined cottage and its garden, attracts our attention:

She is dead,

The worm is on her cheek, and this poor hut,

Stripped of its outward garb of household flowers,

Of rose and jasmine, offers to the wind

A cold bare wall whose earthy top is tricked

With weeds and the rank spear-grass. She is dead,
And nettles rot and adders sun themselves

Where we have sat together while she nursed

Her infant at her bosom. (B 157-65)

On the basis of these passages showing the ruined cottage’s intimate connection to Margaret, we might merely contend that the ruined cottage is used to “indicate Margaret’s physical and psychic deterioration” (Faflak 85). But we can further flesh out the implications of this relationship between the ruined cottage and Margaret by rethinking Faflak’s point that “the specter of the cottage” is viewed as Margaret’s “viscerally spectral presence” (89, 90). Why does Faflak repeat such words as “specter” or “ghost”—“the specter of the cottage,” Margaret’s “viscerally spectral presence,” and “Margaret’s ghost”? (Faflak 89, 90). Does he suggest that the traces of Margaret embodied in the ruins of the cottage are not simply cancelled out? If so, isn’t this to say that the symbolic “reality” of the Pedlar and the narrator is perpetually haunted by its intimate relation to Margaret? The important point here is that Margaret should not be regarded as the “unattainable, opaque, enigmatic, inert being” who precedes the symbolic reality, or as “a left-over that remains from the past or the return of an original state” (Zupančič, Shadow 147; Shepherdson, “Intimate” par. 62). Rather, Margaret is none other than what embodies the void or the surplus *jouissance* which “comes into being only as a result of the symbolic operation” but does not
belong to the symbolic order (Shepherdson, “Intimate” par. 34). This amounts to saying that Margaret functions as the object a which allows the lack or the void in the symbolic order “to be veiled at the very moment of its manifestation” (Shepherdson, “Pound” 84).

“Review[ing] that Woman’s suff’rings,” the narrator “bless[es] her in the impotence of grief,” and then traces “with milder interest/That secret spirit of humanity” still surviving among “her plants, her weeds, and flowers./And silent overgrowings” (D 498, 500, 502-03, 505-06). “[S]eeing this,” the Pedlar advises him to “[b]e wise and chearful, and no longer read/The forms of things with an unworthy eye” (D 507, 510-11). To sharpen our sense of what is at issue in this scene, we turn for a moment to Lacan’s reading of Plato’s Symposium, and especially to the term agalma upon which Lacan lays great emphasis. The term agalma appears when Alcibiades describes what causes his desire for Socrates; he attempts to praise Socrates, saying “he’s just like those Sileni you find sitting in sculptors’ shops, the ones they make holding wind-pipes or reed-pipes, which when opened up are found to contain effigies of gods [agalma] inside” (215b). In his seminar on transference love in psychoanalysis, Lacan recounts several meanings implied by the term agalma which are summed up by Chiesa as follows: “a) it is something precious; b) the ‘topological indication,’ the fact that it is ‘inside,’ is very important; c) it can be
considered both as a ‘special image’ and as an ‘unusual object’; d) unlike most translators who refer to agalma as hidden statues of gods, Lacan invites us to think of it as a ‘trap for gods’” (Chiesa, “Love” 79n68). According to Chiesa, the metaphor of Silenus and the term agalma play an important role in Lacan’s reading of the scene, because “the analysand behaves exactly like Alcibiades with Socrates”; more precisely, “he attributes a hidden precious object (agalma)...to the analyst” (“Love” 68).

Chiesa, along with this comment, asks us to scrutinize Socrates’ reply to Alcibiades’ “unashamed advances,” which Lacan translates in these terms: “Be careful, examine things with more circumspection (ameinom skopei) so that you won’t make any mistake; this self is, properly speaking, nothing (ouden őn)....There where you see something, I am nothing” (qtd. in Chiesa, “Love” 69). What is of particular interest to Chiesa in this scene is that Socrates knows that he is “void/nothing” (ouden) and that he is not “the real object of Alcibiades’ desire” but rather “only an imaginary substitutive object of Alcibiades’ (emerging) real desire” (“Love” 68). This gives us a preliminary clue as to the nature of agalma as the object of desire which Lacan

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12 According to a note in Symposium translated by Seth Benardete, “Silenus was a woodland god, depicted as an old man with the ears of a horse, often drunk, and riding an ass or wine jar. If caught, Silenus was supposed to reveal his wisdom; but nothing is known of his wisdom except that he said that it was better not to be born. He was associated since the sixth century with Dionysus. The sileni or silenuses were half-gods or spirits, with the same characteristics as Silenuses, but often confused with the satyrs” (45n19).

13 Matthew Sharpe’s translation of Lacan’s text, in his essay “Hunting Plato’s Agalmata,” also deserves reading: “But! Don’t be deceiving yourself, examine things more carefully...so as not to deceive yourself, and you will see that I properly speaking am nothing” (543-44).
delineates as object *a*; “by desiring *agalma*, or, in Lacanese, the *objet petit a*,” says Chiesa, “one actually desires the (lacking) object which causes desire to desire all other objects (at the imaginary level)” (“Love” 69). It could be said that “one does not merely desire what one lacks” but “essentially one desires the lack that desire is”; this is why the object *a* is redefined as the “object-cause of desire” and why it points to “an object-nothing which creates something” (Chiesa, “Love” 69). This also allows an important distinction to be made between “the order of the Real (*qua* lack)” and the symbolic reality “in which the structural lack is necessarily veiled” (Chiesa, “Love” 69). Here it may be helpful to recall Žižek’s account of how the primordial void or lack of desire manifests itself in a particular object of reality: “[T]he series of objects in reality is structured around…a void; if this void becomes visible as such, reality disintegrates. So, in order to retain the consistent edifice of reality, one of the elements of reality has to be displaced onto…the central void” (“Melancholy” 662).

Let us now align these two scenes: the one in which the narrator traces “[t]hat secret spirit of humanity” still surviving among Margaret’s plants, and the one in which Alcibiades describes his desire for Socrates (D 503). This leads us to read the narrator’s tracing of the “secret spirit of humanity” as a kind of attempt to attribute “a hidden precious object (*agalma*)” to Margaret or to Margaret as the ruined cottage. If this is the case, can we interpret the Pedlar’s response, in which he advises the
narrator not to “read/ The forms of things with an unworthy eye,” as suggesting the possibility that Margaret, to whom the narrator endeavors to attribute “something,” namely, the hidden precious thing (*agalma*), could in fact be “nothing”? (D 510-11).

This reconsideration of the Pedlar’s response derives from the assumption that Margaret could be regarded as a particular object in reality that is displaced onto and occupies the structural lack or void. Moreover, this opens up an interesting path to Lacan’s comment on the example of the vase discussed by Heidegger as a work of art constructed around a void: “[T]he fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical” (Lacan, *Ethics* 121). Can we read this as highlighting the idea that “the void is strictly consubstantial with the very moment of its concealment”? (Žižek, *Interrogating* 53). From this perspective, Margaret as the ruined cottage ultimately corresponds to what “conceals” or “disguises” the void and at the same time “stands in place of” the void (Žižek, *Interrogating* 53). The important point to note here is how the Pedlar and the narrator respond to Margaret as the ruined cottage that conceals and at the same time stands in place of the void. The narrator, as implied in his gesture which traces the “secret spirit of humanity” that remains, is still overwhelmed by “the dazzling and fascinating experience” of the object *a*, namely, Margaret as the ruined cottage (“something”), which “distracts” him from the void (“nothing”) that it fills (D 503; Žižek, *Interrogating* 48, 53). On the contrary, the
Pedlar seems well aware of the logical priority of the void or “the precedence of the (empty) place with respect to the elements that fill it”; that is to say, he can be read as experiencing the priority of the empty, traumatic place in relation to Margaret as the ruined cottage (see Žižek, *Interrogating* 47, 48).

Thus, the truth of Margaret is reformulated as having a fundamental bearing on her status that both conceals and stands in place of the void, which once again brings us to the question of how the Pedlar transmits the truth of Margaret. Before exploring this issue, it will be useful to give our attention to Faflak’s argument concerning MS. D’s closing part. Faflak first maintains that the Pedlar dismisses Margaret’s story as “an idle dream that could not live/Where meditation was,” “as if to cure the ‘impotence of grief’ transferred to the narrator,” which enables both of them to “reenter the social order of a ‘rustic inn,’ presumably to resume their meditative—and meditatively uncomplicated—lives” (Faflak 89; D 523-24). But he soon makes clear that this return to the social “happens only at Margaret’s expense, and by overlooking their transference with her” (90). This in turn leads him to examine how the Pedlar’s attempt to “abstract through rational interpretation” Margaret’s “chaotic presence” or “the chaos of her unconscious” rather keeps “reanimating Margaret’s ghost”; for example, “the text itself, by so carefully parceling out the rare times it allows Margaret to speak, insures, by virtue of her viscerally
spectral presence, her continued half life” (Faflak 90). Faflak asserts that the Pedlar’s attempt to rationalize away the question of Margaret—“the woman’s question/the question of woman that will not go away”—thus ends in failure (90).

However, what if the Pedlar is actually trying to preserve and transmit the truth of Margaret rather than simply rationalize it away? Let us examine the passage in which the Pedlar says that on a day he happened to pass by the ruined cottage, “those very plumes,/Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall” “looked so beautiful” “that what we feel of sorrow and despair/From ruin and from change” “[a]ppeared an idle dream” (D 513-14, 518, 520-21, 523). The important point to retain here is that in this passage, the Pedlar recollects his past experience in which he was confronted with the ruins of the cottage. The Pedlar, in other words, who “turned away/And walked along [his] road in happiness,” now returns to the ruined cottage, and once again tells about what he once dismissed as “an idle dream” (D 524-25, 523). Can we read this as the Pedlar’s strategy to preserve and transmit the truth of Margaret without covering up her fundamental unintelligibility or strangeness?

Interestingly, The Ruined Cottage contains an important clue to grasp the Pedlar’s work in conjunction with the task of Wordsworthian Poet. Here is the passage in which the narrator describes who the Pedlar is:

I knew him—he was born of lowly race
On Cumbrian hills,

…………………

He from his native hills

Had wandered far: much had he seen of men,

Their manners, their enjoyments and pursuits,

Their passions and their feelings, chiefly those

Essential and eternal in the heart,

Which ‘mid the simpler forms of rural life

Exist more simple in their elements

And speak a plainer language.

………………………………

In all shapes

He found a secret and mysterious soul,

A fragrance and a spirit of strange meaning.

………………………………

Such sympathies would often bear him far

In outward gesture, and in visible look,

Beyond the common seeming of mankind.

Some called it madness—such it might have been,
But that he had an eye which evermore

Looked deep into the shades of difference. (B 47-95)

This is reminiscent of the definition of the Poet which Wordsworth offers in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, as Faflak and Swann point out; indeed, Faflak writes that the Pedlar is “the prototype of Wordsworth’s poet in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” and Swann remarks that he is “an idealized version of the Wordsworthian poet” (Faflak 87; Swann 91). In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth asks “[W]hat is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself?” His first answer to these questions is that the Poet is “a man speaking to men.”14 We are thus invited to reconsider the Pedlar as “a man speaking to men”; but about what does the Pedlar speak to men? More specifically, how does the Pedlar speak to men about Margaret who remains unspeakable in the symbolic order? It is this question that serves as a guiding thread for our reading of MS. D’s closing part.

In order to answer to the question of how the Pedlar speaks to men about Margaret, it is necessary to make a detour through David Sigler’s reading of Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection in his essay “The Navel of the Dream: Freud, Derrida and Lacan on the Gap where ‘Something Happens’.,” According to Sigler, the dream of Irma’s injection “has occupied a central place in the psychoanalytic canon” for several

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reasons: “[I]t is the first dream that Freud subjects to a rigorous analysis, and it is his own dream; moreover, its analysis, unusually thorough, leads Freud to two essential formulations (the dream as a fulfillment of a wish, and the logic of the broken kettle)” (17). Freud reports that after hearing about his patient Irma’s condition from Otto, his junior colleague and friend, he had a dream. At stake in Sigler’s discussion of the dream of Irma’s injection are several footnotes which Freud appends in the process of his self-analysis of the dream, for those footnotes, which suggest the limits of Freud’s inquiry, allow him to dwell upon the problem of “the responsibility of the analyst” “in relation to the encounter with [the] seemingly absolute limit (the navel) and [the] seemingly insurmountable resistances” (Sigler 19, 22).

Sigler takes as his starting point the footnote in which Freud mentions the dream’s navel. This footnote is attached to Freud’s analysis of one of the scenes in his

15 “A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving.—Among them was Irma. I at once look her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my ‘solution’ yet. I said to her: ‘If you still get pains, it’s really only your fault.’ She replied: ‘If you only knew what pains I’ve got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it’s choking me’—I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that.—She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose.—I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it….Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven….My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: ‘She has a dull area low down on the left.’ He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.)…M. said: ‘There’s no doubt it’s an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated.’ …We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls…propionic acid…trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type)….Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly….And probably the syringe had not been clean.” (4:107)
dream, in which “she” shows “signs of recalcitrance” to Freud, who wants to examine her throat. Concerning this scene, Freud writes that the “she” mentioned here does not merely point to Irma herself, but rather has something to do with three other women, namely, a governess, Irma’s friend, and Freud’s wife (see 4: 109-11). He then appends this footnote:

I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield.—There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown. (4: 111n1)

Sigler explains that what Freud calls the dream’s “navel” is “a structural presence in any dream and demarcates the limit-point of any analysis”; as Freud says elsewhere, even if one knew “how to interpret dreams in the right way,” successful analysis would still prove evidently impossible because of the dream’s navel: “a certain secret quality in your being,” a thing that will remain “always…concealed” (Sigler 26; Freud 4: 309n2). In saying that the dream’s navel is intimately entwined with “a certain secret quality in your being,” Sigler stresses that the word “secret” should not be understood as “an inner truth to be discovered, revealed or confessed,” but rather
as “an unconditional thing that must, by necessity, remain silent, giving rise to no affirmative process whatsoever” (26). He proceeds to argue that the dream’s navel “paves the way for Lacan’s theorization of the [r]eal,” evoking Lacan’s articulation of the navel as an “ultimately unknown centre—which is simply…that gap,” a gap where “something happens” (Sigler 26; Lacan, *Four 23*, 22).

How does Freud respond when he “comes up against the navel, an irreducible mystery, one that cannot be unraveled by psychoanalysis”? (Sigler 23). It is Sigler’s attempt to answer to this question that constitutes the main argument in his essay. Freud’s comment on the dream’s navel implies that he already acknowledges that there is a point beyond which analysis can never progress. Nevertheless, Freud doesn’t merely give up his analysis; as Sigler emphasizes, he continues his careful analysis of the other parts of the dream. Freud then soon encounters another obstacle during his reading of the scene in which he identifies an infection on Irma’s left shoulder and says that he can notice it “in spite of her dress” (4: 107). Freud introduces his memory associated with the phrase “in spite of her dress” and adds a comment to it: “I remembered that it was said of a celebrated clinician that he never made a physical examination of his patients except through their clothes. Further than this I could not see. Frankly, I had no desire to penetrate more deeply at this point” (4: 113). This is interpreted by Sigler as a situation in which Freud, confronted with the
second obstacle that is represented by “clothes,” “would merely prefer not to continue on, however helpful further analysis might prove” (4: 113; Sigler 23). Freud’s response to the point beyond which analysis can never go can thus be described as follows: Freud “claims to be unable (‘could not’) and unwilling (‘no desire’) to proceed further,” which is to say that he “chooses to proceed no further at the very moment in which he ‘could not’” (Sigler 24). In respect to this strategy used by Freud, can we say that “although there is a recalcitrant point, a navel if you will, that can never be accessed by analysis, Freud has nevertheless suspended his researches voluntarily”? (Sigler 28). If so, doesn’t this bear on the way in which he claims “responsibility for the outcome of the analysis”? (Sigler 27). Sigler’s argument, in sum, is that “[w]hen Freud diverts his analysis at the navel of the dream, when he claims that the arrested analysis is both inevitable and voluntary,” “he opens his analysis to the future in a fully responsible way” (33-34).

In MS. D’s closing part, the Pedlar, after advising the narrator not to “read/The forms of things with an unworthy eye,” asserts that Margaret “sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here,” and then shows how he could turn away from the ruined cottage and walk along his road in happiness (D 510-12, 524-25). In the Pedlar’s memory, Margaret’s ruined cottage is turned into “an image of tranquility”; according to Wolfson’s view, “Margaret’s plants,” namely, “those weeds, and the high spear grass”
are “recollected through a soft aesthetic filter,” that is, “[b]y mist and silent rain-drops silver’d o’er,” which makes “what we feel of sorrow and despair/From ruin and from change” appear “an idle dream” (D 517, 514, 515, 520-21, 523; Wolfson, *Questioning* 110). For Wolfson, this is nothing more than the Pedlar’s attempt to “disengage” himself from his involvement with Margaret (*Questioning* 111). Against the narrator, who strives to incorporate Margaret into the economy of meaning or representation by tracing the “secret spirit of humanity,” or to use Wolfson’s phrase, against the narrator’s “fond indulgence,” the Pedlar proposes to detach himself from her, which is followed by the Pedlar’s account of “his own more chaste turning away” (Wolfson, *Questioning* 113; D 503). The Pedlar’s attempt to disengage himself from and turn away from Margaret as the ruined cottage might, as Wolfson insists, suggest that he gets involved with Margaret too intensely; he struggles to defend himself against his involvement with Margaret (see Wolfson, *Questioning* 111).

However, Sigler’s reading of Freud’s analysis of the dream of Irma’s injection provides us with a different perspective from which we can approach the Pedlar’s turning away from Margaret. As we have seen above, the Pedlar’s focus of attention throughout his story of Margaret is almost exclusively on her strange status as a void or rupture in meaning. It can be said that for the Pedlar, Margaret functions as something “unplumbable,” like the navel of a dream beyond which his inquiry can
never go. The question then becomes: how does the Pedlar ultimately respond to Margaret as his “point of contact with the unknown”? (Freud 4: 111n1). To this question, can we answer that he decides not to search for the truth of Margaret, suspending his search voluntarily by turning away from his involvement with Margaret? Significantly, the Pedlar does not make Margaret, as something “unplumbable,” in other words, as what can be called “the navel of his situation,” “an alibi with which to mask the intrinsic limits” of his work; rather he turns away from the navel of his situation quite voluntarily (Sigler 32, 20). To use Sigler’s words, the Pedlar “voluntarily refus[es] to do the impossible” (28). The Pedlar’s own past experience in which he “turned away/And walked along [his] road in happiness” is introduced to support his decision not to proceed his story—not to search for the truth of Margaret (D 524-25).

The Pedlar’s gesture, in fact, could be simply construed as “one of withdrawal,” intended to keep a certain distance from his object of inquiry; indeed, Philip Cohen claims that the gesture of withdrawal “enables the Pedlar to view the human state from the perspective of unchanging nature,” which seems to be backed up by the Pedlar’s own remark that the “idle dream” “could not live/Where meditation was” (Cohen 192; D 523-24). But the problem is that the Pedlar returns to the problematic place of the ruined cottage and transmits to the narrator the story of
Margaret, redefining himself as “an idle dreamer”: “I am a dreamer among men—indeed/ An idle dreamer” (B 289-90). The Pedlar then proposes to turn away from his involvement with Margaret once again. His advice not to “read/The forms of things with an unworthy eye”—his proposal to turn away from the ruined cottage—has an impact upon the narrator, but in no way directly, which we can gather from the fact that the narrator who has searched Margaret’s stragglng garden for “that secret spirit of humanity” begins to listen to “other melodies./At distance heard”: “A linnet warbled from those lofty elms./A thrush sang loud, and other melodies./At distance heard, peopled the milder air” (D 510-11, 503, 531-33). Finally, he, with the Pedlar, casts “a farewell look/Upon those silent walls,” as if displaying his turning away from Margaret and the ruined cottage (D 535-36). Yet what if the narrator, like the Pedlar, will come back to this place and himself tell the story of Margaret—as evidenced, indeed, by the poem we read?

Can we say that the Pedlar, who tells a story of Margaret, and the narrator, who transmits the Pedlar’s story of Margaret, have not completed their search for the truth of Margaret “voluntarily and necessarily,” thereby opening it “to the future in a fully responsible way”? (Sigler 35, 34). We should be very careful not to miss the point of Sigler’s comment that the Pedlar and the narrator open their search for the truth of Martha to the future; for it does not merely signify that various interpretations
or explanations with regard to the truth of Martha will be provided in the future.

Zupančič’s elaboration of the difference between the structural non-wholeness and the empirical impossibility of the subject ever embracing the object as a whole may be helpful in this context. It can be argued that the latter causes us to keep saying that “all our knowledge is subjectively mediated and necessarily partial”; or from this perspective, we could say “this is how I see the problem of Margaret, but I admit the possibility that somebody else sees it very differently” (see Zupančič, Shadow 105, 106). But at stake for us is nothing other than “what structurally escapes every (single) perspective,” not the kind of stance which emphasizes the impossibility of the subject ever embracing the object as a whole, but nonetheless still presupposes the wholeness (Zupančič, Shadow 105). If we can say that the Pedlar and the narrator have opened their search for the truth of Margaret to the future, this means that they are aware of the structural or constitutive non-wholeness of their search or story, which is intimately bound up with the way in which they, as subjects, are inscribed in the thing they are representing. And this is why we should examine the Pedlar’s and the narrator’s story in connection with the ethics of speaking well.
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