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Buddhism in Progress: Ecstasy, Eternity, and Zen Sickness in the English Romantics

Logan M. Rohde
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Faflak, Joel R.
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in English

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the philosophical similarity between English Romanticism and Buddhism from a Zen Buddhist perspective. In contrast to scholars such as Mark Lussier and John G. Rudy, who have focused on the similarity between Romantic and Buddhist philosophy, I explore their differences. I argue that Romanticism represents a “Buddhism in progress”: both philosophies seek to overcome “the self,” but do so through different means. Lacking direct access to Buddhist teachings, the authors considered in this study (Beckford, Coleridge, De Quincey, Shelley, and Keats) developed their own practice of self-transcendence through writing, often prompted by experiences of ecstatic intoxication that call into question the existence of “the self.” For these authors, “self” is an illusory concept that is narrated into existence to account for one’s “being” over time and is recognized as a source of suffering. Ecstatic intoxication offers self-palliation, but exposes an ontological groundlessness with which these authors struggle to come to terms.

In Chapter 1, I give a historical overview of Romanticism’s relationship to Buddhism, suggesting that Romanticism’s self-difficulty is symptomatic of “Zen sickness” (i.e., attachment to self-lessness). Chapter 2 explores William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) as an ur-text of Romantic religion that appeals to the Orient in order to escape time and selfhood. My third chapter argues that Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s and Thomas De Quincey’s opium addictions model a kind of Zen sickness that is apparent in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (1816) and De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). In Chapter 4, I argue that Percy Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) vacillates between Christian and Buddhist philosophy, showing commitments to

ontologies of both self and self-lessness. My fifth chapter addresses John Keats's Hyperion poems (1818; 1819). I posit that due to his relationship to suffering, Keats, more intensely than any other author in this study, grapples with Buddhist themes, but is ultimately unable to cope with his self-lessness. Finally, I conclude by considering the status of the self in post-Romantic Western philosophy, which also understands the self as illusory, but unlike Buddhism, does not find liberation in this fact.

Keywords:

English literature; Romanticism; Buddhism; Zen; Ontology; Opium; Intoxication; Ecstasy; Eternity; Time; Emptiness; Sunyata; Self; William Beckford; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Thomas De Quincey; Percy Shelley; John Keats

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Introduction

Towards a Romantic Buddhism

Ordinary people look to their surroundings, while followers of the Way look to Mind, but the true Dharma is to forget them both. The former is easy enough, the latter very difficult. Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma.

~ Huang Po, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind*

“Mindfulness” has become a key buzzword of the modern age. It has been effectively marketed as a bit of simple ancient wisdom powerful enough to combat complex modern neuroses and the feelings of self-fragmentation and social alienation that accompany them. The concept of mindfulness was introduced to North America, in its popular form,¹ by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979 with his founding of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. Kabat-Zinn studied meditation from Buddhist teachers and adapted it for stress-management and relaxation. This act of secularization, however, cut off the practice from the tradition it came from. Although meditation is likely to reduce the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression over time, it is important to remember that, traditionally, feeling better about one’s self was never the purpose of this spiritual practice, which is actually centred on overcoming the concept of self by realizing its

¹ In reality, Buddhist philosophy first entered the USA along with Asian immigrants during the 19th century, particularly after the 1849 Gold Rush in California. Buddhism gradually entered American consciousness, gaining some interest by the middle of the century. Given that they represent the American tradition of Romanticism, Thoreau and Emerson are two notable examples, having published a portion of the *Lotus Sutra*, a Buddhist scripture, in the transcendentalist literary magazine *The Dial* during the 1840s. See Sarina Isenberg 23.

illusory nature and thus disrupting the ontological security “the self” seems to provide.²

As Kosen Eshu Osho,³ a priest at the Victoria Zen Centre in British Columbia, notes, meditation is “sneaky, and you’ve really got to watch it, because if [feeling better is] what you’re coming for, in some ways . . . [this is] like coming to heroin for relaxation.” The practice, he says, is “strong medicine, and it works every time” (“Forgetting Self” 1 Aug. 2015). That is, sooner or later, one will start to experience changes to one’s sense of self after realizing that the narrative of one’s life cannot adequately account for the totality of who and what one *is*, and these ontological disruptions can have severe and lasting effects on the psyches of those who are unprepared for them, including psychotic breaks and collapses into addiction.⁴

My thesis for the present study is that English Romanticism emerged under similar conditions to those of modern mindfulness, and that the Romantics experienced

² In *The Buddha Pill* (2015), psychologists Miguel Farias and Catherine Wikholm study the effects of meditation, determining that it “can sharpen attention, quiet thoughts and angst, increase positive emotions towards ourselves and others and, in the extreme, it can lead to a deep alteration of our identity—a kind of ecstatic annihilation of the ego” (169). They suggest that “with the wrong kind of motivation and without clear ethical rules, that very spiritual selflessness can serve all kinds of ill purposes” (169).

³ My intention in this dissertation is to make Buddhism as accessible as possible to readers with limited familiarity with Zen/Buddhism. In the interest of this aim, I have removed the diacritics from Japanese and Sanskrit terms, except in cases where I quote sources that retain them.

⁴ Since 2014, *The Guardian* and *The Atlantic* have each published articles on these more unexpected and threatening effects of meditation. *The Guardian*’s article introduces us to the case of “Claire, a 37-year-old in a highly competitive industry, [who] was sent on a three-day mindfulness course with colleagues as part of a training programme. ‘Initially, I found it relaxing,’ she says, ‘but then I found I felt completely zoned out while doing it. Within two or three hours of later sessions, I was starting to really, really panic.’ The sessions resurfaced memories of her traumatic childhood, and she experienced a series of panic attacks. ‘Somehow, the course triggered things I had previously got over,’ Claire says. ‘I had a breakdown and spent three months in a psychiatric unit. It was a depressive breakdown with psychotic elements related to the trauma, and several dissociative episodes.’” The article also explains that “[f]our and a half years later, Claire is still working part-time and is in and out of hospital. She became addicted to alcohol, when previously she was driven and high-performing, and believes mindfulness was the catalyst for her breakdown. Her doctors have advised her to avoid relaxation methods, and she spent months in one-to-one therapy. ‘Recovery involves being completely grounded,’ she says, ‘so yoga is out’” (Foster). See also Thomas Rocha’s “The Dark Knight of the Soul.”

similar ontological effects, which were sometimes pleasurable and sometimes painful. The Romantics, vis-à-vis the translations of sacred Indian texts by the Orientalist scholars Sir William Jones and Charles Wilkins (and the historical research of Thomas Maurice), were exposed to Indian philosophy and meditative practices outside the particular context under which they were developed. I argue that this philosophy influenced how many English Romantic authors, particularly the five explored in this thesis—William Beckford, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, Percy Shelley, and John Keats—engaged with self-inquiry and -exploration, rendering these efforts similar to Zen Buddhist practice.⁵ But these authors discovered that the self they had grown accustomed to could not be satisfactorily located at the “core” of their “being.” Rather, Romantic subjectivity is more accurately characterized by an ontology of perpetual flux, never fully settling to become a site of sovereignty against the movement of time and mutability. On the one hand, this is what the Romantic subject desires—to have their “being” become *self-less* as it gets enveloped by an experience typical of Romantic aesthetics, the sublime, becoming entirely inseparable from the processes of nature.⁶ Yet on the other, this practice of dissolving the self into the rhythms of the natural world stands to disrupt the ontological stability of the “Romantic subject,” drawing its very existence into question. That is, the Romantic subject feels their self most when “the self” is not

⁵ It should be noted that, coming from a Zen Buddhist background, I use the terms “Zen” and “Buddhism” somewhat interchangeably. However, I use the latter term to emphasize points about Buddhist philosophy generally, whereas the former is used to express points that are more specific to the Zen school of Buddhism.

⁶ For Kant, the sublime manifests in the gap between intelligible and non-intelligible cognitive processes at work within one’s self-understanding. For Burke, it is the affectual reaction to realizing this gap exists, which can induce terror, but is nonetheless desired as a source of pleasure. Both of these theorizations point towards self-effacement, as the structure of the self gives way to experience and movement that cannot be contained within the self. That is, the sublime emerges as a force to interrupt one’s usual mode of self-awareness.

apparent as a distinct or separate “unit” apart from nature. But when such an experience of oneness ends and awareness of self reemerges, the Romantic subject faces the troubling realization that their “being” exists as both everything (in the world) and as an individual identity. This tension causes individuality to rip at the seams, exposing it as nothing more than the narrative of self that has developed over the course of linear time: if one is everything, one cannot be limited by a single linear narrative of selfhood, and thus individual identity becomes difficult to comprehend. In fact, the very language needed to express these concepts begins to break down. I use the term “self” to denote an awareness of continuity in the “being” on the part of the Romantics I read. This continuity gives the appearance of sovereignty against (and over) time, but does not manifest as an essence that can be referred to as “the self” that is able to claim that sovereignty. Thus, there is an appearance of a separate or individual existence, but the identity “it” is bound to be merely a personal understanding of the experience of time. Although these Romantics would not have explored the self with poststructuralist notions of subjectivity in mind, subjectivity speaks to a mode of self-consciousness that fails to understand its self as an individual identity and can only define its “being” relative to other “beings,” which is a central concern for the authors considered in this study. The concept of subjectivity therefore presents itself as a reliable means to assess these Romantics’ understanding of their “being.”

For these authors, writing becomes a practice to help map the flux and fragmentation of Romantic subjectivity. Poetry and non-linear narrative forms—those which resist and draw into question the legitimacy of narrative singularity—express and evoke the kinds of complex spiritual and philosophical exploration typical of Buddhist

practice by focusing on the nature of experience, especially the experience of nature, and one's awareness of it. In these Romantic experiences, "self" cannot be dissociated from "other." But coming from a Western Christian philosophical tradition, although writing at a time of increasing interest in other forms of religious doctrine and practice—as we shall see—the Romantic writers I examine, unlike practicing Buddhists, had little means to help them think through an ontology that does not anchor its self to some kind of sovereign essence capable of resisting mutability and flux. Because "identity" cannot be sectioned off as separate from the mutability of nature's process, the Romantic subject faces a deep-seated anxiety of "being" as they become aware of this emptiness within the self. They seek to resolve this anxiety by effectively "short circuiting" the problem of how they can "be" as both everything and nothing by once again returning to a state of self-lessness, thus overcoming these problems of duality. As Wordsworth explains in the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), to write the Romantic poem is to mentally re-enact the experience that prompted it:

poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion . . . is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever . . . the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. (400-01)

By overcoming the apparent boundary between self and other, the Romantic subject is able to set aside their troubling ontological upheavals by simply negating them, seemingly asserting a degree of control over them. Romantic writing, thus, seeks to reassert a level of ontological stability by textually re-inscribing one's individual identity after the self has been dissolved into the sublime. But this method is ultimately

ineffective, as the “stability” it connotes is revealed to be just as illusory as the concept of self that was overcome in the sublime experience. Figured as such, subjectivity—as expressed by the authors in this thesis—finds itself always trying to reconstruct a narrative of self that leads to its own demise in order to escape its self.

The above model of Wordsworthian subjectivity valorizes the experience of selflessness as somehow, and paradoxically, essential to the Romantic subject’s sense of self. Under such a model, Romanticism is always looking backwards, always trying to understand how the self that is presently apparent was once indistinguishable from the world around it and how subjectivity might once again enter this blissful state.⁷ As a result, the Romantic subject, intoxicated by the sublime experience of selflessness, becomes a figure seeking to get back to the experience of self-loss as a means of remedying the anxiety of “being” that ensues after the experience ends. This subject seeks perpetually to re-experience this selflessness as a mode of ecstatic pleasure, as though they might one day break through to a “place beyond” ordinary human ontology where the self can once again be satisfactorily consolidated by escaping time and mutability, that is, *eternity*. However, the Romantics’ failure actually to reach an eternity outside of time finds them undergoing a series of ecstatic “little deaths,” momentary experiences that offer glimpses of the eternal by freeing the self from its ordinary subjective bonds, allowing subject and object to appear as one. The problem, though, is that these experiences are always in decline, just as Shelley notes in *A Defence of Poetry* (531). The return to life as usual thus becomes a painful experience that anticipates death,

⁷ In the Preface, Wordsworth notes, too, that “[w]e have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure” (395).

as the self no longer seems to provide the ontological support it once did, becoming a vestigial appendage to remind the Romantic subject of a “being” that has been outmoded but cannot be escaped. The Romantic subject, then, is caught between states of life and death, and this inclination towards self-death is what links Romanticism to Buddhism, especially Zen, which refers to the moment the self is overcome as the *Great Death*. But as Hakuin, an eighteenth-century Zen master, writes, “dying this once you will never die again” (qtd. in Sessan 173), as Buddhist philosophy dictates that life and death are not separate.

Buddhism teaches that all things and phenomena are marked by “emptiness” (*sunyata* in Sanskrit).⁸ That is, they are empty of self-nature; they lack any permanent or abiding presence in the world: there is *nothing* at the root of their “being” that distinguishes them as uniquely separate from the conditions under which one becomes aware of them. The appearance of separation only exists by virtue of contrast: self can only appear as such in relation to something denoted as other. Because all things are contained within the universe, and thus do not appear or disappear, nothing can be said to have been born or died, as these concepts denote notions of separation and individuality: birth is, rather, a *no-birth* and death a *no-death*. When one realizes the emptiness of the self, one understands that a chronological self-narrative has shaped one’s identity, but that such narratives are by no means binding. To let go of these narratives is to let go of the past and the suffering it contains. Because this suffering has helped to shape one’s sense

⁸ *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* offers the following definition: “lit. ‘emptiness, void’ . . . All dharmas [things and phenomena] are fundamentally devoid of independent lasting substance, are nothing more than mere appearances. They do not exist outside of emptiness . . . One should not, however, take this view of the emptiness of everything simply as nihilism. It does not mean that things do not exist but rather that they are nothing besides appearances” (203). Hereafter, this source will be abbreviated as “SDBZ.”

of self, it is very difficult to dismiss, and to do so is effectively to embrace the death of the self, as one loses one's ontological footing in the world. In so doing, one's "being" is opened up to the interdependence of everything; thus dualistic notions of subject-object or self-other become meaningless, apart from communicating particular ideas from our experience in space and time.

This is why the surrender of self is known as the Great Death in Zen: when one dies the Great Death, one dies into the Great Life, which one realizes one was never separate from, and thus can never *be* separated from. Death is no longer understood as something that follows life, but as something that exists amidst the experience of life. The Great Death is the moment one realizes self to be a momentary experience rather than an ontological anchor. Self goes in and out of "being" depending on conditions (of awareness), facing a birth and death each time awareness relapses or remits. One will "never die again" in the sense that biological death ceases to be an experience that is personally claimed as "*mine*," becoming instead an inescapably clear example of self-emptiness. The Romantic "little death," by contrast, plays at this sort of spiritual awakening, but does not connote a full ontological rupture. The little death leads one to experience the self as illusory, but, unlike the Great Death, does not lead to the realization that it *is* illusory and that letting go of it entirely leads to liberation.

Romanticism emerged at a time when self-oriented ontology was no longer a given. By the middle of the Enlightenment, Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738-40), had already begun questioning the validity of Cartesian dualism, finding that he could not locate his self independently of perceptual experiences, and he entertained

the idea that it might not exist at all.⁹ Moreover, as Andrea Henderson notes, the “Romantic era saw the production of a diversity of models for understanding subjectivity” (3). Henderson also points out that “canonical” Romanticism is structured by an “opposition of spirit and body” that faces “difficulties” for which there is no easy “solution” (129). Romanticism, then, rethinks assumptions regarding the self as a fixed or immutable essence, seeking instead to develop an ontology that does not depend on understanding the self as a sovereign entity that exists separate from the rest of the world, but in many cases cannot escape the dualistic tendencies that their philosophic milieu had not fully moved past. The Romantics considered in this study engage deeply in the practice of self-exploration, though they struggle to develop an ontology of emptiness, finding it difficult to let go of ideas of spirit, self, and soul entirely. Romanticism, then, exists as something like an incomplete Buddhism or a Buddhism in progress; it has the same philosophical orientation, but not the same modes of putting that philosophy into practice.

Buddhism emphasizes silent meditation, a practice of observing the nature of the mind, which, not unlike Hume’s sense of identity, is chaotic, directionless, intermittent, and inconsistent in its assessment of sensory stimuli. Over time, the meditator stops making associations between thoughts and an underlying self who thinks them, gradually becoming more and more comfortable dismissing thoughts as aberrations of

⁹ Hume: “when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When perceptions are remov’d for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist” (*Treatise* 252; italics original).

consciousness rather than accepting them as evidence of self-nature.¹⁰ Romanticism, however, is a practice of writing out the experience of the mind, which leads, in many cases, to insights similar to those made during Buddhist meditation. The key difference is that Romantic writing constellates a relationship between language and the mind, which uses thought as a linguistic nexus in order to respond to experience. Writing, then, is capable of describing the experience of vacillating self-awareness observed in meditation, but is limited in that it re-inscribes and thus codifies the self within language and incites a process of self-narrativization that runs contrary to Buddhist practice bent on overcoming this self-nature. As Geoffrey Hartman suggests, Romanticism is based upon a desire for “anti-self-consciousness”; yet “Shelley’s visionary despair, Keats’ understanding of the poetical character, and Blake’s doctrine of the contraries, reveal that the self-consciousness cannot be overcome; and the very desire to overcome it, which poetry and imagination encourage, is part of a vital, a dialectical movement of ‘soul-making’” (49).¹¹ Thus, we can think of Buddhism as something like the unconscious of Romanticism, the conclusion that it tries to realize but is prevented from doing so by its ego’s death-grip attachment to the structure of its self.

Under this light, Zen presents itself a possible solution to the paradox identified by Rei Terada: that to escape such agony, Romantic subjects need “to conceive of a non-

¹⁰ D. T. Suzuki notes that “the intellect has a peculiarly disquieting quality in it. Though it raises questions enough to disturb the serenity of the mind, it is too frequently unable to give satisfactory answers to them Because it points out ignorance, it is often considered illuminating, whereas the fact is that it disturbs, not necessarily always bringing light on its path” (8).

¹¹ Harold Bloom makes a similar argument, suggesting that the Romantic “quest is to widen consciousness as well as to intensify it, but the quest is shadowed by a spirit that tends to narrow consciousness to an acute preoccupation with self” (6).

pathological response to ruin that is *not* a working through” (180; my italics).¹² Because Zen does not rely on a strictly teleological understanding of time and “being,” the two concepts begin to blur. Past suffering and subjectivity cannot escape each other when time and “being” are thought of as the same thing, and thus the pain of the past can re-emerge at any moment. The practice of Zen, however, is to learn to be untroubled by this effect. Trauma is let go of, but not “left behind,” per se. Therefore, Romantic subjects, being aware that emptiness stands to dismantle the buffer the self provides between them and the experience of trauma, struggle to fully embrace emptiness as a mode of liberation, even if they acknowledge its potential for achieving this end. This awareness, I argue, leaves them deeply unnerved, and as a means of remedying this ontological pain, Romantic subjects seek to die countless “little deaths,” as the ecstasy makes the experience of emptiness a source of pleasure capable of palliating the pain the Romantic subject otherwise feels in response to self-rupture. This attachment to the pleasure of emptiness, though, is diagnosed by Buddhist philosophy as “Zen sickness,” which is linked to the kinds of ontological upheavals experienced by the Romantics in this study, and it ultimately becomes the reason they are unable to reach the conclusions of Zen. These Romantics’ proclivity for the pleasure of the “little death” prevents them from taking their ontological realization to its full conclusion, that is, the Great Death. Rather than fully accepting emptiness as the true nature of their “being,” they try to find a way of making that emptiness a kind of replacement for the self-nature they no longer trust. The ecstasy of the “little death” exposes these authors to self-emptiness, but, unlike

¹² Terada makes this point about De Quincey specifically. However, the conclusions I draw in the study lead me to argue that this is true of Romantic subjectivity generally.

the Great Death, it offers them the illusion that they might maintain this state of ecstasy-as-emptiness forever, needing never to return to self-awareness.

Chapter 1

Romantic Buddhism: Emptiness, Ecstasy, Opium, and “the Self”

In the Orient we must look for the most sublime form of the Romantic.

~ Friedrich Schlegel, “On Mythology”

But the awful result of romanticism is that, accustomed to this strange light, you can never live without it. Its effect on you is that of a drug.

~ T. E. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism”

1.1 Romanticism and Buddhism: A Historical Overview

The field of Romantic studies interested in Buddhism has been largely developed by the work of John G. Rudy and Mark Lussier. The field was cemented in 1996 with Rudy’s *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind: The Poetry of Self-Emptying*, the first book-length analysis of the philosophical similarity between Romanticism and Buddhism. Rudy posits that Wordsworth’s experience of what is traditionally known in Romanticism as “the sublime” produces a state of self-dissolution that mirrors the Buddhist concept of “emptiness.”¹³ In his second monograph on the subject, *Romanticism and Zen Buddhism* (2004), Rudy explores this similarity in the writing of several other English Romantics, revealing that this Zen connection exists as part of Romanticism generally and is not just a peculiarity of Wordsworth’s poetry. More recently, the work of Mark Lussier has

¹³ Rudy himself does not explicitly make this connection. However, his implication is that the power of nature produces self-effacement, which is in essence the effect of the sublime. However, Rudy avoids making this connection directly because he is not advocating for what Keats, critiquing Wordsworth, calls the “egotistical sublime” in a letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 Oct. 1818). That is, the experience of the sublime is not one that later enhances one’s sense of self, but reveals it to be illusory, as Keats notes in the same letter when he talks about the “poetical Character” having no self. I will return to this point in Chapter 4, in which I argue that Keats had insights into emptiness greater than any other author considered in this study.

expanded the field with the publication of *Romantic Dharma: The Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe* (2011)¹⁴ and his edited volume *Romanticism and Buddhism* (2007), both of which have made use of the concept of emptiness as a means of linking Buddhism to Romanticism. Lussier, Rudy and other scholars'¹⁵ work leads me to argue that our understanding of Romanticism's attempts to articulate a self-less ontology is enhanced by studying it alongside Buddhism, which is engaged in the same process, but has been developing for roughly 2500 years. As such, it has philosophically crystallized its articulation of self-lessness. As a complete system, it thus allows us to survey and measure Romanticism's development of a like ontology.

However, in contrast to these scholars, the present study explores several Romantics' difficulties with self-lessness and the ways they struggle to think through the consequences of an ontology that disregards the significance of their sense of self. For all of the apparent benefits of their encounters with emptiness, they also suffer great ontological pains because of them. Hindsight allows us to see that a complete "conversion" to Buddhism is perhaps the most logical response to this struggle. Yet it is important to note that the English Romantics would have had no direct access to Buddhist philosophy¹⁶ during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, as

¹⁴ In contrast to Rudy's Zen approach, Lussier explores Romanticism's relationship to Tibetan Buddhism. Because I, like Rudy, practice Zen Buddhism, my analysis will contain a Zen inflection. Due to Zen's special emphasis on overcoming the self, I contend that it is the most obviously applicable to study alongside Romanticism. However, in a few cases where appropriate, I have not shied away from incorporating material from other Buddhist traditions. But it is important to note that these traditions, while differing, are not unrelated. Both belong to the Mahayana lineage of Buddhism and ultimately represent two different ways of looking at the same thing.

¹⁵ E.g. Dennis McCort, Louise Economides, Timothy Morton, and Setsuko Wake-Naota, Seamus Perry.

¹⁶ Because of its lack of dogma, Buddhism is rather unlike other religions: there is not a set of beliefs one must hold in order to call oneself a Buddhist. Moreover, an understanding of its more religious elements is

European scholars treated it as a subset of Hinduism until about the 1850s.¹⁷ Coleridge and De Quincey both show some awareness of Buddhism, though neither cast it in a particularly positive light.¹⁸ Keats has traditionally been thought to have been aware of Buddhism. But more recently, this idea has been treated skeptically by Christopher Langmuir, who contends that “no specific source available to Keats has been identified to substantiate the claim” (514).¹⁹ In light of this evidence, Romanticism’s similarity to

not necessary to understand its value to Romantic studies. I have chosen to refer to Buddhism as a philosophy in order to help keep it on an even level of comparison with Romanticism.

¹⁷ As Philip C. Almond explains, it was not until “the start of the 1850s [that] a European discourse on Buddhism had developed and the religion was fully separated from the many schools of Hinduism” (24). Moreover, Almond notes that 1836 the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, an encyclopedia series produced by The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge during 1828-1843, “virtually identified the aspirations of the Buddhists with those of Hindus. The Hindu notion of the liberation of the soul from rebirth and its return to a lasting union with the Divine Being, it claimed, ‘developed in a peculiar manner, forms likewise the basis of the Bauddha creed.’ The Prospective Review for 1850 suspected that the Buddha meant by Nirvana ‘no more than what Wordsworth sings[.]’” (105-6).

¹⁸ Coleridge makes mention of the Buddha in a religious comparison and speaks of Buddhism as being inferior to Christianity, explaining that he finds in Buddhism “grotesque fancy, gigantic littlenesses but no imagination” (5.6115). See also his *Notebooks* 4.4856 and 5.5868. De Quincey shows some awareness of Buddhism in Tibet, mentioning the hierarchy of lamas with the Dali Lama at the top and his residing in Tibet (*Works* 9.177). Also, he mentions Buddhists in Ceylon, but notes that they worship “a carious tooth two inches long, ascribed to the god Buddha (but by some to an ourang-outang)” and suggests that they have no emphasis on compassion or kindness (14.172). It should be noted that although I use Grevel Lindrop’s edition of De Quincey’s collected works, all references to *Confessions*, *Suspiria*, or *Mail-Coach* use Joel Faflak’s Broadview edition.

¹⁹ A. L. Mayhew contends that the “two-and-thirty Palaces” Keats mentions in his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (19 Feb. 1818) are part of Tibetan Buddhist doctrine (219). Langmuir, however, has persuasively argued that Keats is referring to the 32 points of the marine compass. Langmuir contends that Keats’s referring to them as “Palaces” is an allusion to the seventeenth-century play *Lust’s Dominion, or the Lascivious Queen*, suspected to be written by Thomas Dekker et al. (514-15). To my knowledge, K. G. Srivastava is the only recent scholar to have made an attempt to place this reference specifically. He “think[s] the poet is alluding to the 32 signs of really great souls, pointers to their divinity: these have been called ‘dvātrinshat Mahāpurusha-Lakshanāni’ in Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, dealing with the life of Lord Buddha such as *Lalitavistara* and *Buddhacharita*” (310). However, these texts are unlikely to have been available to Keats, as Buddhist studies in Europe did not become properly established until after Keats’s death. Moreover, the “32 signs” referred to pertain to physical body characteristics and, as such, do not seem to obviously suggest a palace of any kind.

Buddhism likely developed along philosophically indirect lines.²⁰ This raises the question of whether the English Romantics considered in this study would have become Buddhists if they had had complete access to Buddhist philosophy. The short answer, I argue, is *no*.

As much as Romanticism is philosophically oriented towards overcoming the self, the authors I read remain attached, to varying degrees, to a certain sense of individual accomplishment during this process as one that will—or at least *should*—enhance the self rather than efface it, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5. Thus, I posit that if these Romantics had access to Buddhist philosophy, it would have been read with intrigue, but ultimately rejected in favour of a philosophy that they themselves created, even if certain elements were borrowed from Buddhism, just as they were from Christianity. The authors I explore are at once revisionist and iconoclastic: they use existing religious and philosophical assumptions but alter them as needed and break with them altogether when they no longer reflect these authors' understanding of reality. After all, Romanticism developed, in part, as a philosophical response to a habit of religious and cultural comparison, particularly with the East. Yet despite this religious and cultural syncretism, Romanticism cannot be reduced to a mere subset or bastardization of these “other”

²⁰ Lussier attempts to trace historical conditions that could have led to the Romantics acquiring some Buddhist knowledge through what he refers to as cultural “counterflow” (11), that is, epistemological dissemination via colonial encounter. (A similar argument is made by Attar regarding the influence of Islamic philosophy entering European consciousness [xv-xvi], which I will return to in Chapter 1.) While I agree that this is possible to a certain extent, Coleridge's and De Quincey's writings on Buddhism would seem to make cultural counterflow a somewhat unlikely source for the alternative modes of “being” that Romanticism develops. Lussier himself acknowledges that his argument is not one of “direct contact and subsequent influence but rather the confluence of analogous views of mental operations and social commitments, with Romantic thought arriving to the same conclusions as Buddhism through systemic modifications of Western enlightenment forms and techniques” (94). Lussier's argument does indeed rise to a level of greater significance than coincidence. Yet the stake his scholarship has in Romantic studies ultimately presents us with an issue that has always been present in the field of scholars interested in Buddhism: they are similar, but not identical. Rudy, however, side-steps the issue of influence by positioning his argument strictly along the lines of comparison, making no claims that Romanticism encountered Buddhism at all, only that their philosophical orientations are very similar.

traditions. I argue that Romanticism's similarity to Buddhism is an effect of this syncretism. The authors I read exemplify a certain capacity to see "otherness" within the self (and vice versa), and thus their writing models Buddhist practice in that it seeks to investigate earnestly the difference between self and other. As I will address in Chapters 2 and 3, this often takes the form of a confrontation between East and West that elides self-other distinctions and threatens the subject's ontological security. But it is first necessary to address the history of Romanticism's relationship to the Orient, as it allows us to see how Romanticism was able to develop a Buddhist temperament without any real exposure to its philosophy.

While Buddhism proper was out of reach, the English Romantics were known to have read and, to a certain degree, enjoyed Hindu philosophy, from which Buddhism is essentially a breakaway movement, with one of the key issues of contention being the former's belief in an immutable self/soul and the latter's rejection of such an entity.²¹ Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was unsatisfied with the methods of the traditional Hindu teachers he encountered, as he found that the trance meditations he was

²¹ Noble Ross Reat makes a comparison between the Hindu philosopher Sankara and the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna to explain the difference between the two religions, explaining that "for Śāṅkara ultimate reality . . . is the source of the self and the universe, whereas for Nāgārjuna ultimate reality is the emptiness . . . of all things and the self. Given that both thinkers reject the validity of verbal and conceptual formations of the nature of ultimate reality, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish meaningfully between Śāṅkara's ultimate 'something' and Nāgārjuna's ultimate 'nothing,' especially since both thinkers would reject the labels 'something' or 'nothing' as being far too crude to characterize accurately the ultimately real" (75). The present study treats Hinduism and Buddhism as roughly two ways of looking at the same thing, with Romanticism falling more on the Buddhist side of interpretation. Thus, Romanticism can be thought to have gained access to Buddhist philosophy via exposure to Hindu texts, which I will explore in the coming pages. It should be noted, too, that specifically I am referring to the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism, which is based on a philosophy of non-dualism, though not all schools of Hinduism are non-dual. There is no specific information available as to what school of Hinduism the Romantics were likely to have been exposed to. But given its similarity to Buddhism (Sankara refers to the Advaita Vedanta school above) and its emphasis on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, I suspect it is likely that this is variety of Hinduism to which the Romantics had access. See also Amit Ray 259-77.

taught (and mastered), although pleasurable, did not get to the root of his question about the origin of his suffering. He decided to strike out on his own and found that his self was ultimately the cause of his suffering (due to its cravings and desires) and taught that true liberation can only be gained by realizing the emptiness of the self.²² Similarly, the Romantics were exposed to Hindu philosophy, but, like Gautama Buddha, they find that the self cannot not be pinned down as an immutable essence. Hinduism, by emphasizing an immortal and immutable self/soul, essentially replicates the limitations of the Christian tradition Romanticism emerges from but develops an increasingly tenuous relationship to by the end of the so-called second generation of Romantic authors.²³ Nevertheless, Hinduism constellates a different relationship between the self/soul and the divine than is seen in Christianity, and thus offered the Romantics an alternative way of understanding “being” as a spiritual phenomenon. Moreover, Romanticism emerges at a time when European attitudes towards Oriental philosophy were moving towards religious comparison.

In 1784, the creation of the Asiatick Society in British India established Orientalism as a serious scholarly field of study. Founded by the Orientalist Sir William Jones, the society worked to study Indian culture and to translate the texts of the Hindu canon, which are now believed to have been read and studied by the first generation Romantics. In 1828, historian Edgar Quinet suggested that the Jones’s translation of Indian poetry “was remarkable in promoting a passion for Asia among the poets of the

²² For an aetiology of suffering in Buddhism see John Peacock, esp. 213. See also Nancy Ross 8-16.

²³ Paul D. Barton characterizes Byron as an “unwilling participant in an existence defined by his Calvinist experience” (133); Douglas G. Atkins reads Keats as “rabidly anti-Christian” (“Grander” 43), and Michael O’Neill suggests that Shelley “adeptly undercuts rational arguments in favour of Christianity, leaving the outcome to be choice between blind faith and atheism” (“Double” 39).

Lake School” and that “each of the poets of the Lake School had begun his career with an Asian poem” (qtd. in Schwab 195, 53), suggesting that the Indian influence extended beyond the more obviously Oriental poems like Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (1816) or Southey’s *The Curse of Kehama* (1810). This relationship to Indian philosophy is expanded by Raymond Schwab, who also concludes that the “Lake Poets” owed a “debt” to “the Hindu revelation” (43). He argues that “[a]fter reading the copious scholarly notes in which they comment on their own work, one cannot doubt that the poets of the Lake School had read the Asiatic Researches [of Jones]” (43).

However, while Jones’s work was unquestionably important for the development of Oriental studies and its integration into the Romantic psyche, Thomas Maurice’s *History of Hindostan* (1795-98) and Charles Wilkins’s prose translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1785) were just as influential for providing the Romantics access to the basics of Indian philosophy and Hindu belief. The *Gita*, as it is usually shortened, is the quintessential text of Hindu philosophy,²⁴ and Blake, Wordsworth, De Quincey, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and also Southey can all be linked to it in some way.²⁵ However, Coleridge

²⁴ Other important texts include the *Brahma Sutras* and the Upanishads.

²⁵ David Weir notes Blake’s familiarity with the *Gita* and the works of Jones, Wilkins, Maurice, and their contemporaries (88-90), arguing that Blake “understood the [*Gita*] in theological terms as a kind of bible or sacred code” (88). See also Northrop Frye’s *Fearful 173*. Srivastava notes that *The Monthly Magazine* and *The British Critic*, “printed favourable comments on the [*Gita*]” (159) during the 1790s (135), which Wordsworth, as a subscriber and contributor to these publications, “could not have missed” (159). De Quincey’s exposure is less direct than the others. Nonetheless, he makes reference to Hindu mythology in *Confessions of and English Opium-Eater* (125 esp.). This lack of real exposure would seem to account for De Quincey’s xenophobia towards the East. See also Daniel Sanjiv Roberts 24-27. John Drew speculates on Shelley’s knowledge about Hinduism given the poet’s unique relocation of Greek myth to the Indian Caucasus in *Prometheus Unbound*. He remarks that Shelley was an avid reader of Southey’s *The Curse of Kehama*, which was directly influenced by Southey’s reading of the *Gita* (235-37). Moreover, Drew argues that Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary* (1811), can “be read as a perfectly extraordinary fictionalization of the psyche of William Jones” (242) and was a major influence on Shelley. Keats, in his famous letter on the “vale of soul making” to his brother and sister-in-law (21 Apr. 1819), makes reference to Hinduism, specifically Vishnu and entertains the idea of a common “Parent” of all religious traditions (336). As I will

is undeniably the most significant figure for linking Romanticism to Hindu philosophy.²⁶ Indeed, he played a large role in integrating these Eastern ideas into the basis of the Romantic tradition inherited by later English Romantic authors.

The *Gita* tells the story of the warrior Arjuna's conversation with Lord Krishna. Krishna explains that the warrior has nothing to fear in doing his duty, as he, his allies, and enemies are all united through the concept of *atman*—the universal self/soul—and are inseparable from the cosmic principle of *Brahman*—the essence of Ultimate reality. Brahman is reached through the avenues of reality but is understood as the cosmic principle that undergirds all things in that reality and is thus not its one-to-one equivalent. Brahman is something that can be experienced but not reduced to an object locatable in time and space, as it is the cosmic principle that both supports and transcends these modes of division. The atman, as an emanation of Brahman, links the one and the many: the atman, originating in Brahman, seeks to get back to Brahman, transcending all appearances of division and separation. These ideas are no doubt familiar to readers of English Romanticism, and it was this *panentheism* that was at first read with much intrigue by the early Romantics.²⁷ Yet over time, Romanticism began to develop along

elaborate below, Keats's thinking bares some similarity to the theory of Jones, who believed that all religion stemmed from Egyptian mythology. See Roberts 27 and Deirdre Coleman 53. Schwab notes that Byron "seems to have read at least the poetical works of Jones" (195), and he asserts that Southey was familiar with the work of Jones, the *Gita*, and other Hindu texts (195).

²⁶ As David Vallins writes, "Coleridge engages more profoundly with oriental ideas and cultures—and in ways more extensively informed by contemporary and earlier scholarship—than any other British Romantic. At the same time, the idea of the Orient as signifying a transcendent intuition of the unity of self and other, spiritual and material, or conscious and unconscious is . . . so pervasive in his writing as to make Coleridge in a sense the most profoundly 'orientalist' author of his age" (Introduction 2). While I agree, I would add that Coleridge's eventual rejection of Hinduism has largely to do with an ontological disruption that Vallins does not address.

²⁷ While Hinduism is commonly thought of as a pantheism (as Coleridge suggests below), it is perhaps better understood as rather a *panentheism*. Under a pantheistic model, Brahman and the universe would be

different ontological lines from those of Hinduism, becoming rather skeptical of the existence of an essential self/soul, though much to the chagrin of its authors who repeatedly retreat towards the ontological stability offered by such a concept. Coleridge is a case in point, as his reactions to Hindu philosophy model the reactions to alternative modes of “being” that I argue incited the shift towards Buddhist ontology in the Romantics I study and their difficulty in elaborating that ontology.

Natalie Tal Harries points out that it is difficult to date Coleridge’s exposure to the *Gita* with much specificity, noting that his first mention of the text occurs between 1818-1819 in his *Philosophical Lectures*. But she suggests that his first reading of Wilkins’s translation of the *Gita* likely occurred much earlier, citing a 1797 letter to John Thelwall that seems to evince Coleridge’s awareness of the text (132):²⁸

My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great—something one & indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!—But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!—‘Struck with the deepest calm of Joy’ I stand

Silent, with swimming sense; and gazing round
On the wide Landscape gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily, a living Thing
Which acts upon the mind, & with such Hues
As cloath th’ Almighty Spirit, when he makes
Spirits perceive his presence!—

It is but seldom that I raise & spiritualize my intellect to this height—& at other times I adopt the Brahman Creed, & say—It is better to sit than to stand, it is better to lie than to sit, it is better to sleep than to wake—but Death is the best of all!—I should much wish, like the Indian Vishna, to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, & wake once in a million years for a few minutes—just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more. (*Letters*

identical with each other, but a more accurate way of conceptualizing this relationship would be that Brahman is not the universe as such, but the two interpenetrate each other, and the one is inseparable from the other (i.e., non-dual).

²⁸ Harries posits that “Coleridge’s ‘first presentation’ to the *Gita* seems to occur alongside his reading of Jones and Maurice during the mid- to late 1790s” (132-33).

349-50)

Coleridge attests to a desire to have his “being” dissolved into the infinite, to embrace the death of his self as a state of infinite freedom as it returns to the oneness of nature, from which he finds himself to be no different. It is in this state that Coleridge believes he has gained a glimpse of eternity, a moment outside of time in which the self has been brought to rest, and because of this stillness he longs to exist forever in this state of pleasure.²⁹

The references to Vishnu and the Brahman creed strongly suggest that Coleridge’s philosophizing had been influenced by his Hindu reading.³⁰ For all the enthusiasm for Indian thinking he shows here, however, Coleridge’s optimism was not to last past the early years of his career. In his later days, he was to renounce all of his previous support for Indian philosophy, finding it less and less tenable as time went on, eventually returning to an explicitly Christian position,³¹ albeit a less than traditional one.³²

²⁹ Commenting on these lines, Drew notes that this “prose passage is remarkable for the way it takes us through several shifts of consciousness. Coleridge begins by suggesting he has an objective sense of beauty. He regrets, however, that this is not always sustained: too often all possible knowledge, and the universe itself, appears fragmented, partial and therefore insignificant. This leads him to aspire towards a coherent vision in which natural scenery appears sublime. In such a state, he says, all things counterfeit infinity He regrets by way of contrast to the spiritualized state of intellect he more frequently falls into a state of lassitude where the more supine the posture and the more insensate the consciousness the better. At such times, he says, he has become a Brahmin in his attitude. This is, of course, a travesty of the significance of traditional yogic teaching and it is an extraordinary (and possibly double) irony that Coleridge, having rather idly postulated a Brahmin predilection for a series of living states which successively assimilate themselves to death, slips—just like a *yogi*—into a vision of himself as an archetypal Indian god in the cosmic interval before the recreation of the universe” (189).

³⁰ Harries suggests that Coleridge’s writing here shows similarities to Wilkins’s translation of the *Gita* (132), as does Drew (193).

³¹ Srivastava and Harries both trace the phases of Coleridge’s attitudes towards India. Srivastava finds that during 1793-1815, Coleridge was “liberal” towards India, but “hostile” from 1815 to his death in 1834 (205). Harries, however, finds a third phase. She suggests that by 1802, Coleridge’s attitude shifts towards a “vacillation between positive and negative responses to the concepts . . . in the *Gita*” (137), and by 1816 he meets a third period in which he “retracted his previous views and refuted the doctrines of the *Gita*” (144).

³² As M. H. Abrams notes, Coleridge “carried on a lifetime’s struggle to save what seemed to him the irreducible minimum of the Christian creed within an essentially secular metaphysical system” (*Natural*

In *Opus Maximum* (1819-23), Coleridge shows his disenchantment with Indian techniques of exploring ontology. Yet this disenchantment is also a retreat from the revolutionary spirit that caused Coleridge to esteem Hindu panentheism and displace Christianity's God as the philosophical centre of the world. Coleridge claims that he "paid [a] debt of homage on [his] first presentation to these foreign potentates under the introduction by aid of the great linguists above mentioned [i.e., Jones and Wilkins]" (282). But now "having so done," he seeks "to purge" their influence (282), finding that "their Pantheism"³³ is "a natural result of an imbecile understanding producing indistinction half from indolence and . . . by a partial closure of the eyelids, and when all hues and outlines melt into a garish mist" that is "deem[ed] . . . unity" (280-81), resulting in "the additional mystery of secondary self-impersonation, metamorphoses, incarnations" that remind "us of their incompatibility with the doctrines of omneity and infinity, which are the constant theme and the philosophic import of the indian theology, but without even an attempt to resolve the riddle" (282-83). Coleridge thus becomes dissatisfied with reducing his "being" to what he now sees as an illusory unity of all things, which the self exists apart from as a discrete and sovereign unit. Coleridge, it seems, wants to be assured that there is some higher power at the cosmic helm that he ultimately does not find in Indian philosophy—which seems only to connote a further descent into chaos. Because he wants to reconcile unity with selfhood, he turns back to Christianity in an attempt to "solve the riddle" of his ontology.

In a notebook entry from 7 Jan. 1830, Coleridge asserts that

67).

³³ See note 27 above.

Prayer is the mediation—or rather the effort to connect the misery of Self with the blessedness of God—and its voice is—Mercy! mercy! for Christ’s sake in whom thou hast opened out the fountain of Mercy to sinful Man—. It is a sore evil to be and not in God—but it is a still more dreadful evil & misery to will to be other than in God. And yet in every act, in which the gratification of the sensual life is the ultimate end, is the manifestation of such a will. (5:6243)

Coleridge, then, moves from a pleasurable position in which individuality is sacrificed to the oneness of everything to a position that reclaims the ontological security of the Christian self/soul and seeks to recover such pleasure but in a manner that joins the soul with the eternal through sensory experience, that is, one in which the self can be blended into the divine, but retain its individual identity. Coleridge, in opposition to Hindu philosophy, espouses a belief in which the self is not of the same “substance” as the divine but is rejoined with the divine in a manner that makes it indistinct. However, as I will explore at length in Chapter 3, opium becomes instrumental in Coleridge’s effort to achieve this unity, even if he is less than willing to admit it. Coleridge thus preserves the experiential basis of Indian philosophy, but attempts to reconcile it with Christianity’s self/soul, which allows for his “being” to find its ontological “ground” within the context of a Christian eternity.

One of the consequences of Enlightenment Orientalism was to foreground rationalism when attempting to understand the history of religion, resulting in an exercise of religious comparison.³⁴ Jones in particular sought to trace the history of religion back

³⁴ As Schwab notes, “[n]o consequence of the oriental revelations stirred things up quite so much as religious comparativism; no chapter counted for so much in the history of the spirit as this new confrontation between two spiritual techniques. . . . All the beliefs that suddenly appeared from other times and places created a pressure on the inquisitive to ask what lay behind belief. One now knew all that had been believed, for it lived on in those who still believed. . . . If there is but one Truth, is it because the others are insignificant? Or is it because they are *suddenly no different from it*. Faith had never before experienced such a need for a reference point. Furthermore, it was not merely a matter of faith’s content. The novelty of competition between different aptitudes for the inner life had to be considered” (453-54; my italics). As a result, this puts the narrative of the self/soul in treacherous waters as it raises questions about how the

to a common origin in order to account for Christianity's relationship to other (perhaps more) ancient religions.³⁵ At first, this comparativism was greeted with interest and optimism. As Schwab explains, "With India . . . Christianity encountered a heterodoxy millennia old yet still very much alive, and for the first time Christendom ceased automatically to consider gentiles idolators. Instead of opposing a unique form of certitude against the certitude of universal error, one began to seek an original principle of commonality within foreign beliefs" (454). However, by the 1830s a certain revulsion to India had developed due to a desire to keep in place the mentality that "West was best," which was in no small part the work of the European Orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries (53).³⁶ As Schwab puts it, "[t]he conquerors felt obligated to defend their conquest, which meant exalting their own race and religion. This resulted in political and spiritual unrest, which spread like an epidemic" (43). But while Christianity was now forced to take a defensive position on its claim to religious Truth, to a certain

individual relates to god/the cosmos, on which Christianity no longer has the final word.

³⁵ As Roberts explains, "Jones had influentially suggested an oriental ethnology linking the Greeks, Egyptians and Indians as being of similar racial stock and sharing the same popular religion. He also suggested, drawing on Hindu traditions, that the Chinese were an outcaste from Hindu society, being lapsed Kshatriyas who had established themselves north-east of Bengal and gradually taken over the vast area of China" (27). Also, Roberts highlights that "Jones, displayed a powerful synthetic impulse to link Hindu, and generally oriental thought and practices with Christianity in a way that initially appealed to conservative and evangelical interpretations of Indian/Hindu civilization as being in a radical sense compatible with Christianity. According to this Mosaic ethnology of Jones, Indian civilization could be traced back to the diasporic rehabilitation of the earth following Noah's flood. The ancient nature of Indian civilization, and its pristine preservation by the Brahmins, suggested therefore that this ancient civilization was a well-preserved version of Biblical patriarchy. Hence Christianity, as a development of Judaism, could find affirmation in India" (22-23).

³⁶ In 1825, Joseph Daniel Guigniaut contended that "[t]he route mapped out by Jones, Robertson, and the learned Thomas Maurice was soon abandoned in England, and the Christian missionaries contributed, through their often tainted picture of the moral and religious state of these people, a great deal of diffusion of a host of false ideas about the ancient religion of the Hindus" (qtd. in Schwab 43-44).

extent the “damage was done,” and dogmatic Christianity no longer held the same clout as in pre-Enlightenment years.³⁷

Romanticism, thus, emerges at a time when all religious “bets” seem to be off amongst the Enlightened philosophical elite, to which Romanticism effectively responds. Romantic writers do not abandon religion altogether, but the end of the eighteenth century finds them rethinking religion and spirituality in the aftermath of the Enlightenment. In addition to the Hindu tradition, Europe had also “discovered” Islam. Although neither were seen as “on par” with Christianity, the fact remained that certain similarities could be traced, however uncomfortably. Moreover, by the time Romanticism emerges, both Deism and Unitarianism offered alternative models of understanding religion but in a way that could more easily be reconciled with the epistemological advancements of the Enlightenment, and Coleridge himself considered becoming a Unitarian minister. Yet this is not to say that dissent was condoned or even popular, though these spiritual models did offer new vantage points for the Romantics and nineteenth-century thinkers more generally.³⁸ Romanticism thus emerges, in part, as a response to the ailing religious sentiment in Europe that developed by the end of the

³⁷ Roberts argues that “[a]s the greater antiquity of the Eastern religions of India, China, and Egypt became increasingly recognized over the course of the century, in order to keep its origins unsullied by paganism, Christianity itself required to be purged of its oriental (and even Judaic) associations rather than to embrace them. Yet at the heart of Christian belief a doubt had been sown of its essential purity. The vast reaches of geological time emerging from fossil records (far greater than Mosaic orthodoxy allowed), the anthropological view of religion that this ushered in (building on the Higher biblical scholarship), and the idea that Christianity was linked with other major world religions in mythological import were all deeply challenging to simpler evangelical notions of scriptural belief” (31).

³⁸ For the influence of Islam, Deism, and Unitarianism, and Socinianism on European attitudes towards religion in the eighteenth century, see Colin Jager 37 and Daniel E. White 161-70.

eighteenth century.³⁹ For all of the advancements in knowledge gained through the Enlightenment's development of empirical study as the basis of rational thought, Romanticism argues that reason alone cannot account for the whole of human experience. As I emphasize specifically, however difficult it is for many Romantic writers to express spirituality, it remains for them as, if not more, essential to an understanding of experience, a struggle and importance that inspires much of their literature. Supported by the imagination, this experience does not strictly align with their time's emphasis on empirical validation, as in, for instance, Coleridge's refutation of David Hartley's associationist philosophy in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), which draws from the empirical philosophy of Locke and Hume. That is to say, the more fluid domain of literature, as in the poetry of Shelley, Keats, or Coleridge, or the experimental narratives of De Quincey's prose confessions or Beckford's novel, allowed these writers, unlike the philosophical treatise—which was constrained by its demand for the truth of reason—to explore a deep sense of spirituality that nonetheless grows from a post-Enlightenment demand for rationality that no longer has the same esteem for dogmatic religion. In effect, they seek to explore the empiricism of spirituality.

Abrams has famously characterized this Romantic attempt to secularize spirituality by superimposing it onto the natural world as *natural supernaturalism*. He argues that the Romantics attempted to use the religious model they inherited from the

³⁹ Michael Tomko notes that “[d]espite its historical prevalence, there is a long-standing debate in romantic studies about the relevance of religion for understanding Romanticism. Romantic criticism oscillates between making the dismissal of religion the *sine qua non* for the emergence of Romantic literature and viewing Romanticism as inextricably bound up with religious sensibilities, discourses, and communities” (341). Much like Buddhism, Romanticism is religious but non-dogmatic and therefore cannot escape its spiritual commitments, though it does not require strict adherence to any sort of revealed scripture. Rather, in both philosophies the primacy of experience is seen as the most important factor, and intellectual or scriptural understanding is considered secondary.

Christian tradition as a means to give support to their more modern understanding of spirituality:

The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced one had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity, yet to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values, may surely be viewed by the disinterested historian as a display of integrity and of courage. Certainly the greatest Romantic writers, when young and boldly exploratory, earned the right to their views by a hard struggle. (68)

In so doing, argues Abrams, the Romantics “reconstitut[ed their religious inheritance] in a way that would make [it] intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent” (66), while also “reformulat[ing these views] within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature” (13). As much as Western religious models offered a kind of structural support to the Romantics’ spirituality, their bold exploration, as I will show in my coming chapters, leads them into a spiritual realm beyond the “known limits” of familiar religious models. Christianity, then, offers a language by which to understand the experiences of the Romantic subject who dissolves their self into the processes of nature, but, in so doing, transcends both the language and logic of Christianity. That is, Romanticism seeks a “limit-experience,” one that exists at the boundaries of religious epistemology and seeks to go *beyond* those boundaries. While Romanticism may start from a position of subject and object/ego and non-ego (what Abrams refers to above as a “two-term system”), its philosophical orientation is aimed at overcoming these binaries. Instead, Romantic subjectivity is forced to question its self. The Romantic subject cannot “transact” with nature as Abrams suggests because they awaken to an inseparability between their “being” and nature itself: their self-nature *is* nature.

For example, in “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth is rendered as a speaking subject that can only be constituted through the processes of nature. His sense of his “being” is “disturbed” and taken over by something “he” is not and yet is inseparable from, as his “being” is “interfused” with “the light of the setting suns,” “the round ocean,” and “the living air” (94-98). All things are governed by this “motion,” which becomes the true “spirit” within the “mind of man” (99-100), as mind is only a personal experience of nature’s flux and flow and thus has no stable essence one can call “spirit,” “self,” or “soul.” As such, Christianity no longer suffices as an ontological support, as Romantic subjectivity is thrown into a state of ceaseless mutability. It looks for a resting point, but cannot find it as one’s sense of self is up for perpetual reinterpretation, and it is this mode of “being” that brings Romanticism in line with the Buddhist concept of emptiness.⁴⁰

While Christianity remained the standard model, we find Romanticism exploring variations to its logic and creation story, even when such speculation seemed contentious. In effect, Romanticism “samples” other religious traditions in an attempt to make sense of the spiritual territory it encounters and the ontology that comes with it, which leaves Romanticism perpetually trying to get back to its self.

⁴⁰ Rudy reads something similar going on in “Tintern Abbey” (*Wordsworth* 6-9). While I generally agree with Rudy’s reading of this poem, I stop short of endorsing his argument that Wordsworth (and the other Romantics he takes up in *Romanticism and Zen*) are able to overcome the Western tradition of subject-object dualism. I agree that there is an attempt to do so, which allows the Romantics to experience what Buddhist’s refer to as the emptiness of the self. However, I posit that the Romantics are unable to fully overcome the logic of selfhood. This process, then, is very much like the one of transcending the self and then binding subjectivity to nature described by Hartman as “akedah” and “apocalypse” (*Wordsworth’s* 225).

1.2 The Empty Self: Romantic and Buddhist

In Buddhist philosophy, what appears to us as self is actually an illusion produced by the meeting of what are known as the five aggregates or *skandhas*:⁴¹ form/body, sensations, perceptions, mental activity/thoughts, and consciousness—all of which are “empty” (of self-nature). Because all experiences are produced by the mixing of the five skandhas, all things exist only as appearances. Their being reified as “real” things depends on the activity of the mind (considered to be a sixth sense faculty), which seems to endow them with self-nature as a result of its ability to set up phenomena in contrast to each other. The mind is thus predisposed towards making dualistic distinctions, which creates the appearance of a sovereign self-nature. But given the emptiness of all phenomena, subjectivity and objectivity are in reality inseparable, as emptiness does not metaphysically coalesce to produce its own kind of negative ontological stability. That is, even emptiness is empty. Buddhist scholar Jay Garfield explains this succinctly:

Suppose that we take a conventional entity, such as a table. We analyze it to demonstrate its emptiness, finding that there is no table apart from its parts, that it cannot be distinguished in a principled way from its antecedent and subsequent histories, and so forth. So we conclude that it is empty. But now let us analyze that emptiness—the emptiness of the table—to see what we find. What do we find? Nothing at all but the table’s lack of inherent existence. The emptiness is dependent upon the table. No conventional table—no emptiness of the table. To see the table as empty . . . is not to somehow see “beyond” the illusion of the table to some other, more real entity. It is to see the table as conventional, as dependent. But the table that we so see when we see its emptiness is the very same table, seen not as the substantial thing we instinctively posit, but rather as it is. Emptiness is hence not different from conventional reality—it is the fact that conventional reality is conventional. Therefore it must be dependently arisen, since it depends upon the existence of empty phenomena. Hence emptiness itself is empty.

⁴¹ *SDBZ*: “‘lit. group, aggregate, heap’; term for the five aggregates which constitute the entirety of ‘personality’” The characteristics of the *skandas* are birth, old age, death, duration, and change. They are regarded as without essence” (206).

(“Dependent” 231-32)⁴²

Because things are empty, they are always changing in relation to the contrasts they are set against. The fluctuations of mind, then, are not different from the more readily apparent fluctuations of nature. As such, the practice of Zen is to forget the mind and the self-nature it seems to contain, giving one’s subjectivity over to a state of constant process, a stream with no start or end point.

The concept of emptiness is most succinctly expressed by the Buddhist scripture known as the *Heart Sutra* (c. 150-350 CE).⁴³ As the name implies, this text is the “heart” of Buddhist teaching on emptiness and, as such, is emphasized by the Zen tradition, which places a special emphasis on realizing the emptiness of the self. The sutra teaches that form and emptiness are two sides of the same thing: form only exists in contrast to emptiness and vice versa. All things have form, but form should not be mistaken for permanence or self-nature. Edward Conze translates the key section as follows:

form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is form that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

. . . all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete. Therefore, . . . in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells,

⁴² Specifically, Garfield is responding to the philosophy of Nagarjuna, who is arguably the most important Buddhist philosopher after Gautama Buddha himself and is a key figure in elaborating Buddhism’s doctrine of emptiness. I will return to Nagarjuna’s philosophic interventions in Chapter 3, as they intersect with Shelley’s philosophy in *Prometheus Unbound*.

⁴³ N.b. Buddhist scriptures were not traditionally written down, making it difficult to date their origin, as the written text often appears much later than the material’s original articulation. Moreover, the Buddhist canon is not organized into a single volume, as teachings were adapted to the culture they entered. As such, the various schools of Buddhism emphasize different teachings. While attempts at dating and organizing Buddhist scripture can often frustrate historical analyses of them, this difficulty also speaks directly to those teachings’ emphasis on transcending space and time, which will become an increasingly important part of my analysis.

tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element. (81, 85, 89)⁴⁴

This sutra points to the fact that these things do not really exist independently of other things. The eyes *see*, but are not in and of themselves *sight*. The ears hear, but are not synonymous with the experience of hearing. Both of these cases, and the others quoted above, depend on the mind to filter and integrate this sensory data, but this “data,” too, has no essential nature; it is subject to reinterpretation from moment to moment and vacillates in and out of awareness, which directly contradicts the logic that they have any permanent self-nature or lasting essence.⁴⁵ The only constant among phenomena, then, is their emptiness, their lack of any stable point of existence. Consequently, Zen practice is focused on overcoming the logic of mind-self relation, which leads to nirvana. When the self is fully given up, the remaining human subject is left behind as simply one part of the processes of the universe. Yet while this spiritual awakening connotes a liberation from suffering—the process of embracing the emptiness of the self is akin to the *psychical death of the self*, as one can no longer claim existential sovereignty amidst the world’s flux. Thus, Zen practice is seldom easy and frequently uncomfortable.

Eihei Dogen, founder of the Soto school of Zen in Japan, famously writes in the “Genjokoan” fascicle of his *Shobogenzo* (c. 1231-1253) that

[t]o learn the Buddha’s truth is to learn ourselves. To learn ourselves is to forget ourselves. To forget ourselves is to be experienced by the myriad dharmas. To be

⁴⁴ In addition to the synoptic commentary I provide, readers may wish to consult Conze’s commentary on these verses (81-89).

⁴⁵ Zen master Dainin Katigiri offers a helpful example: “When you use the toilet, you don’t believe it’s a provisional picture in an imaginary world, because you can see the toilet right in front of you. But the toilet you see is a toilet fabricated by your consciousness. The real toilet is just like time—every moment it goes away. All you have to do is just use it, just handle the toilet as Buddha, and live with the toilet in peace and harmony. This is everyday practice” (97).

experienced by the myriad dharmas is to let our own body and mind, and the body and mind of the external world, fall away. There is a state in which the traces of realization are forgotten; and it manifests the traces of forgotten realization for a long, long time. (42)

The point to observe here is that Dogen very clearly shows that Zen practice is a process of *loss*: a loss of self—which often involves wading through traumata of the past, that is, the struggles that define the self. An excerpt from Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen* (1965) pertaining to one student’s meditation experience is particularly revealing in this regard: “Spasms of torment like bolts of electricity shoot through me and I writhe in agony I feel as though I’m being made to atone for my own and all mankind’s sins Am I dying or becoming enlightened?” (230; Kapleau’s ellipses).⁴⁶ Building on the existing scholarship’s awareness of these sorts of ontological upheavals, I explore further the various ways in which texts by Beckford, Coleridge, De Quincey, Shelley, and Keats face the illusory nature of the self as a concept that can be transcended in certain moments.⁴⁷ But these texts suggest that when self-awareness returns it becomes deeply unsettling, as this transcendence irreversibly alters their experience of subjectivity: something called “self” can still be detected, but what exactly “it” “is” becomes

⁴⁶ In the context of Romanticism, Henderson similarly suggests that Romantic subjectivity cannot escape an affinity to gothicism, suggesting that “[o]rdinary modern life is itself sufficiently full of danger and distress, and to live in time is to accumulate painful memories, to be haunted by ghosts” (126).

⁴⁷ As Rudy comments in *Romanticism and Zen*, “there is no guarantee that the void is a pleasant place. If it is to be negotiated, it must be negotiated by one who has lost all vestiges of selfhood and its attendant appetites” (121). “The problem for the meditator, as for the Romantic poet, is to prevent the experience of oneness from hardening into dogmatic principle, static trope, or obsessive expectation. One can become attached to emptiness, the experience of oneness, and lose the existential freedom that such experience requires” (137). However, Rudy’s focus on the similarity between Romanticism and Zen seems to limit his maneuverability to delve very deeply into this issue. Lussier’s text does not explicitly attend to this anxiety, though as a practicing Buddhist he is likely to have knowledge, if not direct experience, of the difficulties that can arise in meditation practice.

increasingly uncertain with each exposure to self-emptiness. What was initially experienced as transcendental pleasure becomes a troubling ontological upheaval.

This odd relationship to subjectivity has been noted by Romantic scholars other than those interested in Buddhism. Jacques Khalip has explored Romantic subjectivity as a kind of “anonymity,” which bespeaks an ontology very similar to that of emptiness. He argues that the Romantic “‘self’ is a projection of being that dubiously authorizes itself as it falls apart in the very act of authorization” (6). That is, it is a textual-linguistic artifact that stands as a point of reference on the page. But Khalip cautions that “before leaping to valorize such ungrounding as a newfound freedom, what should be understood is that the anonymous subject precisely enacts its erasure in a scene of self-address that never can be overcome” (5). Thus, Khalip’s study testifies to the fact that the Romantic poem is at once a reification of self (the written “I” on the page) and a monument to the dissolution of self that Romantic poetry reveres as an awesome experience of the sublime. Yet Khalip suggests that “[t]he subject’s inability to claim a proper knowledge of itself renders it a belated remainder of historical cognition,” making such a mode of “being” “anachronistic because it evokes an existence . . . [that is] always temporally unfinished and suspended, not knowing what it is, and what it will be” (6-7). Due to this suspension of the subject’s ontological stability, history and time—the things one has experienced—become a stand-in for the self, but do not coalesce as a sovereign identity apart from the conditions that produce it, as the self cannot be reduced to one’s ontological fluctuations over time.

Similarly, Thomas Pfau argues that “[t]he role of the aesthetic [in Romanticism] . . . becomes to trace how individuals and communities are at once embedded in and estranged from their experiential, historical reality” (16). He suggests, also, that this

“ontological echo of man as a strictly *historical* phenomenon” is “constitute[d]” by a “prevailing ‘mood’ of anxiety,” which speaks to a “‘being-in-the-world’ that knows of its utter lack of any transcendent point of reference or ‘ground’” (16; Pfau’s italics).⁴⁸

Rather, “it explores how experience in the aggregate molds the emotional fabric of its subject—namely, as a persistent and unsettling ‘feeling’ of the irreducible tenuousness and volatility of being” (16-17). That is, subjectivity emerges as an affectual response to the prior events and conditions of one’s life. As Keats writes in his famous letter on life as the “vale of Soul-making” (21 Apr. 1819), the concept of “soul,” that is, the sense of who and what one is, only emerges after one has lived and struggled and suffered in the world and is not “implanted” at birth by a divine agent. The soul, then, becomes a way of keeping track of the apparent self-unity that takes shape over the course of a life in time. As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 5, however, this suggests that linear unity is perhaps not as real as it is imagined. Because Romantic “being” is, as Pfau states, tenuous and volatile, it is subject to change and reappraisal. As a result, one’s ability to perceive and identify something called the self makes its presence something of an alien concept that renders the self as its own source of otherness, which will become a central concern in Chapter 3.⁴⁹ While Buddhist philosophy accounts for this effect and offers strategies for managing it through meditation practice, the practice of Romantic writing struggles to

⁴⁸ Pfau’s Heideggerian approach to Romanticism is in many ways complementary to a Zen Buddhist one. William Barrett notes that after reading one of Suzuki’s books on Zen, Heidegger remarked, “If I understand this man correctly . . . this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings” (xi). See also Steven Heine (who contrasts Heidegger’s “being and time” with Dogen’s concept of “being-time”) and Carl Olson 161-62, 172-73. N.b. In Chapter 2, I address Dogen’s “being-time,” but use Nishijima and Cross’s translation: “existence-time.”

⁴⁹ As Khalip reminds us, “subjectivity is already other in that its self-projections are dissimulations of a nothingness or anonymity that fails to guarantee any lasting ground” (17).

resign the self to its own emptiness and often finds the self incapacitated by an inability to explain its existence, given that historical precedents are no longer enough. We can detect something of this effect at work via the dis-ease of Coleridge's "being" in "Limbo" (1811) or Byron's in "Darkness" (1816), as both experience a terrifying upheaval of space-time.⁵⁰ As Pfau suggests, "feeling" is all that remains to offer ontological support to Romantic subjectivity. But feeling's tenuous volatility becomes an intoxication Romantic subjectivity can neither define its self by nor escape.

1.3 Ecstasy, Intoxication, and Zen Sickness

Given that the previous section closed by offering intoxication as a model for understanding Romanticism, it may appear that such a model stands to supersede my previous theorization of Romanticism as a kind of Buddhism in progress. However, as we will see, using a Buddhist model actually accounts for this lapse into intoxication. Specifically, I argue that the Romantics in this study seek the ecstasy that accompanies self-dissolution as a means of recouping themselves from the more uncomfortable effects of emptiness. They are thus caught in a trap of wanting to overcome the self, but are unable to face the pain of letting go of the ontological support it provides without using an anodyne of some kind, be it opium or the sublime. In Chapter 5, I argue that in the *Hyperion* poems (1818; 1819), Keats resists making this appeal to ecstasy, but still cannot escape its intoxicating effects. For Keats—and to a lesser extent for Shelley (as I explore

⁵⁰ Coleridge opens his poem as follows: "'Tis a strange place, this Limbo!—not a Place, / Yet name it so— where Time and weary Space / Fettered from flight, with night-mair sense of Fleeing / Strive for their last crepuscular Half-being—" (1-4). Byron begins in a similar vein: "I had a dream, which was not all a dream. / The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars / Did wander darkling in the eternal space, / Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth / Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air; / Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day" (1-6)

in Chapter 4)—intoxication is used heuristically in order to make sense of the dissociating effects of self-loss. Nevertheless, these varying modes of intoxication are addressed by Buddhist philosophy.

The *Lankavatara Sutra* (c. 350-400 CE), among the most important scriptures to the Zen tradition, makes some mention of these sorts of intoxicating effects and the potential pleasures of emptiness. The sutra cautions students that it is possible to become “intoxicated⁵¹ with the happiness that comes from the attainment of perfect tranquillisation,” possibly leading to an inability to “overcome the hindrances . . . growing out of . . . notions of generality and individuality” (213): a point that ultimately addresses the pleasures and pains of mindfulness we began with. Although Buddhism emphasizes the realization of emptiness, it is possible to become attached to emptiness, to reify it as something separate from our experience of reality as though one might “cross over” into emptiness and remain “there” permanently (i.e., imbue it with a self-nature). Red Pine (Bill Porter) gives a translation of the above section from the *Lanka* that helps to further clarify this point: “[meditators may] fall prey to views of attachment to no self among persons and things and give rise to conceptions of nirvana, not to an understanding of detachment from dharmas [i.e., phenomena]” (235). The importance of this verse is that it signals the fallacy of trying to conceptualize nirvana as something beyond the experience of things as they are (in reality), which I will explore in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4. The authors I study engage in similar habits, failing to understand that nirvana is not a destination to be reached or something to be attained

⁵¹ Translations of Sanskrit into English often vary widely from one another, though Suzuki’s use of the word “intoxication” in this passage is not idiosyncratic to his translation. Goddard (116) and Red Pine (235) use similar language.

from outside one's own "being." Rather, nirvana is the cessation of suffering connoted by overcoming the self, which reveals dualistic notions to be fallacious, despite appearances.⁵² As Zen priest Amakuki Sessan notes, "[b]y non-duality, duality is resolved and becomes not two. But it is not that it becomes altogether one. Two but not two, one but not one, two and yet one, one and yet two, it can be called neither one nor two. Distinctions are themselves sameness, sameness is itself distinctions—this is the truth of the universe" (112-13).

Although the Romantics seek an alternative to subject-object duality, their writing (practice) suggests that they were still mired in the dualistic notions their philosophic milieu had not quite surpassed. Thus, when they do experience emptiness, it becomes a mode of intoxication that bestows upon them a profound feeling of blissful harmony with nature—not unlike that noted in the *Lankavatara Sutra* above.⁵³ But as a mode of intoxication, this state can only be reached by travelling the "road of excess," which Blake reminds us leads to "the palace of wisdom," as this sensory intoxication "cleanse[s]" the "doors of perception," making visible the "infinite" (*Marriage* 35, 39).⁵⁴

⁵² Because of its non-duality, nirvana can be difficult to discuss, and historically the Buddha taught that it was beyond language. *SDBZ* offers the following definition: "lit. 'extinction' . . . the goal of spiritual practice in all branches of Buddhism. In the understanding of early Buddhism, it is a departure from the cycle of rebirths . . . and entry into an entirely different mode of existence" (159). I will return to the issue of rebirth/reincarnation in Chapter 5.

⁵³ Orrin Wang has more recently argued for a "Romantic sobriety," suggesting that "it is a common place to associate British Romantic literature with figures of delirium and psychotropic activity" but that "the study of Romanticism, like all literary fields, has undergone intense methodological and topical transformations" (17), which leads him to "define Romanticism by its sobriety" (1) rather than its sensory excess. I have positioned my study of Romanticism in terms of intoxication because in my reading what Wang explores as "sobriety" would be more accurately represented as moments in which Romanticism caught in a *sobering* moment after moments of sensory intoxication.

⁵⁴ Blake's Romanticism presents something of a paradox when read under a Buddhist lens. On the one hand, he advocates for the necessity of "contraries" to promote progress, thus suggesting an inseparability between things that resembles emptiness. However, his stance on desire and excess are a bit harder to

However, this pleasure seeking carries with it unanticipated consequences that serve to further disturb the Romantic subject's ontology. As Zenist Brad Warner has written,

[s]omething like a drug-induced euphoria is often a part of the meditative experience. But in Zen we try to avoid these states of euphoria or bliss . . . because they're just as unbalanced as our so-called normal states of mind. Euphoria is the other side of terror. Just because you're only paying attention to one side doesn't mean you're not getting both. (*Karma* 95)

Moreover, as the *Lanka* indicates, this method does not result in overcoming the self. The effect of this is that the Romantic subject begins to experience their self as illusory but cannot make the ontological and epistemological leap to understand emptiness as the pervading characteristic of all things. Romantic subjectivity, thus, enters a strange ontological zone in which the reality of both inner and outer worlds is drawn into question, compounding the intoxication, but not necessarily as a source of pleasure.

As F. L. Lucas argues, Romanticism is a mode of "intoxicated dreaming" (130). "Romanticism," he writes, is "an intoxication" akin to "[a]lcohol," which "does not so much stimulate the brain as relax its higher controls . . . though there are varying degrees of it, just as there are day-dreams, night-dreams, nightmares, drink-dreams, and drug-dreams" (127). Romantic subjectivity, being unable to find stable ontological ground, finds reality to be dream-like, something that the subject can interact with and move around in, but is not bound by any sort of strict linear narrative or chronology. Rather, as I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 5, this dream state speaks to a lapse of such narrative that loosens subjectivity from its normal confines. Yet as Lucas implies above, this dream-like

reconcile with Buddhist philosophy. Rudy offers an admirable reading of Blake's relationship to desire along Zen lines by focusing on the "delight" Blake finds in the "abyss of the five senses" (See *Romanticism* 93-126); however, I am not fully convinced of such a reading, as Blake also emphasizes excess, being resolute that the proper way of life is "[e]nough or too much" (*Marriage* 37). Buddhism would commonly position itself against this proposition.

intoxication can take many forms, and all too often the Romantic subject seeking pleasure and bliss finds distress and terror:

Again and again the romantic who drinks too deep, who surrenders too much to the unconscious, who becomes too completely a child once more, has fallen a victim to the neurotic maladies that beset the childish adult who cannot cope with life but falls between two ages. Then the “clouds of glory” have changed to the nightmares of ego-maniac perversion; to love of sensation even in torture; to the pursuit of strange fruit even in the Garden of Proserpine, whose beauty is death. (134)

In becoming a “childish adult,” the Romantic subject has their identity thrown into flux. Under Romanticism, adulthood is characterized by what Blake calls “experience,” a realization of the negative and restricting aspects of life to which one exists in opposition. That is, the self emerges in response to experience—especially suffering. But “innocent” children, having experienced less, are much freer to use the imagination to place their “being” within the processes of the world around them. Their subjectivity, then, is largely inseparable from the rest of the world, and this is the state that Romantic subjectivity seeks to recover through sensory excess. But this experience draws the validity of their self-narrative into question.

Tilottama Rajan aptly characterizes Romantic writing as a “restless process of self-examination” (*Dark* 25), as it is an effort to understand how ontological existence relates, if at all, to the marker of identity called “self.” The consequences of this exercise are often deeply uncomfortable. Because this process is endless, we might also think of it as a restless *practice* of self-examination. The Romantics return, again and again, to the experience of emptiness, even as it anticipates death of the self. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), for instance, Coleridge introduces us to the ontological dis-ease of *life-in-death*, a state in which “being” and “non-being” become indistinct and is to be

the “penance” that the mariner must endure in order to pay for his transgression against nature—the killing of the albatross. In the early part of the poem there is harmony between the ship, crew, captain, and nature. Despite the “tyrann[y]” of the wind’s “storm-blast” and the dangers of the “snowy cliffs” (42, 41, 55), the ship and crew are unmolested by these threats (“the helmsman steered us through” [70]). Yet the sound of cracking ice produces a “swo[oning]” (62) effect: a dizzying of consciousness caused by witnessing the sublime’s naturalistic lack of concern for human self-sovereignty. The albatross’s arrival is thus initially welcomed as a symbol that the crew will be protected from a world that stands to swallow up their individual identities: “Through the fog it came; / As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God’s name” (64-66).

However, the bird links the Christian self/soul to an emptiness connoted by nature, which does not recognize the significance of human agency, and by subsuming the agency of the soul, nature forces the mariner to confront the absence of his self-sovereignty. Facing a state of psychological upheaval, he seeks to assert his self in order to reclaim the sovereignty that he seems to have lost to nature: “I shot the albatross” (82). But rather than bolstering his self-identity, the mariner realizes that he can never escape his interconnection with the natural world and the otherness it contains. He is thus forced to endure the torment of knowing he is responsible for the death of his crew, as their death becomes his life after the ship is infiltrated by the “Night-mare” of “Life-in-Death” (193).

The mariner’s sense of individual identity is shattered by the souls of others assailing him as he assailed the bird, linking all of them together as part of the natural process the mariner has upset:

The souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe!

And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow! (216-23)

His initial assertion of self comes back to him in a haunting reprise. Finding that he cannot undo the bonding of his subjectivity to the otherness of which he is now aware, the mariner cannot resist “blessing” (285) the ghastly “water-snakes” (273). By repenting, the mariner realizes that he and his crew are non-dual (*not one*, yet *not two*), and the crew therefore return as revenants (333-34): “They raised their limbs like lifeless tools— / We were a ghastly crew (339-40). The switch from “they” to “we” signals the mariner’s realization that he is inseparable from the processes that have brought him to this state, which he never truly leaves. Even after the mariner has paid his penance, he is still controlled by a compulsion to recount his experiences to others. He does not need to inquire who needs to hear this story; he simply knows (588-90). He is connected with something that goes beyond the apparent agency of humans and is compelled to honour it. The mariner thus becomes a kind of ruined spiritual figure testifying to the emptiness nature connotes. Moreover, his travelling and compulsion to repeat bring him in line with Wordsworthian notions of Romantic poetry as a recollection of the past in the present. Thus, the mariner will never truly escape the state of life-in-death. Even after making it back to the shores of life, he is forced to endure it day after day, week after week.

In Buddhism, life and death are seen as likewise interdependent, but through realizing emptiness this interdependence becomes liberating rather than stifling. Coleridge’s poem, however, attests to the haunting effects that can accompany self-dissolution for those who do not yet fully understand emptiness. In Buddhism, this dissociation is sometimes referred to as “Zen sickness.” Sheng Yen, a modern Chan master (“Chan” being the name for the Chinese lineage of Zen), notes the potential

dangers that belie emptiness for the unprepared student. He explains that “[i]t is possible” for someone “to suffer from *Chan Sickness*” as a result of a “no-self” or “emptiness” experience, which may result in one developing “mental problems or becom[ing] deeply confused”; he thus “stress[es] the need for a qualified teacher (qtd. in Nelson 91). The term “Zen sickness” originally appears in *Wild Ivy* (1766), the autobiography of Hakuin (1686-1768), a Japanese monk who developed a mysterious illness after years of intensive meditation practice. After becoming afflicted, Hakuin himself did not know what was wrong. Yet all of the more experienced practitioners he sought aid from informed him that he was experiencing Zen sickness and that nothing could be done (41-42). This “serious illness,” he was told, was a result of “pushing himself too hard” in his meditation practice (79). Attempting to explain his symptoms, Hakuin writes:

I began moping around in a dark, melancholy state. I was always nervous and afraid, weak and timid in mind and body. The skin under my arms was constantly wet with perspiration. I found it impossible to concentrate on what I was doing. I sought out dark places where I could go to be alone and just sat there motionless like a dead man. (41)

While the precise nature of Hakuin’s affliction will likely never be determined,⁵⁵ his Zen sickness has come to represent symbolically any sort of affliction or unintended consequence that may arise during meditation practice.⁵⁶ Arguably, though, the most significant lesson to be learned from Hakuin’s Zen sickness is the danger of privileging

⁵⁵ In his introduction to *Wild Ivy*, Norman Waddell notes that “modern writers have diagnosed [Hakuin’s sickness] variously as tuberculosis, pleurisy, nervous collapse, or some combination of the three” (xxvii).

⁵⁶ Lawrence Nelson shows that the term has been used to describe both physical and psychological ailments that occur due to meditation practice. See esp. Chapter 4.

emptiness over form, reifying emptiness as a thing to be possessed because it has been experienced.⁵⁷

Zen sickness, then, offers a model to understand Romanticism's relationship to Buddhism, given that it speaks to both a privileging of emptiness and the distress that can arise from not understanding the ontological implications of self-emptiness. As I have been arguing, the Romantic writers addressed in this thesis encounter both of these things. By seeking to have their "being" integrated in to the rhythms and processes of nature, the Romantics seek the experience of emptiness. But being unable to understand the relationship between form and emptiness (and the emptiness of emptiness),⁵⁸ they become aware, much like Coleridge's mariner, that the existence of self is dependent on others. The concept of self thus becomes a ghastly and haunting presence, something they seek to escape. But the only means of achieving this is by finding a way of getting *outside of the self*, that is, through an experience of *ecstasy*.

As a conceptual mix of excess and spirituality, ecstasy acts as a heuristic for us to understand the specific form of Zen sickness that the Romantics are afflicted with, as it is effectively a subset of it. That is, Zen sickness is the dis-ease and ecstasy is its symptomatic presentation, as it is this being outside the self that the Romantics cannot help but return to again and again as a means of recuperating from the damage done by

⁵⁷ *SDBZ* defines "Zembyo" (lit. Zen sickness) as "any attachment to one's own enlightenment experiences; also attachment to emptiness" (261). The argument I am developing sees the Romantics as suffering from both of these: they have an experience and seek to get back to it, as though the experience itself was the only way to live in line with what was learned in the initial experience. Moreover, with regards to other complications of meditation practice noted previously, the *SDBZ* also notes that Zen sickness pertains to "deceptive sensations and appearances . . . that can come up during the practice of [meditation]" and "when someone develops great pretensions about his experience on the Zen path and thus considers himself someone special" (261).

⁵⁸ See pp. 31-2 above.

unwittingly encountering the empty self (the origin of the dis-ease). In ecstasy, the self is temporarily escaped (through intoxication) but not altogether done away with, given that ecstasy is constrained by temporality. Georges Bataille's theorization of ecstasy is particularly illuminating for Romantic experiences with ecstasy and the divine, as it connotes a state of deep pleasure and psychological pain. As Bataille explains,

Anyone wanting slyly to avoid suffering identifies with the entirety of the universe, judges each thing as if he were it. In the same way, he imagines, at bottom, that he will never die. We receive these hazy illusions like a narcotic necessary to bear life. But what happens to us when, disintoxicated, we learn what we are? . . .

. . . if we are without a narcotic, an unbreathable void reveals itself. I wanted to be everything, so that falling into this void, I might summon my courage and say to myself: "I am ashamed of having wanted to be everything, for I see now that it was to sleep." From that moment begins a singular experience. The mind moves in a strange world where anguish and ecstasy coexist. (xxxii)

Here, Bataille captures the moment of undecidability between the Romantic experience of ecstasy as a means of both avoiding suffering and confronting it head-on. He notes, too, that the factor that determines pain or pleasure is the narcotic effect of the experience, which mediates awareness of one's "being" as a groundless abyss. As long as one can be anaesthetized by such an effect, one can continue to perceive oneself as everything and never have to return to awareness of one's subjectivity.

The problem remains, however, of how to think through the collapse of the duality between everythingness and individuality that ecstasy connotes. Bataille refers to this ecstatic mode as "inner experience," which if "viewed from the outside by intelligence, it would . . . be necessary to see in it a sum of distinct operations, some intellectual, others aesthetic, yet others moral . . . It is only from within, lived to the point of terror, that [inner experience] appears to unify that which discursive thought must separate" (9). Inner experience bestows upon the subject a state of "intolerable non-

knowledge, which has no other way out than ecstasy itself” (12). This ecstasy, in turn, forces an “intimate cessation of all intellectual operations,” under which “the mind is laid bare” (13) and speaks to a differentiation “between inner experience and philosophy” that says, “what counts is no longer the statement of wind, but the wind” (13). Thus, Bataille shows us that the “goal” of the ecstatic experience is not what the experience seems to suggest but the experience itself, that is, a transcendence of intellectualism and the self it supports, a realization of unity in opposites: most importantly of life and death. Although Bataille seems ultimately unable to resolve the tension between self and not-self in the same fashion as Buddhism, he nonetheless offers a way of understanding the vacillation of self that finds Romanticism struggling to come to terms with emptiness. Moreover, he does so in a way that models Romanticism’s relationship to Buddhism.

Bataille was initially interested in Buddhism, but eventually found that it was not suited to the kind of self-exploration he was interested in practicing. As Marcus Boon notes, Bataille discontinued his meditation practice in favour of other methods and eventually critiqued Buddhism for practices that it is not really guilty of committing (“To Live” 31-57). Andrew Hussey explains that Bataille came to see “the techniques of Eastern mystical practice⁵⁹ [as] serv[ing] only to undermine the individualised thinking subject in a method which recognises no other goal than the experience of alterity” (67). As much as Bataille seeks to dismantle his concept of self, he seems to do so as a way of paradoxically enhancing his self: he seeks to lay claim to the experience itself as something to be repeated and thus figures it as one to possess. Under a Buddhist model, however, the experience itself is secondary to the realization made and how it is

⁵⁹ Specifically, Bataille was interested in tantric practices associated with the Vajrayana—or mystical—tradition of Buddhism. See Boon’s “To Live” 38.

integrated into one's life. The Soto school of Zen in particular de-emphasizes the importance of enlightenment experiences, favouring instead the gradual process of *silent illumination*, which leads to the very self-lessness that Bataille and the Romantics I study seek to understand. Zen Buddhism, therefore, seems to offer precisely the model both are searching for, but depart from in favour of an ecstatic spirituality that becomes its own kind of narcotic to tranquillize the self's perpetual flux. These Romantics seek to find a way to control the experience of self-emptiness, to *form-alize* it so that it can be "dosed out" as needed, producing a kind of drug-like escape from the self. Yet while this drug-like ecstasy may seem to be a turn away from the spiritual exploration connoted by Buddhist practice, Boon sheds light on the fact that drugs are a "hybrid" composed of a "material" substance and a culturally "constructed" "transcendental element" that "goes beyond materiality, and materialist explanations—*that which has traditionally . . . been the concern of religions and spirituality*" (Road 12; my italics). He adds that "[t]his transcendental impulse or meaning is to be found everywhere in drug literature" (Road 12).

Romanticism is not specifically a literature of drugs, though drugs, particularly opium, do have a role in its production and development.⁶⁰ Therefore, I argue that opium acts as kind of stand-in for the concept of emptiness that, at least for a time, can reliably offer emptiness as a mode of ecstasy, as can be seen in the opiated verse of Coleridge's

⁶⁰ Boon begins his history of literature and drugs with a chapter that, in part, takes up the Romantics' proclivity for opium use (Road 17-46). But he also does not leave out Coleridge and Southey's participation in Humphry Davy's nitrous oxide experiments (Road 87-96). Abrams, Elisabeth Schneider, and Alethea Hayter have also traced the influence of opium in Romantic literature: in *The Milk of Paradise* (1934), Abrams is sure of a connection, but Schneider, in *Coleridge, Opium, and "Kubla Khan"* (1953) later refutes this claim. Yet, Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968) strikes a balance, concluding that there is a connection but not an absolute one. However, I think it prudent to consider, too, Boon's reminder that, for the most part, the history of drugs has been written by people who "never took them" (Road 8).

“Kubla Khan.” However, as we shall see in De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), such ecstasy gives way to a threatening experience of self-emptiness. De Quincey’s writing thus evinces a quest to recover (and recover from) the self in a state of ecstasy, which he compulsively returns to as a way of dissociating from the self-pain incurred by dissolving singular identity, as ecstasy allows him to see his “being” as one with worldly processes. By dissolving self into nothingness and then reconstituting it as “everything-ness,” ecstasy thus mimics what the Zen philosopher Kitaro Nishida refers to as a “direct” or “pure experience,” in which “there is only an independent self-sufficient *event*, with neither a subject that sees nor an object that is seen” (48; my italics).⁶¹ This experience allows for a unified sense of “being” to emerge, producing the effects of eternity by seemingly escaping the effects of time. But this unification with all things in the eternal realm is itself subject to time, as it is not an experience that can be sustained. Buddhist philosophy acknowledges this fact and teaches that the experience of emptiness is not one that can be preserved, and thus one should not attempt to attach to it. The appeal of opium, then, is that it seems to offer a level of control over how and when the experience of self-lessness is recovered. Thus, the moment of *recovery* is also a *relapse*, as, in the state of ecstasy, the self is once again undone. It is palliated, but further unravelled and can never be satisfactorily located, as

⁶¹ Nishida fully elaborates this concept as follows: “In pure experience, our thinking, feeling, and willing are still undivided; there is a single activity, with no opposition between subject and object. Such opposition arises from the demands of thinking, so it is not a fact of direct experience . . . Just like when we become enraptured by exquisite music, forget ourselves and everything around us, and experience the universe as one melodious sound, true reality presents itself in the moment of direct experience. Should the thought arise that that the music is the vibration of air or that one is listening to music, at that point one has already separated oneself from true reality because that thought derives from reflection and thinking divorced from the true state of reality of the music” (48).

we shall see in Chapter 3. Ultimately, this self-unravelling resembles emptiness as the state of self-alienation and nihilistic “being” understood by modern Western psychologists and typical of drug withdrawal. Therefore, I would argue that self-emptiness figured in this way connects to the ecstasy of Romantic authors’ opium use as a form of Zen sickness.

Opium, certainly, is the most extreme and telling case of the Romantic’s desire to hold onto emptiness. However, as Keats shows us in “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819), drugs can be eschewed, and an intoxication can still take over. Keats’s meditation on death in this ode leads him to consider the effects of anodynes on his consciousness (3, 11-20). But he rejects all material substances in favour of Poesy (31-33), represented by the bird’s song. This union with nature produces an “ecstasy” (58), reducing the poet to a “sod” (60)—a state of self-nothingness: literally the dirt of the earth, but figuratively a Romantic subject stupefied by the experience of having overcome the boundary between subject and object in a moment of sensuous rapture. Such dissolution of self into sensory experience would, then, seem to render the figurative and the literal reading as very close to the same thing, as both suggest that self cannot be hived off apart from nature. By the end of the poem, however, the poet becomes “[f]orlorn” as he returns to his individual, “sole self” (71-72) after having been ecstatically outside of it. Keats thus anticipates the untimely demise he would meet two years later as a result of tuberculosis, yet the poetic staging of this event as an ecstasy makes it his “little death,” freeing him from his ontological dis-ease, if not his biological one. His return to self, though, is a disorientation: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? . . . Do I wake or sleep?” (79-80). The status of his self becomes ontologically uncertain; the eternal has been glimpsed

(“Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!” [61]) but not attained (“Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades” [75]). But as I will address in Chapter 5, Keats ultimately seeks to move past the ecstatic “little death” in order to find an entirely different mode of “being.” His poetry, therefore, exemplifies the model of writing-as-practice that parallels Buddhist meditation.

1.4 “Little Death,” Great Death, Eternity, and Time

I oppose Romanticism’s inclination towards dying the ecstatic “little death” to Buddhism’s concept of the *Great Death*. In typical Western thought and practice, birth and death represent a duality. However, Zen practice focuses on the interdependence between them, as one can only be constituted by the other, making them, in reality, non-dual: life, then, *is* nothing other than *birth-and-death*. The two concepts cannot be separated, so life does not *turn into* death and death does *not* turn into life.⁶² Rather, each moment is contingent on the experience of both. As Zen scholar Masao Abe explains, “breaking through this antimony [of life and death] is called, particularly in Zen, the ‘Great Death’ because it is the total negation of life-and-death and is beyond a realization of death as distinguished from life” (*Zen and Western* 131). To embrace this seemingly

⁶² In “Genjokoan” Dogen writes: “If we become familiar with action and come back to this concrete place, the truth is evident that the myriad *dharma*s [i.e., phenomena] are not self. Firewood becomes ash; it can never go back to being firewood. Nevertheless, we should not take the view that ash is its future and firewood its past. Remember, firewood abides in the place of firewood in the Dharma [i.e., universal law]. It has a past and it has a future. Although it has a past and a future, the past and the future are cut off. Ash exists in the place of ash in the Dharma. It has a past and it has a future. The firewood, after becoming ash, does not again become firewood. Similarly, human beings, after death, do not live again. At the same time, it is an established custom in the Buddha-Dharma not to say that life turns into death. This is why we speak of “no appearance.” And it is the Buddha’s preaching established in [the turning of] the Dharma wheel that death does not turn into life. This is why we speak of “no disappearance.” Life is an instantaneous situation, and death is also an instantaneous situation. It is the same, for example, with winter and spring. We do not think that winter becomes spring, and we do not say that spring becomes summer” (42; Nishijima and Cross’s italics).

paradoxical position, then, is to enter into the *Great Life*, which now cannot be seen as separate from the Great Death. But having died such a death, the self of the subject can no longer remain distinct or cut off from *other objects*.

Time, then, is not something that exists separate from or alongside one's "being." Rather, it is "being" itself. The Zen philosopher Keiji Nishitani articulates this reaction as follows:

When time becomes a circle and the world becomes an Eternal Recurrence, this world-time (or time-world) becomes present in the home-ground of the present, opening up the abyssal nihilism directly beneath it. In this case, too, infinite openness as transcendence beyond world and time takes on the character of eternity. It is not, however, the eternity of a transcendent *being*, but something that might be called the eternity of a transcendent *nothingness*, or the eternity . . . of Death itself. It opens up directly beneath the present⁶³—there and only there can it open up. (230; Nishitani's italics)

Moreover, he elaborates that "all things in the world, together with the self, turn into nihilism as one, and the Great Death presents itself out of the bottom where world and self are one" (230), adding that "[t]he field of ecstatic transcendence from world and time, the field of eternity, now appears in its original Form as the field of the Great Life" (232). To use Keats's phrase from the end of his unfinished epic *Hyperion* (1818), emptiness is something that one must "[d]ie into" (3.130), and to do so is to return to the originary state of the universe, that is, the state of things before concepts of self and other can arise: all is realized as *fundamentally* one, despite the appearance of separation (*not one, not two*). This realization, though, is contingent upon surrendering one's self to its own voidness, perceiving that the narrative of one's existence does not support the totality of

⁶³ Both Nishitani and Abe figure such a "transcendence" as rather a "trans-decendence," as what they are describing is not a rising above the conditions of the world but instead being swallowed up by them. Yet given the non-duality of these concepts, they amount to the same thing. See Nishitani 171 and Abe's "Beyond" 240.

their “being.” Self-narratives help to keep track of chronological time, but are confounded by one’s actual experience of time, which suggests that there is really only a perpetual present that contains both past and future. Viewed as such, one’s “being” is inseparable from the fluctuations of time.⁶⁴ To understand “being” in this way is to dismiss attachment to self and, ultimately, to watch it die. But this death gives access to what we may call “eternity.” As Nishitani shows above, this is not a transcendence from one place into another one called eternity. Rather it is a realization of the infinite in every moment that obliterates any notion of sovereign selfhood or subject-object dualism.

Romanticism, rather than dying the Great Death, endeavours to die countless “little deaths,” which contain the ecstatic separation from self noted by Nishitani but only in miniature. Because the Romantics had not completely moved past the assumption of an immutable existential core, this becomes an exercise in trying to get the self to some sort of new place outside of its usual confines, that is, to eternity, where mutability no longer stands in opposition to the self. In Shelley’s “Mutability” (1816), for instance, the speaker must recognize (and re-cognize) his self as something apart from time and process. The self, lacking any sovereignty over the things that it experiences, is rather acted upon by them, which is to say it “suffers them.” Shelley writes that “[w]e are as clouds that veil the midnight moon; / How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver, / Streaking the darkness radiantly!” (1-3). Clouds suggest a state of “being” as a presence in the world

⁶⁴ As Nishida puts it, “[b]ecause time is nothing more than a form that orders the content of our experience, the content of consciousness must first be able to be joined, be united, and become one in order for the idea of time to arise. Otherwise we would no be able to link things sequentially and thereby think in terms of time. The unifying activity of consciousness is not controlled by time; on the contrary, time is established by the unifying activity. At the base of consciousness there is a transcendent, unchanging reality apart from time” (60-1).

that is not fixed or grounded, but is rather a formless free-flowing part of the natural world's cycles and rhythms. However, the loss of their presence becomes rather troubling: "yet soon / Night closes round, and they are lost for ever" (3-4). Any awareness of "being" under these terms prevents one from exercising any degree of control over the processes that perpetually act upon subjectivity and force it to bend and change its mode of relation to the experience it finds itself in, which is never reliable:

We rest.—A dream has power to poison sleep;
 We rise.—One wandering thought pollutes the day;
 We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;
 Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away[.] (9-12)

Shelley finds that all phenomena are like this: "It is the same!" (13); nothing can ever be brought to a point of rest and stability:

For, be it joy or sorrow,
 The path of its departure still is free:
 Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
 Nought may endure but Mutability. (13-16)

For Shelley this experience is painful, but it contains a shred of hopefulness in that sorrow, like joy, is not stable and may depart at any moment. However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, inasmuch as Shelley understands that mutability is the governing principle of the world, he still seeks a variety of eternal perfection, or at least a way of returning to it time and time again.

Similarly, in *Alastor* (1815) Shelley's poet, early on, embarks on a spiritual quest to recover the bliss experienced in his dream-vision. Yet he is only able to be reunited with it at the end of his life, thus giving himself over to the natural world in order to escape mutability and the pain it causes. Shelley's vision of the eternal achieves its stability and stasis, but only once self becomes undetectable, leaving only flux and

process. While this state is achievable during life, its presence is always temporal, and this transience is what becomes the problem for the Romantics, who are always seeking to return to this state to escape mutability. Wordsworth's "Mutability" (1822) is a testament to the fact that the only way out of mutability is through mutability: "From low to high doth dissolution climb, / And sink from high to low, along a scale / Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail" (1-3). Still, he too notes a "melancholy" that arises from the loss of self-sovereignty (4), as only those who are not "over-anxious" can hear this tune (6), that is, those who do not obsessively reify the self.

However, it is vital to note that as much as figures like Shelley's poet long to find the stability of an eternity outside of time, they only gain the appearance of escaping time in small moments that are themselves subject to time. Wordsworth calls these experiences "spots of time" (*Prelude* 11.257): sectioned-off moments of life that take on a particular significance only because they are moments that, having past, seem stable. Yet as Saree Makdisi notes,

the resistance offered by a spot of time may in the long run turn out to be no resistance at all, but rather in effect an affirmation of modernization. Hence it is important to be able to see romantic spots of time as historical constructions, rather than as ahistorical essences that exist outside of time, even if there is no way to account for their historicity in their own terms, and even if they are constructions that seek (as they often do) to deny their own historicity in the first place. (16-17)

The spot of time seems to offer resistance because it is a moment plucked from the past, and thus removed from time. It is then psychically projected (into the future) as something to return to for its healing potential, which "lifts us up when fallen" (*Prelude* 11.267). The spot of time is a vision of an imagined eternal; it reifies the self while also escaping its bondage. Being a memory, it offers ontological grounding in time, but in

such a way that negates the relevance of time and its passage in favour of setting up a model of existential stability that can be recovered in some kind of timeless future. In doing this, the Romantics are able to escape the increasing division between subject and object that was taking hold throughout the expansion of capitalism in the nineteenth century via the Industrial Revolution and colonial conquest.⁶⁵

This struggle to overcome limiting distinctions leads Makdisi to refer to Romanticism as the “anti-modern other against which modernity can be constituted” (14). The Romantic project is thus other to but contained within modernization, which models Romantic efforts to preserve self amidst a recognition that self cannot be located apart from the processes which constitute it. In an attempt to resolve this struggle, the Romantics in this study develop an affinity with modes of aestheticizing otherness to create what can only be referred to as a consciousness of *self-otherness*, which, as we shall see in Chapter 2, is exemplified by Beckford’s *Vathek* (1782). This self-otherness becomes the basis of overturning dualistic modes of thinking and thereby opposes the effects of modernity. By attempting to position itself outside of modernization, Romanticism plays into the dualistic game it seeks to escape. This is ultimately an effect of contrasting the eternal against the finite world and seeing the two as separate, but

⁶⁵ Although the Romantics are caught up in the Orientalism noted by Edward Said, they are also confounded by it, as the Romantic project is one of overcoming the distinction between self and other. Orientalism speaks to Romanticism’s difficulty in achieving this end, but does not necessarily amount to the desire to control and dominate that Said argues for. As Susan Taylor notes, “[o]ften it is assumed that orientalist texts present Eastern cultures as exotic, mysterious, dangerous and uncivilized—as tantalizingly different regions where harems and political despotism are prominent. While this view of the East as exotic Other is frequently found in Romantic literature, the East in fact plays a number of contradictory roles in British literature and culture: as Utopian region, as vehicle for disguised political critique and cultural satire, and as allegory for discussing the position of women in British culture to name a few. Scholars of British Romanticism in the last 20 years have examined the complexity of British literary representations of the East and challenged especially the idea that the East is monolithically Other in British Romantic writing” (1-2). I will return to the issue of Orientalism in greater detail in Chapter 2.

intersecting at certain moments. The “quest” of Romanticism, then, is to find a way to break through, once and for all, the boundary that keeps separate the eternal and the finite. But Romanticism cannot fully give its self over to the Great Death and thus fully accept the Buddhist position that the eternal and the finite are non-dual, continuing to think of eternity as a state independent of time (a topic I will explore at length in Chapter 4). Suzuki, a scholar of Zen and a key figure in its Western dissemination, reminds us that, on the contrary,

[t]o Zen, time and eternity are one. This is open to misinterpretation, as most people interpret Zen as annihilating time and putting in its place eternity, which to them means a state of absolute quietness or doing-nothing-ness. They forget that if time is eternity, eternity is time, according to Zen . . . [E]ternity is our everyday experience in this world of sense-and-intellect, for there is no eternity outside this time-conditionedness. Eternity is possible only in the midst of birth and death, in the midst of time-process. (266)

Ideas of eternity, then, arise out of concepts of duality. The eternal does not free one from subjectivity. Rather, subjectivity is all there is; it exists not in time, but *as* time, and, therefore, can be nothing other than the imperfections and inconsistencies that arise in, through, and over time. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this relationship through Dogen’s concept of existence-time, which sees “being” and time as inseparable, making it impossible to project a place outside of the present moment.

Just as time is inseparable from existence, so too is bliss inseparable from pain. Yet Romanticism tends to struggle the most with this particular non-dualism. In *Lamia* (1819), Keats seeks to have the “scintillating brain . . . / Unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain” (191-92). While there is an acknowledgement that the two states are linked, Keats invokes the intellect, the self-oriented mind, to find a way to separate the two so that bliss may be preserved. However, he fails actually to achieve this by the end of poem, where

bliss has once again returned to pain. What Keats exemplifies here is Romanticism's predisposition towards collapsing into the duality it attempts to transcend. Just as the spots of time, in attempting to resist time, actually confirm it, Keats's treatment of pleasure and pain show that although Romanticism intuits the non-duality of things, it struggles actually to resolve the problems exposed by such an ontology, which I will explore at length in Chapter 5. Buddhism, by contrast, encourages the realization that pleasure and pain—or more accurately of *liberation* and *suffering*—are actually non-dual. Thus, to experience true freedom, one must give up on both of them, as this connotes an ontological position in which nothing needs to be added or subtracted: all is always already in the state of perfection, and thus perfection need not be sought in some other place. *Samsara*,⁶⁶ the world of suffering, and nirvana, liberation from suffering, are often construed as antithetical to one another, but just the opposite is true: nirvana can only be realized through samsara; to think of them dualistically is to miss the point and ensure greater suffering. As Abe remarks, “If one abides in so-called *nirvāna* by transcending *samsāra*, one is not yet free from attachment, namely, attachment to *nirvāna* itself” (*Zen and Comparative* 57). To attempt to remain permanently in nirvana is, rather, symptomatic of Zen sickness, as nirvana is contingent on a realization of emptiness. However, Zen practice, as I have been arguing, is not about escapism, but rather facing the true nature of what reality is like, which involves forgetting one's self and facing the ontological upheaval that remains. Sheng Yen states the matter aptly: “The cause of suffering is resistance to suffering and trying to escape tribulation. We help ourselves

⁶⁶ *SDBZ*: “lit. ‘journeying’; the ‘cycle of existences,’ a succession of rebirths that a being goes through within the various modes of existence . . . until it has attained liberation and entered nirvana” (184). I will return to the relationship between nirvana and samsara in Chapter 4.

when we can find meaning in our suffering and allow ourselves to live through our difficulties” (*Setting* 44-45).

1.5 Chapter Breakdown

In the coming chapters, I explore the extent to which Romanticism is able to achieve these ends, arguing that although Romantic thought and writing come very close, they fall short because of their inability to give up fully on self-sovereignty. In Chapter 2, I read William Beckford’s *Vathek* to show that from its outset, Romanticism develops its understanding of “being” through modes of religious and cultural comparisons that reveal the inseparability between self and other. I posit that Edward Said’s theorization in *Orientalism* (1978) does not accurately conceptualize Romantic interest in the Orient, as Romantic consciousness is actively engaged in overcoming the dualism that informs Said’s methodology. I argue that Romanticism engages with otherness as a means to better understand self, but, in so doing, finds that self-narratives fail to verify the self as a discrete entity. Beckford’s text thus evinces Romanticism’s effort to understand how self relates to other, yet it also highlights Romantic consciousness’s difficulty with moving past self-oriented ontology, as to do so seems also to upset the dichotomy between pleasure and pain, salvation and damnation, life and death, “being” and non-“being,” and disrupts the separation between past, present, and future. However, these dualistic ruptures are indicative of a growing awareness that duality fails to secure any solid ontological ground. In line with Dogen’s theory that existence and time are really one concept, the text shows that although chronological self-narratives give the appearance that the self exists as a sovereign entity independent of time, mutability, and otherness,

one's "being" cannot be properly understood without them. Thus, the text intersects with fundamentally Zen themes, but understands them as a source of pain and damnation, as they cannot be made amenable to a Western Christian understanding of ontology.

Chapter 3 expands on my discussion of Romantic Orientalism to suggest that Romanticism's relationship to the Orient is best understood along the lines of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity," which allows for self and other to exist within each other, however uncomfortably. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and De Quincey's *Confessions* hinge on such a relationship, as both are symptomatic of a writing practice that begins by symbolically drawing Oriental otherness into the self via the use of opium. I argue that these texts exemplify an effort to engage with otherness as a means of experiencing the emptiness of the self, suggesting that these authors' opium addictions reflect an attempt to attach to emptiness, as it seems to offer visions of a coming eternity. I connect this attachment to emptiness-as-pleasure to Buddhism's concept of Zen sickness, suggesting that as a source of ecstatic intoxication, opium anaesthetizes the self against the attendant discomfort of giving up its apparent sovereignty. Yet by moving beyond the self as a sovereign entity, these authors find that they cannot escape the otherness that has disrupted the self to which they had grown accustomed. Therefore, they are compelled to return to the ecstasy that elides self-awareness and thereby mediates the pain associated with their realization of the self's emptiness, a process which is dramatized through encounters with the Orient and Eastern others.

Chapter 4 addresses Percy Shelley's reticence to depart fully from the possibility of an eternity beyond time, and, as such, resists accepting the non-duality of samsara and nirvana. I argue that Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) elaborates a philosophical

understanding of reality that comes very close to articulating a Buddhist understanding of time and eternity, yet ultimately cannot escape the Christian underpinnings that Shelley seeks to move past, but which nonetheless inform his philosophical development.

Shelley's drama seems to arrive at the conclusion that eternity must be located within time. But at the same time, Shelley seems to suggest that this conclusion is not sufficient, as his drama subtly works to elaborate two concepts of eternity—one that exists within time and another that can be located beyond it. I suggest that this latter desire is motivated by a longing to escape the effects of mutability, which will allow the self to (re-)emerge as a stable and sovereign entity, thus preserving its individuality. In this regard, Shelley's desire is not unlike that of Coleridge and De Quincey, except that in Shelley's lyrical drama the natural world itself, not drugs, becomes a source of intoxicating ecstasy, a link between eternity and ecstasy that causes Shelley also to succumb to Zen sickness.

My fifth and final chapter argues that John Keats, more than any other author considered in this study, explores the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy in his writing about suffering. I approach his *Hyperion* (abandoned in 1818; first published in 1820) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (abandoned in 1819; first published in 1857) as meditations that explore the nature of suffering as an effect of a faulty understanding of self as it relates to other. Unlike the Romantics in my previous chapters, Keats is not content with only dying the little death. But although Keats is not satisfied with intoxication for the sake of intoxication, he nevertheless uses it heuristically to explain the experience of losing his self in relatable terms. As such, these poems suggest that Keats sensed that his "being" was capable of a greater, more profound ontological change, which would allow him to

experience a psychological death before his biological death. Thus, these texts palpate the experience Zen refers to as the Great Death. However, I contend that Keats's inability to finish either poem evinces his struggle to understand such an ontological shift. These texts seem to advance a non-dual understanding of "being," but they do so only because Keats repeatedly fails to delineate dualistic ontological categories. Keats's texts, therefore, bespeak an experience of emptiness that he is ultimately unprepared for, suggesting that he, too, is afflicted with a type of Zen sickness.

Chapter 2

The Otherness of the “Self” and the Selfness of the “Other”: Zen, Islam, and the Pursuit of an Eternity beyond Time in William Beckford’s *Vathek*

As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual effort must culminate in it, or rather must start from it, if it is to bear any practical fruits. Every religious faith must spring from it if it has to prove at all efficiently and livingly workable in our active life. Therefore Zen is not necessarily the fountain of Buddhist thought and life alone; it is very much alive also in Christianity, Mohammedanism, in Taoism, and even in positivistic Confucianism. What makes all these religions and philosophies vital and inspiring, keeping up their usefulness and efficiency, is due to the presence in them of what I may delegate as the Zen element.

~ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*

Published in 1786, twelve years before one of the traditional start dates of High Romanticism (1798), William Beckford’s most significant novel, *Vathek* (1786), was long remembered mostly as an Oriental tale that influenced subsequent Romantic authors such as Byron, Southey, and Keats.⁶⁷ The novel has gained increased critical attention in recent years, however, and is structured around the same onto-religious questions that preoccupy later Romantics, thus ushering in the kinds of ontological questions this thesis explores in Romanticism. Yet *Vathek* is also important historically, as it marks a tentative beginning to a Romantic phase of Orientalism that begins to understand the relationship between self and other non-dualistically. The novel draws from Eastern religion to rethink the ontological assumptions of Christianity and Cartesian dualism. As such, *Vathek* becomes something of an ur-text of Romantic spirituality and religion. It elaborates many

⁶⁷ e.g., Byron’s *The Giaour* (1813), Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), Keats’s *Fall of Hyperion* (1819).

of the central issues that later Romantic texts would continue to develop and refine in an attempt to articulate a secular understanding of spirituality.

Vathek is the story of a self-indulgent Caliph, hellbent on obtaining supernatural powers in order to supersede the authority of Mahomet and Alla.⁶⁸ Vathek's quest begins at the behest of the mysterious and duplicitous Giaour, who offers Vathek the power he seeks, but requires him to renounce Islam and commit several crimes, including the murder of children, to prove his worth. More than once, however, the Giaour goes back on his word. Out of frustration, Vathek gives up his quest and begins to pursue more immediate rewards. While travelling through the mountains, Vathek encounters a small religious community led by the Emir Fakreddin and immediately falls in love with the Emir's daughter, Nouronihar—who is already betrothed to her cousin Gulchenrouz. After breaking up their engagement, Vathek seems content to enjoy sensual pleasures with Nouronihar, but Vathek's mother, Carathis, eager for her son's acquisition of supernatural power, encourages him to resume his quest. Vathek complies and soon after enters Hell in the Halls of Eblis, where he quickly learns that he has been duped by the devil Eblis and that he will not receive his reward as expected. Eblis affords Vathek a few days of luxury before he meets his damnation, yet it is crucial to understand that Vathek's arrival in Hell alters his experience of time. While the promised interval before damnation does occur, for Vathek and his compatriots in Hell, torment begins immediately after learning that their efforts have failed to grant them access to an eternity beyond time. In Beckford's Hell, human subjects are forced psychologically to recollect their crimes, and once subjected to these torments, Vathek cannot distinguish his self

⁶⁸ In the interest of textual accuracy, I have preserved Beckford's spelling of these names, though they do not match the contemporary conventions "Muhammad" or "Mohammed" and "Allah."

from his life-time and the atrocities it contains. Rather than entering an eternity beyond time, he becomes trapped in a paradoxical eternity *of* and *within* time.

By blending elements of both Orientalist and Gothic literature, *Vathek* explores the concepts of self and other as mental constructs imposed on the world and finds that both need to be defined relative to each other. In Orientalist literature, a Western European “self” encounters the Eastern “other.” In what is otherwise a straightforward meeting between human beings in the world, this juxtaposition normalizes and thus universalizes the Western self against an Eastern self that is, by virtue of its difference, exoticized, which is an effect of Orientalist literature embellishing the difference it identifies and using it as a locus for further self-definition. Gothicism, however, exposes the mind’s unconscious participation in this self-other differentiation, acting as a mirror to reflect an uncanny re-presentation of the self back upon the thinking subject. But this uncanny self is barely recognizable as such, an experience that results in a growing awareness of the *otherness* that exists within the self, exposing the self as a concept that depends on otherness in order to define itself.⁶⁹ By incorporating both of these literary modes, *Vathek* addresses both the inner and outer experience of the self-other confrontation to show that such an encounter is as much a psychological event as it is a geopolitical one.

⁶⁹ Jerrold E. Hogle provides a helpful example of this line of thinking by linking the Gothic to Julia Kristeva’s concept of “abjection,” “a process . . . whereby the individual in quest of a coherent sense of identity, yet dimly aware of a pre-conscious fore-language of vague sensations across the body and amorphous memories in the psyche, ‘throws off’ and ‘casts under an [internalized] authoritative gaze’ (the literal meaning of *ab-ject*) all those confused anomalies at the base of the self’ and tries ‘to emerge with an ‘identity’ by throwing off into an ‘other’ all the blurrings-together of differences deep in themselves or their contexts that seem incongruous with it” (“Gothic” 204; Hogle’s brackets and italics). “These cast-offs,” he argues, “then appear in a seemingly external monster or ghost such as the vampire Dracula or Dr. Jekyll’s Mr. Hyde or Frankenstein’s creature or their *Otranto* forebears, the outsized and fragmented revenant of an effigy, the shade of an immobile portrait set in motion, and the specter of a *danse macabre* skeleton” (“Gothic” 204).

In this chapter, I examine the ways *Vathek* uses this Gothic Orientalism to draw self-oriented ontology into question, which I argue incites an unconscious confrontation with Buddhism. By reading the ending of the text first, we see that it questions the legitimacy of self-oriented ontology and exposes the possibility of an alternative mode of “being.” I posit that because the novel ultimately presents a non-linear understanding of time, the plot cannot be adequately understood through a linear reading. Thus, the text invites us to revisit its early and middle pages, as they must be re-evaluated in light of the ending, which reveals that past and future intersect with the present rather than existing as independent chronological vectors. Beckford’s novel therefore intuits the logic of Zen Master Dogen’s concept of “existence-time,” which suggests that all of time is present in each moment of existence. Dogen’s model, then, presents itself as a means to analyze the ontological crisis Vathek experiences at the end of plot in which his past is both his present and future. Also, I would like to remind my readers that although Zen is a unique expression of Buddhism (as all schools of Buddhism are) it is not fundamentally different from other forms of Buddhist teaching. I use the term “Buddhism” to refer to Buddhist philosophy generally, and “Zen” to emphasize the ways the Zen school teaches that philosophy.

2.1 Self, Other, and the Romanticized Orient

In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that the Western subject develops a greater sense of self by seizing the East as an object to be used and controlled, thereby allowing the West to assert dominance over the East through an act of cultural

appropriation.⁷⁰ Thus used as a literary prop treated as “other,” the Orient plays out the imperialistic fantasies of the Christian West as modern and civil against an antiquated and barbarous East used to confirm the superiority of Western culture, which, having grown *out of* the East, contains and improves upon it.⁷¹ Said contends that the West intellectually received the Orient as “a set of structures inherited from the past, secularized, redisposed, and re-formed by such disciplines as philology, which in turn were naturalized, modernized, and laicized substitutes for (or versions of) Christian supernaturalism” (122), and that “from the end of the eighteenth century on,” Orientalism “retained . . . a reconstructed religious impulse, a *naturalized supernaturalism*” (120; my italics).⁷² Moreover, he identifies *Vathek* as a major contributor to the Oriental “vogue” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (118).

Yet it is vital to point out that Said draws a rather rigid line between East and West by insisting that Western interest in the Orient is motivated only by an aesthetically

⁷⁰ Said remarks that “[e]very one who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking on its behalf. None of this takes place in the abstract, however. Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies. (20)

⁷¹ Said posits that “[m]any of the earliest Oriental amateurs began by welcoming the Orient as a salutary *dérangement* of their European habits of mind and spirit. The Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth. Schelling, for example, saw in Oriental polytheism a preparation of the way for Judeo-Christian monotheism: Abraham was prefigured in Brahma. Yet almost without exception such overesteem was followed by a counterresponse: the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth. A swing of the pendulum in one direction caused an equal and opposite swing back: the Orient was undervalued. Orientalism as a profession grew out of those opposites, of compensations and corrections based on inequality, ideas nourished by and nourishing similar ideas in the culture at large” (150).

⁷² Said, here, is drawing from M. H. Abrams to emphasize the role Romanticism plays in turning the East in to an object to help satisfy its own desire for secular spirituality.

veiled hostility.⁷³ In structuring his argument this way, Said assumes a *Christianized* Western self's sense of the Orient. As we shall see, *Vathek*, resists this logic by attempting to go beyond Christian modes of self-understanding and so models Romanticism's often more fluid notions of consciousness and selfhood. Although Romanticism is tempted towards Orientalizing the East as other, it also contests the binary distinctions at the root of Said's argument, as Romantic Orientalization often entertains ideas that the world is not divisible into geopolitical zones. In appealing to the "land of the other," Romanticism confronts the layers of its own consciousness, seeing the selfness of the other as a reflection of its self and also of the otherness within that self, and thus begins to move past such distinctions. As Naji B. Oueijan has written:

To the Romantic writer the tendency to reconcile and unify the inner elements of the psyche was reflected in an outer drive to unite all aspects of nature. Both Hegel and Schopenhauer advance the view that separateness in the world is an illusion. *Thus Romanticism does not separate the world into an Occident and an Orient.* When Lord Byron swam across the Hellespont, Wordsworth dreamt of the desert and the Arab Bedouin, and Coleridge had his dream of Xanadu, they were celebrating the unification of both worlds, the first in actual reality, the other two in their imagination The Orient gave the Romantic writer the chance to break the current classical forms which limited his imagination; it set his wild inner sense of the present free. (47-48; my italics)

That is to say, the Romantics' conception of the Orient has as much to do with time, history, and psychology as it does with imperialism and geopolitics.

By relocating the hallmarks of Western culture to the East, *Vathek* emphasizes humanity's common bonds as much as it fosters divisions and control. This is especially relevant given Romanticism's awareness of the East's historical precedence as the

⁷³ See also Andrew Warren (*Orient* 14), Alan Richardson (2), Mohammed Sharafuddin (xvii), and Susan Taylor (2-3), all of whom acknowledge the value of Said's work, but are also critical of his approach.

location of Eden and therefore the original territory of humankind.⁷⁴ But as much as the Romantics use the Orient to liberate themselves from the typical confines of self, the blurring of East and West also confronts Romantic consciousness with its own latent otherness. As Warren notes, the Oriental space “appears to be an escape from the self” but “*turns out to be a mirroring of it,*” becoming “a site of encounter: between Self and Other, Self and Fantasy, the Self and its limits, Democracy and Despotism, ‘East’ and ‘West’ and what names them as such” (18; my italics). Romantic self-exploration, then, seems to go hand-in-hand with the same self-deconstruction the Orient readily connotes by challenging notions of Western self-sovereignty. Romantic subjectivity finds that ontological categories begin to blur as a result of Orientalization, and what seems truly other is *selfness* itself. As *Vathek* shows us, the self is a hellish prison that can never escape its relationship to time. To be free from time would amount to freedom from the flux of self, to find a resting point where the self can recover the sovereignty it loses in the ecstasy of self-lessness, an exoticized experience it finds in the Orientalized Orient.

Samar Attar argues that Romanticism’s interest in the self is a direct result of the Romantics having been exposed to Sufi-Islamic philosophy (which bears some similarity to Buddhism⁷⁵) through Ibn Tufayl’s philosophical novel *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (c. 1100) (177), studied by Rousseau, Godwin, and Thomas Paine (xvi).⁷⁶ And while previous scholars have not read *Vathek* under a Buddhist lens, they often address self-difficulty, a

⁷⁴ Daniel Sanjiv Roberts makes this argument specifically about De Quincey (21-22).

⁷⁵ For a comparative study of the two religions, see Mehrdad Massoudi. See Also Devendra P. Varma who argues Beckford was influenced by Sufism (103-09 esp.).

⁷⁶ However, Attar argues that Tufail is not mentioned directly because his influence was concealed due to European bias against Eastern scholarship (8). See also G. A. Russell, whose argument Attar corroborates and advances.

central theme of Zen Buddhist philosophy. Kwinten Van De Walle, for instance, has argued that “Vathek’s character is defined by a struggle for self-realization” (163), suggesting that Vathek’s identity fluctuates depending on the space he inhabits (163-67), a position shared by Sandro Jung (“William” 17-20). Moreover, Jürgen Klein reads the text as a Gothic study of modern selfhood, similar to the works of Joyce, Eliot, Beckett, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Thomas Mann (194-95). He suggests that “modern self[hood] . . . is bound to basic epistemological questions,” in which “debates on ‘quantity,’ ‘time,’ and ‘space’ are at stake” (195). “The self is not ‘just there,’” he argues; “When perceptions have something to do with a syntax of the self, then the difficulties we encounter in Beckford’s text lead us to define the inner person . . . The mind is the theatre, where many perceptions come together. *Memory, however, makes personal identity possible by constructing unity, but not by necessary connections*” (195; my italics). Klein emphasizes subjects’ need to interpret identity based on one’s perceptions of the available stimuli: the self is not “there” until it is created by an act of reading memory as a linear teleology, which it may not necessarily be, given that the act of remembering inherently interrupts the experience of time moving teleologically. Klein’s reading, therefore, links the text’s self-study to the same qualities Buddhism uses to understand where the concept of self originates, namely the interpretation of memory as a linked series of events based on a (faulty) awareness of a separation between subjectivity and objectivity that arises in moments of time. Beckford’s text does this by challenging Western Europe’s religious and philosophical assumptions.

2.2 Religion and Time: The Makings of Beckford's Zen

Beckford was a Christian, but he celebrated Islamic culture and used the Orient as a device to think outside of the confines of British societal conventions.⁷⁷ As Sharafuddin argues, “what Beckford is really cutting loose from [in *Vathek*] is his identity as a citizen of the ‘tight little island’ that is England” (xxxiv). *Vathek* dramatizes an attempt to understand the nature of self-identity apart from Western Christian philosophical assumptions by critiquing those assumptions through an Orientalist lens.⁷⁸ However, in a sudden and ironic shift at the end of the novel, the text re-authorizes the Christian morality it seemingly sought to subvert, as Beckford’s narrator attests to the justice of *Vathek*’s punishment on the text’s final page:⁷⁹

Such shall be, the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds the wisdom of the Creator has prescribed to human knowledge; and such the dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition, which, aiming at discoveries reserved for beings of a supernatural order, perceives not, through its infatuated pride, that the condition of man upon earth is to be—humble and ignorant. (120)

Temple J. Maynard suggests that this may be Beckford appealing to the established conventions of Oriental tales (28), noting that the moralistic ending would have helped to “disarm some of the criticism . . . his fiction was sure to raise” (28). But he contends that this does not really lessen the “weight” or “impetus” of Beckford’s themes (28).

⁷⁷ As Marina Warner notes, Beckford’s “Orientalising arose from a passionate fascination with the literature and culture of Islam,” which “provided him with an alternative to English society and culture” (305). She notes, too, that Beckford was not pro-imperialist (306).

⁷⁸ As Sharafuddin explains, “the Romantics had an ambiguous attitude to Islam: on the one hand, it offered a convenient symbol of the tyranny they all sought to overcome: but on the other, it offered an alternative to the compromised or corrupted political and social systems of Europe. It is therefore best to regard despotism not as the theme of Romantic orientalism, but as a major signpost” (xxi).

⁷⁹ Sharafuddin notes that *Vathek*’s “attribut[ing] to Islam a deep and central moral concern” is an “eccentricity” of the text (xxxii). Moreover, Klein argues that Beckford’s Hell operates in an “utterly Christian mode” (191).

Similarly, Alan Liu argues that “the discovery we glimpse at the [novel’s] seeming end . . . is not really conclusive” because “[i]n the denouement on the last page, Beckford . . . cannot fully unravel the knot of his tale” (193). The text thus brings its readers to an obstacle they cannot overcome, although the novel’s ending suggests more than a failed attempt to subvert Christian ontology. Ultimately, Beckford’s text evinces a Romantic quest to overcome a Christian notion of the self by abstracting it onto an imagined idea of the Orient, thereby allowing for a greater fluidity of thought not bound by the restrictions of the more familiar Western world. That said, this act of Orientalization fails to grant Romantic consciousness epistemological access to the alternative modes of “being” it seeks, and instead re-positions the limitations of Christian ontology it sought to escape, this time as punishment. But Peter Hyland notes that “Vathek is not damned for the evil he does, but for the energy, curiosity, and ambition which drive him to choose evil” (150)—in other words, the things that make him a Romantic explorer of the nature of the self.

The novel’s return to Christian morality is ironic, as Vathek’s transgressions draw into question the ontological and eschatological assumptions of Christianity. By the end of the novel, Vathek is forced to realize that selfness and otherness, subjectivity and objectivity, are indistinct, a threat that self-oriented ontology cannot bear on its own, as it connotes the self’s erasure. The subject, encountering self-emptiness, experiences an ontological crisis, which is understood as a hellish punishment for having transgressed religious authority and the ontological reality it prescribes. The novel thus works towards articulating an alternative ontology that is not self-oriented. The process of self-elision offers liberation, but is often painful and disorienting.⁸⁰ The novel’s final turn to

⁸⁰ Marina Warner argues similarly that “Beckford’s deliberate impieties, even while cloaked in overt

Christianity thus suggests an attempt to escape the self's emptiness, that is, to recover a mode of ontological support even if it is provided in a negative and painful way. The return to Christianity seems to stabilize "being" across time and space, but it does so in a way that undercuts religious doctrine, which has proven inadequate to understand reality. The text blurs the lines between life and death and eternity and time that Christianity otherwise treats as solid: Vathek reaches an eternity, but not one that is beyond time, and his finding it does not depend on his death—though "he" cannot properly be thought of as alive after arriving in Hell, as he endures a state of life-in-death.⁸¹

Vathek, then, dramatizes a failed attempt to escape the self's impermanence by entering an eternity beyond time. However, Vathek's attempt to escape time—to use Maynard's phrase—models the Romantic tendency of locating eternity in the past as a means of stabilizing ontology, as laid out in my Introduction. His main goal is to recover the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans, who reside in the Halls of Eblis. Given that they antedate Adam, these sultans stand to offer Vathek access to a place beyond time (or at least before it).⁸² Yet while Vathek makes contact with the pre-Adamites, he fails to escape time and realizes that time is all pervading, as even these pre-historic sultans

moralising rhetoric, offer emancipatory pathways" (305).

⁸¹ Kenneth W. Graham has argued likewise, suggesting that "[t]he ultimate consummation of death is denied to Vathek. His quest for the key to the secrets of nature which leads him more and more deeply into evil stops at a form of life-in-death, an eternity of agony from which death would be a welcome release" ("Beckford's" 250). See also Hyland 153 and Lawton A. Brewer 170-73.

⁸² Pre-Adamism is not a belief held by Islam generally, but refers to a later theory developed by commentators on the Koran. It was a misconception among eighteenth-century Europeans that this theory was part of the faith. George Sale, a translator of the Koran (1734) and a likely source for Beckford's knowledge of Islam, notes in his preface that Islam conceives of a "government of successive princes, who all bore the name of *Solomon*" that "inhabited the world for many ages before *Adam* was created" (qtd. in Maynard 11-12; Sale's italics). Because Beckford is suspected to have been influenced by the Sufi tradition of Islam, it is worth noting that this view was more popular among Sufis. For a concise explanation pre-Adamism, see D. A. Yerxa 10-12.

suffer it.⁸³ The conclusion of *Vathek* reveals that time and “being” are inextricably linked. Vathek cannot live apart from time, yet time also stands to swallow up his self-sovereignty: “the subject” is destroyed, yet subjectivity *qua* ontological awareness remains. Vathek realizes that his effort to stabilize his self is the very thing that decimates it. By realizing that the self is an effect of time, Vathek effectively faces his own selflessness. The text’s ontology thus reflects a Buddhist stance, not as a form of nascent Buddhism promulgated by either Beckford or Vathek, but as a sign of Romanticism’s uncomfortable similarity to Buddhist ontology’s linkage between “being” and time.

In the “Uji” fascicle of his *Shobogenzo*, Zen Master Dogen explains the relationship between “being” and time as a single concept he dubs “*existence-time*” (“*uji*” in Japanese), suggesting that “[e]ach individual and each object in this whole universe should be glimpsed as individual moments of time” (145). I quote Dogen at length, partly because his writing is dense and peculiar, but mostly to give a sense of the complex way in which he defines existence-time:

Because [real existence] is only this exact moment, all moments of existence-time are the whole of time, and all existent things and all existent phenomena are time. The whole of existence, the whole universe, exists in individual moments of time. Let us pause to reflect whether or not any of the whole of existence or any of the whole universe has leaked away from the present moment of time. Yet in the time of the common person who does not learn the Buddha-Dharma there are views and opinions: when he hears the words “existence-time” he thinks, “Sometimes I became [an angry demon with] three heads and eight arms, and sometimes I became the sixteen-foot or eight-foot [golden body of Buddha]. For example, it was like crossing a river or crossing a mountain. The mountain and the river may still exist, but now that I have crossed them and am living in a jeweled palace with crimson towers, the mountain and the river are [as distant] from me as heaven is from the earth.” But true reasoning is not limited to this one line [of thought]. That is to say, when I was climbing a mountain or crossing a river, I was

⁸³ Maynard elegantly summarizes the case: “In the fiction of William Beckford no final escape from time is possible for any of his human characters, but in the subterranean fantasies of these tales we are invited to share their longing that such a respite were available to mankind” (28).

there in that time. *There must have been time in me. And I actually exist now, [so] time could not have departed. If time does not have the form of leaving and coming, the time of climbing a mountain is the present as existence-time.*⁸⁴ *If time does retain the form of leaving and coming, I have this present moment of existence-time, which is just existence-time itself*⁸⁵ We should not understand only that time flies. We should not learn that “flying” is the only ability of time. If we just left time to fly away, some gaps in it might appear. Those who fail to experience and to hear the truth of existence-time do so because they understand [time] only as having passed. To grasp the pivot and express it: all that exists throughout the whole universe is lined up in a series and at the same time is individual moments of time. Because [time] is existence-time, it is my existence-time. Existence-time has the virtue of passing in a series of moments. That is to say, from today it passes through a series of moments to tomorrow; from today it passes through a series of moments to yesterday; from yesterday it passes through a series of moments to today; from today it passes through a series of moments to today; and from tomorrow it passes through a series of moments to tomorrow. Because passage through separate moments is a virtue of time, moments of the past and present are neither piled up one on top of another nor lined up in a row (145; my italics, Nishijima and Cross’s brackets)

For Dogen, time and existence are utterly inseparable, making it impossible to project a place outside of any present moment: “being” composes time, and time composes “being.” This impossibility, I argue, is the root of Beckford’s Hell and the source of Vathek’s punishment, which finds him struggling to understand the interconnection between time and existence. As I discussed in Chapter 1, time and eternity are non-dual under a Buddhist model. Because time is all-pervading, it cannot be escaped, and what we call “the eternal” must therefore be something that is accessible through (and in) time if it is to have any reality at all. However, the lesson that Vathek learns through his damnation is that an eternity within time does not free him from time’s relapsing and

⁸⁴ In their edition of *Shobogenzo*, Nishijima and Cross note that “‘Time that does not have the form of leaving and coming’ means instantaneous time, as opposed to time as a linear progression. If we see time in this way, even a continuous process—like crossing a mountain—is moments of the present” (145 n.13).

⁸⁵ Nishijima and Cross: “‘Time that retains the form of leaving and coming’ means linear time. If we see time in this way, even though the moment of the present has arrived and it will depart, it exists now. Master Dogen’s view of real time embraces both the view of time as a point and the view of time as a line, as well as the view of time as reality itself” (145 n.14). That is, Buddhism does not deny a linear aspect to time, but insists that this is not its only aspect.

remitting nature. He is therefore forced interminably to bear witness to the crimes of his life. His Hell is that he must live with the atrocities he has committed during his life-time. His self is his prison because “he” “is” the things he has done. The past becomes his present and his future, rendering time, as it is usually understood, meaningless, thus drawing into question the self authorized by time. Ontological existence is no longer defined against concepts such as life and death. Vathek therefore has an experience of self-emptiness that he is unprepared for, leaving “him” to suffer a perpetual state of nihilism, as he can no longer find any means of guaranteeing his personal self-sovereignty. Thus, Vathek’s punishment speaks to a struggle to understand existence apart from a chronological narrative of selfhood, to the fact that one’s “being” exists *as time* rather than just *over* and *through* time.

Suzuki’s epigraph to this chapter expresses Zen’s understanding of religion’s connection to ontology generally and not just from a Buddhist perspective. As I argued in Chapter 1, Zen offers a model to understand Romanticism’s relation to onto-religious concerns generally, which begin with, but certainly do not stop at, Christianity. I argue that Vathek seeks to go beyond the epistemological limits sanctioned by Abrahamic religion, which prescribes a certain understanding of self-nature as it revolves around an immortal self/soul that will face divine judgment after death. Under such a model, self-sovereignty is surrendered to the greater power of an omniscient God who decides one’s eternal reward or retribution. Vathek desires an alternative to this model, however, as he seeks not to understand the principles of religion, but the spiritual essence that exists before religious doctrine’s attempts to express it. Suzuki calls this the “Zen element” at the root of all religions, which allows them to offer “practical fruits” that are “efficiently

and livingly workable in our active life.” It is thus similar to Abrams’s argument that there is a *natural supernaturalism* at work, some secular and universal spiritual element that undergirds religious epistemology.

Vathek’s mis-step is to believe that gaining access to this principle will allow him to gain divine power, putting him on the same plane of existence as Mahomet and Alla and thus able to usurp their authority. In effect, Vathek becomes aware of emptiness, seeing self-dissolution as a way of transcending his current ontological status by removing the self-limiting bondage his earthly existence connotes. But he takes the paradoxical view that by dissolving his self, he can fill such emptiness with a new enhanced self. That is, rather than seeing emptiness as a mode of self-effacement, Vathek sees it as something he can draw into himself and possess, as though he might be able to integrate the impermanence that emptiness connotes into the nature of his “being”—master it—and then define a new self that can retain its sovereignty as an eternal presence not subject to time or mutability (i.e., a god). Vathek’s attempt to go beyond the prescribed “limits” or “boundaries” of religious epistemology, I thus posit, speaks to a larger desire of Romanticism to overcome the self-bondage associated with Christian ontology. Ultimately, Vathek’s quest is one for the knowledge needed to develop an alternative mode of “being.”

2.3 Beyond Knowledge, Beyond Religion, Beyond Self: *Vathek*’s Time in Hell

Among the first things we learn about Vathek is that he is “much addicted to women and the pleasures of the table” (1), a pleasure-seeking behaviour I will return to it in the following section. His other addiction is to knowledge: Vathek “wishes to know

everything; even sciences that d[o] not exist” (3).⁸⁶ For Vathek, knowledge and power go hand-in-hand. The action of the plot begins in earnest when Vathek encounters the Giaour who, posing as a merchant, is selling magical sabres engraved with “uncouth characters” that Vathek wishes to “decipher” at “his leisure” (6). But to his frustration, Vathek is forced to seek help from the learned among his people to translate the foreign language. Moreover, once Vathek comprehends the strange text, the magic of the sabres activates and the inscription changes to read: “Woe to the rash mortal who seeks to know that of which he should remain ignorant; and to undertake that which surpasseth his power!” (11). The first inscription, we later learn, portends Vathek’s admittance to the chamber of the pre-Adamite sultans in the Halls of Eblis—the culmination of Vathek’s pursuit of supernatural knowledge. The second inscription clearly challenges the intellectual authority of Vathek’s “right to know,” suggesting that such knowledge is reserved only for the divine. Yet Vathek has a “predilection for theological controversy” and does not “usually” hold to “orthodox” religious views, as he seeks to “have reason on his side” (3) and thus to demystify such religious concepts.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Liu has argued similarly that “[n]eedle tracks of addiction throughout *Vathek* . . . underscore the story’s habit of deferral, of compulsive repetition. There is Vathek’s addictive curiosity, for example, which can never be satiated (p. 2). There is his ‘addiction,’ as Beckford himself says, ‘to women and the pleasures of the table’ (p. 1). And there is his crowning addiction to the Giaour. What, after all, is the episode of the ‘kicking’—initiated when Vathek accuses the Giaour of ‘drugging’ him (p. 17)—but a panic of addiction?” (193)

⁸⁷ As Graham notes, “[d]espite assurances that some knowledge is forbidden, Vathek and his mother are adepts in the occult. In those dark realms they expect to find widened knowledge, power, and experience . . . They are champions of the secularization of knowledge” (“Perverse” 121-22).

This does not mean Vathek is rigidly materialist.⁸⁸ While he does not submit to the will of an omniscient god, he does look to “the stars” to “extort . . . the decrees of his destiny” (4). Rather than following orthodox religion, Vathek relies on the natural world to grant him access to the mysteries of the universe, and using this method he is able to prophesize the coming of the Giaour (5). In light of this, we can read Vathek’s quest to catch the Giaour and claim the reward he has been offered as part of the text’s overarching fascination with knowledge and power. Vathek is vying for power that will make him superior to the Giaour. But, the Giaour, possessing knowledge of the supernatural power Vathek desires, has the upper hand and is able to tease Vathek’s unrestrained appetite for knowledge by twice renegeing on his offer to deliver Vathek to the Halls of Eblis, first by closing the portal that is to lead Vathek there after he sacrifices fifty children (27), and again when Vathek, becoming frustrated with his lack of reward, seeks satisfaction in the hospitality of the Emir Fakreddin and his people, particularly his daughter Nouronihar. Vathek’s mother, Carathis, warns her son that the Giaour preemptively forbade this relationship with Nouronihar and he will now be denied access to the Halls of Eblis (53, 93). But Eblis, eager to add to his empire, permits Vathek and his beloved Nouronihar to enter his Hall, where they find their apparent doom.

Thus, the conventional way to read Vathek’s quest for knowledge is as a series of events in which the attendant revelation is repeatedly forestalled. Vathek’s damnation

⁸⁸ However, as Jung and Van De Walle have argued, materialism plays an important role in Vathek’s attempts to stabilize his identity. Van De Walle argues that “Vathek’s construction of monumentalizing spaces,” such as his tower, “is essentially an attempt to reform a natural landscape already superintended by Mahomet. Since this architectural reinscription is a manifestation of Vathek’s aberrant excess, it constitutes a deviation from the natural order and a moral transgression of Mahomet’s divine law . . . The tower not only metaphorically represents Vathek’s overreaching aspirations to elevate himself to divine status—it also functions as an instrument to aid him in his quest to penetrate the secrets of heaven” (164-65). See also Jung, who reads such spaces as linked to identity construction (“William” 20).

would seem to symbolize the dangers of trying to know too much about the nature of the universe, suggesting that such knowledge is not available to ordinary human subjects. According to such a reading, Vathek is ultimately denied access to the knowledge he seeks in the chamber of pre-Adamite sultans, or, more accurately, he is rendered incapable of seizing it due to the horror he faces at realizing what his fate in Hell will bring. This reading corroborates the ending's moralistic theme that Vathek is rightfully punished for overstepping his mortal limits, and it suggests that Vathek learns nothing, and therefore gains nothing, from his quest. I would argue that to grasp the text's true significance, however, we should not read its ending as Beckford's final stance. Vathek's experience in Hell grants him the knowledge he has set out to acquire, though his realization does not meet his expectations of what gaining such knowledge would be like. To see this effect, we must read the text out of order, as the earlier parts of the plot can only be properly understood with knowledge of the ending, which is an extreme version of the tropes Beckford experiments with over the course of the plot.

The ending begins with Vathek and Nouronihar's entry into the Halls of Eblis. There, they wish to go immediately to the hall of the pre-Adamite sultans, where Eblis assures them that their "insatiable" "curiosity" will be "gratified," as the sultans will provide them with knowledge of the world before the creation of Adam (111). These kings were once "monarchs of the whole earth," but now exist as "fleshless forms." They are not fully vital, but "possess[] enough life to be conscious of their deplorable condition" (112). Rather than offering freedom from the flux of a self in time, they act as a mirror to reflect back to Vathek the relationship between self and time he sought to escape, especially Soliman Ben Daoud, who acts as Vathek's double. Soliman explains

that he, too, once possessed a “magnificent throne,” had access to the knowledge of “sages and doctors” in his realm, built a “palace” that “rose to the clouds,” but gave in to lust and “a curiosity that could not be restrained by sublunary things” (113). Thus, we see the parallel between him and Vathek, who similarly reigns back in Samarah, built a sky-high tower, and is addicted to women, pleasure, and the acquisition of supernatural knowledge.

When Vathek meets Soliman, he realizes that others tried and failed to escape time in their quest for permanent self-sovereignty, although Soliman is unique in that he is not “totally destitute of hope” (114), for his torment will end when the cataract next to him finally ceases to flow. Yet this image is ultimately more tragic than hopeful in that it symbolizes the flow of time. Soliman thus sits in expectation of what Beckford’s textual reality will not allow: an eternity beyond time that will allow for one’s self to be reconstituted as one used to know it prior to experiencing its flux and instability. Thus, hope becomes a somewhat perverse endeavour, as it amounts to the anticipation of the end of time. When Vathek meets Soliman, he effectively meets both a past and future version of himself, a moment that interrupts time’s teleology. Soliman’s history prefigures Vathek’s self-narrative, yet because Vathek meets Soliman in the state of torment that is to be Vathek’s future, past and future both converge on the present in a mode that disrupts Vathek’s ontological stability. Officially, Vathek is afforded “[a] few days” to satisfy his desire for pleasure and supernatural knowledge (114), but in reality he has already learned from Soliman the nature of the universe and time.

Seeing himself in Soliman and Soliman in himself, Vathek finds that his subjectivity has been compromised, and he can no longer exist as a self-sovereign entity.

That is, he learns that the standard way of understanding time's linear movement is not correct: the past and the future converge on the present, but the present never moves and therefore contains both past and future. Vathek therefore comes to experience what Dogen calls existence-time. In light of this, we see that Beckford's text wanders from Christianity in favour of Islam as a mode of thinking outside European self-orientation. In so doing he stumbles upon a Buddhist mode of "being" and finds that self is not what it appears to be. But he then returns to a Christian understanding of Hell as a means of explaining the terror faced when self-emptiness is uncovered. This self-emptiness is figured as a damnation from which there is no return. Life as it once was cannot be fathomed, and death as a future event is unavailable: Vathek's existence, being inseparable from both life and death, connotes a state of life-in-death.

In trying to escape time, Vathek also seeks to avoid mortality, as it leads to the very self-erasure he attempts to overcome.⁸⁹ And strictly speaking, Vathek does avoid mortality but does so by experiencing life and death non-dualistically. That he experiences this as damnation rather than liberation speaks to his inability to cross over into the alternative mode of "being" he seeks to define. Understood this way, we are able to see that time and self are at the root of Vathek's torment in Hell. The narrator characterizes the suffering in Hell as "torment," "unabating anguish," "grief without end," and "remorse without mitigation" (114, 120). With the exception of "remorse," these terms refer generically to a state of suffering that is to last forever, but do not provide any real information as to what causes such suffering. "Remorse," which implies reassessment, is not mentioned until the final paragraph of the novel, where it invites us

⁸⁹ Maynard agrees suggesting that "what Vathek really seeks . . . [is] to control his destiny, to avert the effects of time, and to postpone or avoid a personal mortality" (17).

to re-think the novel's previous events. We see that Soliman is not the only one preoccupied with the past. Rather, this fixation is common to all of the damned subjects Vathek meets in Hell.

After departing from the chamber of the pre-Adamites, Vathek meets the princes and princess who are also waiting for the "few-days" interval before damnation to end officially. They are "not permitted to repent," but find that "trac[ing] back [their] crimes to their source . . . is the only employment suited to wretches like [them]" (116). Because he "does not yet bear [his] hand on [his] heart" (116), the symbol that one has crossed into interminable torment, Vathek is invited to engage in this scene of self-narrativization in which he and the others give in to the punishment they are still technically exempt from for a while longer. Meeting the future in the present by experiencing the past, the group's compulsive return to the past becomes the source of suffering in *Vathek's* Hell. Like sharing Soliman's pain, by sharing self-narratives, Vathek and the others come to experience each others' pain.⁹⁰ Their existences become linked, as they now all wander together devoid of self-sovereign assurance. Time no longer supports their individual self-narratives, and they now exist in a state of self-emptiness, becoming interdependent on time and each other, again in an experience of what Dogen calls existence-time.

⁹⁰ Under a conventional reading, this loss of self-sovereignty would seem to connote a scene of self-isolation rather than the interdependence for which I argue. Indeed, Hyland makes this argument, noting that the heart-consuming fire that causes the damned to clutch intractably at their heart "is not the fire of creation, but the fire of guilt, of isolated self-consciousness, which burns in the human heart" (153). However, I read this as an effect of self-orientation, which I argue the text tries to overcome, even if it is ultimately unsuccessful in its attempts to resolve the ontological crisis it puts forth and thus returns to convention to in order explain the pain of "being" that such an existential rupture causes.

This scene of storytelling as “group therapy,” desiring less the personal benefit of repentance than the sacrifice of one to another, is less personal than collective.⁹¹ These damned subjects share the same phenomeno-ontic position, confronting their individuality as an illusion and experiencing their “being” as other-oriented such that otherness comes to be understood as no different from self. Their consciousnesses are thus yolked together by sharing the same suffering. In fact, though we have no indication that they all arrive in Hell at the same time, they all experience the expiry of the interval before everlasting torment at the same moment (119). Outside of Beckford’s Hell, time structures existence by projecting it teleologically, but in Hell, existence structures time; clock-time is thrown out and replaced with existence-time, which is structured by experience and resists abstract methods of quantification. These damned subjects lose hope, “the most precious gift of heaven,” because they can no longer conceptualize the future as something apart from the present.⁹²

We can read a similar link between Vathek and these characters as an extension of the earlier link between Vathek, Nouronihar, and Carathis.⁹³ After experiencing her Giaour-induced visions, for instance, Nouronihar becomes an extension of Vathek’s own

⁹¹ The self-narratives shared in this scene make up the posthumously released *Episodes of Vathek*. Beckford had intended for this material to be included in the original published version of Vathek, but Samuel Henley, who had been entrusted to translate Beckford’s original French draft into English, sold the manuscript to a publisher before Beckford could integrate this material. Moreover, Maynard argues that the material contained in the *Episodes* reinforces Beckford’s themes on time and mortality (10).

⁹² It is not my intention to suggest here that Buddhism is a philosophy of hopelessness. Yet Buddhism does acknowledge that refusing to embrace the present leads to suffering. By desiring to get out of pain in the present, one ascribes to it, however unintentionally, a self-nature. For a more complete elaboration of the relationship between Buddhism and hope (from a Zen perspective) see Dunlap 108-35. I will return to Buddhism’s relationship to hope in Chapter 4.

⁹³ Hyland argues that “[Vathek], Nouronihar, and Carathis” are “essentially different aspects of the same idea” (150). I agree in the sense that they represent the text’s Romantic interests, as these are the figures who seek to go beyond the normal limits of reality and religion. I would add, too, that this linkage invites us to read their ontological relationship to each other in a similar way.

desires and ambitions (71-74) by joining his quest to overcome the effects of time. The two arrive at the Halls of Eblis together, and Nouronihar is present in the pre-Adamite chamber and its scene of “group therapy.” Like Vathek, Carathis desires to go beyond religious authority, and indeed teaches Vathek how to divine the future from the stars (8). Although Carathis has a secondary role in Vathek’s actual quest, she is guilty of aiding and abetting Vathek’s crimes, and she, too, becomes a damned votary of Eblis. However, it is Vathek and Nouronihar’s entrance into Hell that leads to her own. Due to Carathis’s role in Vathek’s crimes, an afrit is summoned to bring her to Eblis to “have her share” of the punishment (116). This interdependence is reinforced when we learn that Carathis has committed crimes of her own, resembling those Vathek has already enacted: before being carried off to Hell she murders several attendants and sets fire to Vathek’s tower (117), a move that symbolically speaks to the destruction of Vathek’s concept of self. In Hell, she, Vathek, and Nouronihar existentially merge.⁹⁴ While the text is not specific about how long (in standard clock-time) Vathek and Nouronihar reside in Hell, there is also no strong indication that days, as we are used to understanding them, have passed. Carathis is there for an identifiably shorter time than the other two, but is the first to experience the expiry of the “few-days” interval before damnation, or, more accurately, she seems to cause that expiration, seemingly speeding up time by tenaciously pursuing knowledge and power in the Halls of Eblis.

Unlike Vathek and Nouronihar, who are fearful and anxious after meeting Eblis, Carathis is “dauntless” when entering Hell (118). She, too, acquires supernatural

⁹⁴ Van De Walle argues that the destruction of the tower indicates a metaphorical “castration” (167), stemming from Vathek’s failure to secure self-sovereignty capable of superseding the authority of Alla and Mahomet. I agree, but contend that the psychoanalytic perspective Van De Walle argues from limits our capacity to see this as an ontological merging rather than a psychological one.

knowledge, but receives it through her own direct action. She immediately seizes control of magical talismans that allow her to enter deep into the realm of ontological knowledge contained within the mountain of Kaf (111), learning what is “known only to Eblis and his most favoured potentates” (118). These “potentates” are (officially) unnamed. However, their familiarity with the truth about time and existence strongly suggests that the potentates referred to are the pre-Adamite sultans, from whom Vathek and Nouronihar acquire the same knowledge, but as second-hand information. Moreover, Beckford’s ironic treatment of Eblis and Hell adds ambiguity to the term “favoured.” There is no mention of others who rule independently in Hell (the jinn and dives, for example, are capable of being controlled), so “favoured potentates” seems to refer ironically to the pre-Adamite sultans in the sense that Eblis takes the most pleasure in their torment. Carathis attempts to “dethrone” one of these kings, but it is at that moment that a disembodied voice yells, “All is accomplished!” (119), and she succumbs to the torments of Hell. This action, though, sets up a domino effect, as “almost at the same instant,” Vathek and the others also meet their torment (119). Carathis thus acquires the same knowledge but through different means, though she is no more capable of mastering time than are any of the other damned subjects. In this final instant, her self-sovereignty is surrendered to time and, because of Hell’s latent capacity for existential linkage, the others meet the same fate at the same time, figuring time, once again, as an ontological principle rather than a chronological one.

In Beckford’s Hell, the self is swallowed up by time, but awareness of singular existence remains. In this way, the damned face their new existential state as a mode of self-isolation, a “being” cut off from the rest of the world, thus eliminating the possibility

of shared experience. However, this elimination is ironic in that Hell offers only one experience of reality that is shared by all damned subjects. Their experience is singular, due to their self-isolation and -preoccupation, but as a *group* of self-isolated subjects they also exist as a multiplicity; the only thing that prevents them from seeing this collective experience is their self-absorption, which is also the cause of their suffering. The text therefore dramatizes a situation in which self-sovereignty becomes insecure. Its illusory structure nevertheless remains intact, despite a growing awareness that existence cannot be reduced to singular self-entities.

At the root of Beckford's Hell, then, is an inability to access an ontology to adequately account for both self and self-lessness. As a result, the torment the damned suffer is one in which existence becomes no different from time. By endlessly recollecting the past, the damned bring the past into the present. This mental reification imbues the past with a self-nature, causing it to abide as a present reality they cannot escape, and thus, the past is also to be the essence of the future. However, these chronological vectors have actually become irrelevant now that all of existence is realized to be time. The damned, having realized that "being" does exist apart from time, are horrified to recollect the time of their life. In the Dogenian model of existence-time, this realization leads to liberation that signifies how time, like self, comes and goes, and thus neither merit attachment of any kind. But in *Vathek*, the central characters' self-preoccupation precludes such an understanding. Their life-in-death is the surrender of the self to the events and conditions that produced it, which causes them to realize that all transgressions against an other are self-transgressions as well. Hell in *Vathek* is thus not the plot's resolution but only the culmination of an ontological inquiry played out

throughout the text, which sees life and death as non-linear.

2.4 Intoxication, Eternity, and the Inseparability of Life and Death

I began my previous section by noting Vathek's addiction to pleasure as a significant component of his overall quest for supernatural power. Vathek's assumptions about what this supernatural "enlightenment" will grant him seem to come from his understanding of the eternal, which stems from his pleasure-seeking tendencies: Vathek believes that it is "not necessary to make a hell of this world to enjoy paradise in the next" (1). The experience of pleasure, though, is an interesting mediator in the text. On the one hand, a rapturous state of pleasure seems to loosen Vathek's attachment to a concept of self, a "letting go" that is induced by taking in something from the outside. On the other hand, this act undercuts the self-softening of the rapture. That is, pleasure becomes a mode of self-lessness that also reifies the concept of self: pleasure of this sort is had for one self, by one's self. Central to *Vathek's* pursuit of pleasure are the five palaces of sensory delight, built for the "particular gratification of each of the senses" (1), which allow Vathek to study the relationship between pleasure and self-awareness. All of the palaces evince a peculiar combination of self-presence and self-loss that occurs through intoxication. *The Eternal or unsatiating [sic] Banquet* supplies "wines" and "cordials" from "a hundred fountains" that never deplete themselves (2). *The Retreat of Mirth* houses "troops of young females" who offer sexual pleasure to "all whom the Caliph allow[s] to approach them" (3), and *The Palace of Perfumes* is a repository of constantly burning incenses that produce a "powerful" yet "agreeable delirium" (3). In *The Temple of Melody* and *The Delight of the Eyes*, sight and sound overwhelm the eyes

and ears through the “magic optics” of art and nature and a sound that “reverberate[s]” in “every surrounding scene” (2). While these spaces may gratify the senses, they do not *satisfy* them, leading Vathek to experiment with alternate techniques to overcome the self.

The theme of sensory intoxication, intricately related to Vathek’s quest for knowledge, drives the novel’s plot, like the addiction that drives the Caliph’s travels from Samarah to Iskatar. As Graham argues,

[a]nachronistically a follower of John Locke, [Vathek] seeks knowledge through the senses. His five palaces are Lockean museums of sense experience—as well as Hartlean sites of exquisite and refined sensation in a world replete with sensual pleasures. Vathek embraces David Hartley’s ‘exquisite Gratification’ of the senses, but ignores his recommendations of moderation. (“Perverse” 121)

Vathek believes that indulging in sensory excess will precipitate an experience of the eternal, granting him freedom from time. The novel’s introduction to Vathek’s excessive side thus alludes to its final linkage between intoxication, excess, and eternity. When first entering the Halls of Eblis, Vathek believes that he has met his goal and that he has or is about to find an escape from time. The spaces he moves through model his expectations of eternity. For instance, the staircase Vathek descends to reach Eblis’s hall seems to be endless (108). By removing the phenomeno-chronologic connection between walking in the present and arriving somewhere in the future, the text suggests that clock-time is no longer relevant to experience. When Vathek finally reaches the hall, it is “so spacious and lofty, that, at first,” it is mistaken “for an immeasurable plain” (109), an image of both structural limits and the appearance of infinity that connotes a rupture between space and time, playing at Vathek’s conceptualization of eternity as a locatable place beyond time. The only missing factor is sensory intoxication: as Vathek advances through the hall, he

encounters a “throng of Genii, and other fantastic spirits, of either sex, danc[ing] lasciviously” amidst a haze of incense and a buffet of food and wine “of every species” (109), an orgy of the senses reminiscent of Vathek’s five palaces of pleasure.

That Vathek believes he has gained access to the eternal by entering this scene allows us to see his activity in the pleasure palaces in a new light. We see, then, that by appealing to sensory excess, Vathek is catching glimpses of the eternal through his intoxication. Yet his inability to remain in a state of sensory excess motivates him to try other techniques. Vathek’s construction of the tower signals a new phase of his quest for eternity, as the tower is the place he first seeks eternity in the world rather than through the senses. Yet the construction of the tower also speaks to his inability to contain his desire within the walls of the palaces; his goal in building the tower is to rise to the level of the cosmos and penetrate the secrets of the heavens (4-5) and is therefore an effect of his craving for supernatural knowledge to grant him access to an eternity beyond time. However, these expectations lead Vathek astray, forcing him to face the torment of losing the self-sovereignty that he so desperately sought to secure.

By connoting a state of life-in-death, Hell is the text’s clearest expression of an ontological discomfort that develops throughout the story, though it is not the only expression of that discomfort. Nouronihar encounters something similar before she and Vathek enter Hell. In an attempt to keep his daughter away from Vathek, Fakreddin devises a ruse to convince Vathek that Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz have died, a plan that also involves tricking his daughter and nephew, who are drugged and brought to a secluded valley in the desert where they are unlikely to be discovered (75-80). When the drugs wear off, they are told that they have died and will enter paradise after living in

purgatory for a thousand years. While the simple-minded and child-like Gulchenrouz remains convinced that he is now in the afterlife, Nouronihar finds it difficult to “believe that the dead ha[ve] all the wants and whims of the living” (83). That Nouronihar casts “doubts on the mode of her being” (83) speaks to the ontological shift that has (not) taken place. The appearance of her death has forced her to question and explore the states of life and death. Because she does not actually die, Nouronihar comes to understand life and death in a new way. The text thus conflates life and death, showing that neither is entirely separate from the other, suggesting that death is as much a psychological phenomenon as a biological one. Life has become the same as death, or rather death has become the same as life.

For Nouronihar, then, death takes on a different meaning. Like Vathek, she is denied the option of death after arriving in Hell, experiencing a state of life-in-death. However, we see that this final result is actually prefigured in this earlier scene in much the same way that Vathek’s beliefs about eternity are prefigured in the palaces of the senses. Moreover, it is significant that it is after discovering the truth about her father’s ruse that Nouronihar becomes resolute in her desire to achieve what the Giaour has “promised” in the vision he bestowed upon her (71). Nouronihar begins to lose faith in the understanding of reality put forth by her father’s pious preaching. That is, her pseudo-death undercuts the religiously inflected model of the world he has raised her to follow. (This sort of trickery has Fakreddin resembling the faulty promises of the Giaour, which Vathek himself aptly points out [84].) After her “pseudo-death” in the desert, to use Brewer’s term, Nouronihar’s existence very much becomes like the “phantom” Vathek believes her to be when he finds her while he wanders the desert in mourning (83). By

staging a preliminary life-in-death before the climactic life-in-death in Hell, the text offers itself as a non-linear (that is a lived) experience of time, thereby inviting its readers to reassess its plot as a teleology, suggesting instead that time need not follow in only one direction.

To this point, I have emphasized that the text suggests that there is no such thing as an eternity beyond time. However, there is one case in which Beckford does toy with such an idea, but not in a way that presents it as a realistic or even particularly appealing option. Gulchenrouz, still under the belief he died and exists now in the afterlife, becomes startled by the noise of the black magic Carathis is performing in an attempt to locate him. “[B]ewildered with terror,” he runs from the scene until he collapses, “senseless,” “into the arms of a good old genius” who appears to protect him out of a “fondness for the company of children” (97). Gulchenrouz, none the wiser, believes this act has transported him to the “mansions of eternal peace,” where he resides with the fifty children the same genius saved from Vathek’s sacrifice to the Giaour and is free to revel in the “delights of his soul” (97). Thus, Gulchenrouz seems to enter an eternity more along the lines of what Vathek had imagined. As Maynard writes, “Vathek seeks in his way, what Gulchenrouz is given in another, the perpetuated enjoyment of a mortal, sensual existence” (18). But linking this state with one of childhood suggests a kind of immaturity, a lack of having really lived in the world.⁹⁵ The novel’s final paragraph emphasizes this effect:

⁹⁵ In Chapter 1, I noted that Romantacism desires childhood because it represents a formless state of existence. Beckford’s treatment of childhood, here, operates along different terms in that childhood is not something that is recovered, but rather never departed from. The appeal of childhood is that it frees one from one’s self by going back to a time of simplicity, before the flux and flow of time wreak havoc on the self. Eternity, then, is seen as the way to recover this, but in a way that allows the self to coalesce as a fixed

the Caliph Vathek, who, for the sake of empty pomp and forbidden power, had sullied himself with a thousand crimes, became a prey to grief without end, and remorse without mitigation: whilst the humble, the despised Gulchenrouz passed whole ages in undisturbed tranquility, and in the pure happiness of childhood. (120)

The narrator attests to the wickedness of Vathek, but in the final line compares the Caliph to Gulchenrouz, an ending that asks the reader to consider the fates of both of these characters by juxtaposing the states of time and timelessness they respectively enter. Gulchenrouz is able to access the kind of eternity that Vathek seeks only because he is denied an adult life. His role in the plot is static and used primarily as a contrast to Vathek's dynamism, which presents the latter as the text's antihero.

The text thus suggests that thinking of eternity as outside of time is immature, childish, and only available to those willing to forego actually living in the messy reality of "real life." Gulchenrouz is associated with piousness and adherence to the rules, which is why Fakreddin approves of him over Vathek: these qualities make him easy to control and manipulate. In doing this, the text also makes subtle judgements about the values of a religiously-oriented life, as it bespeaks the immaturity we read in Gulchenrouz. Yet on a deeper level, we see the text wrestling with the nature of what religious life truly is in that Gulchenrouz's fate is brought alongside Vathek's at the end of the plot. We find that, really, neither fate is preferable to the other, as salvation comes at the expense any real agency or presence in the world. Ultimately, Beckford's text seeks a third option, which

entity. In order for this to happen, one must actually live in the world and then return. Blake's work reminds us that "innocence" can only be appreciated in light of "experience." Thus, Gulchenrouz, the perpetual child, is ultimately afflicted by a lack of desire and therefore goes against one of the hallmarks of Romanticism. We cannot empathize with him because he is uninterested in exploring the self; he prefers to exist under the authority of blind obedience to religious authority (e.g., Alla, Mahomet, Fakreddin). As Hyland argues, "Gulchenrouz has neither energy nor courage, and no curiosity: his heart always trembles 'at anything sudden or rare' (69). It is this attitude which makes him pathetic; and the very things lacking in Gulchenrouz and that bring about the damnation of Vathek are things which make it possible, in only in part, to admire him (150).

it then struggles to define and mobilize. *Vathek*, as I have argued, seeks a secular understanding of the supernatural—a natural supernaturalism—which would allow him ontological security without appealing to an orthodox religious life. That Gulchenrouz is able to gain such ontological stability through his “immature piety” suggests that there are avenues that do provide such an existence. But the novel confronts us with the difficulty of trying to locate this existence, which only comes at the expense of sacrificing self-sovereignty to religious authority.

Vathek arrives at these options through an understanding of the self as fixed and permanent. But given its stake in equating time and existence as the same thing, the novel challenges any assumptions that self can exist independently of the events of life and the conditions which allow us to become aware of it. Beckford’s novel thus intersects with Zen Buddhist understandings of time and existence, though not unproblematically, as it does not fully give up on self-nature. From a Buddhist perspective, *Vathek*’s Hell suggests a misunderstanding of time and existence. The text’s attachment to self-sovereignty becomes its own stumbling block, as it intersects repeatedly with a realization that such a concept does not really exist. *Vathek*, then, is a text in which the self becomes its own source of otherness, an experience that connotes one’s own ontologically uncertainty, as all of one’s reality seems to have been thrown into a void from which they will not escape.⁹⁶ Rather than an infinity of perpetual pleasure, *Vathek* finds that exposing his self for what it really is connotes a state of hellish pain because he loses what he seeks to secure.

⁹⁶ Cf. Nietzsche’s suggestion that “when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you” (69).

Chapter 3

Ecstasy and Emptiness: Coleridge, De Quincey, and Zen Sickness

In the West, nirvana is often misunderstood as some kind of Buddhist Heaven, or, since nirvana literally means “cessation” or “extinction,” a lot of people have a seriously mistaken tendency to equate the idea with nihilism. Others equate nirvana with some kind of everlasting bliss. Nirvana isn’t about bliss. If you want bliss, you’d be better off smokin’ a fat ol’ doobie, dude. Just brace yourself for a stiff dose of reality again when you’ve used up yer stash.

~ Brad Warner, *Hardcore Zen*

In my previous chapter, I explored Romantic representations of the Orient, positing that William Beckford’s *Vathek* attests to a Romantic consciousness that is unable to maintain a rigid boundary between the concepts of self and other. I argued that the mode of self-isolation in Beckford’s *Hell* is not really isolation, but rather a merging of self and other that elides individual existence, yet paradoxically leaves behind a subject that appears to be separate from object. In this chapter, I will return to these themes in two key Romantic works: Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (1818) and Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), as well as writings related to its composition. Where my first chapter emphasized the self’s inability to constitute itself independently of time’s flux, this chapter will address Coleridge’s and De Quincey’s attempts to come to terms with an ontology that exists independently of self and time. I argue that these quintessentially Romantic texts take up a relationship between East and West that challenges their authors’ preconceptions about self-other dualism, suggesting that these concepts depend on a self-narrative against which otherness is defined. As such, these texts inevitably encounter a struggle with a Buddhist ontology that they each seek to resolve. Critics such as Nigel Leask, John Barrell, and

Barry Milligan, as we shall see, have focused on otherness infecting the self, yet the present study seeks to understand this otherness as something Coleridge and De Quincey realize was already present within their consciousnesses, which is then dramatized as an Oriental encounter.⁹⁷

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" is arguably most (in)famous for the story of its composition. The Preface explains that the poem was inspired by an opium dream that was itself influenced by the Orientalist text Coleridge fell asleep reading (Samuel Purchas's *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* [1614]). Waking up to write down the dream, Coleridge was interrupted by a person on business from Porlock and forgot the remaining lines. This fragmentariness reinforces the poem's ontological themes by attesting to the impossibility of finishing or perfecting a self-narrative. The poem, then, is something of a non-self-narrative exemplifying that self-lessness is an ordinary ontological state that one should strive to maintain interminably. The poem thus imbues emptiness with a self-nature, a place to abide in, an attachment to emptiness as a source of pleasure, which is symptomatic of Zen sickness.

⁹⁷ As Tim Fulford argues, for Coleridge "the oriental poem was . . . a genre in which exotic beliefs could be dramatized—a zone of dream, spells, magic and enchantment, where strange relationships of mind and world could be played out" (59). I would add that these strange relationships of mind revolve around a subject confronting self-emptiness. While I do not dispute the significance of actual real-world colonial relations in helping to understand this process and even contributing to it, my aim is to read Coleridge and De Quincey's texts as enacting a confrontation with the emptiness of the self, which, as I argued in Chapter 1, begins—especially on the part of Coleridge—as an enthusiasm for Indian philosophy. As John Drew notes "[w]e should not . . . underestimate Coleridge's conscious interest in the Orient. Not only did he share in the general contemporary interest in India but he was also aware, as few in his time were, of the influence of India on the Buddhist lamas of Tibet. In the same document where he refers to the awe with which in his younger days he regarded the earliest translations of Sanskrit religious texts, he uses the image of the Dali Lama, 'the temple-throned infant of Thibet,' as 'a pregnant symbol of the whole Brahmin Theosophy'" (224). While Coleridge has some awareness of Buddhism, he understands it to be a branch of Hinduism (i.e., "Brahmin Theosophy"), thus corroborating Philip C. Almond's argument regarding the lack of real knowledge about Buddhism in England (24). Coleridge address Buddhism in this manner in his *Notebooks* 4.4916 and 5.6615. See also De Quincey's "Revolt of the Tartars" (*Works* 9.177) and "Hurried Notices of Indian Affairs" (*Works* 18.161-69)

Although technically a complete text, *Confessions* shares a sense of the self-fragmentation found in Coleridge's poem. Because De Quincey never really resolves the self-difficulty his text exposes, he was compelled repeatedly to revise, re-work, and extrapolate on those issues. *Confessions* was first published serially in the *London Magazine* in 1821 before being reissued as a complete book in 1822. In 1856, De Quincey published a revised edition that, by expanding his autobiography, suggests an attempt to bolster the self-narrative his writing disrupts. He further expanded *Confessions* in two sequels, *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) and *The English Mail-Coach* (1849), which, rather than continue De Quincey's initial narrative, compulsively return to the issue of self-emptiness. His inability to resolve this issue renders each attempt to do so a narrative fragment that defies completion. In these later texts, De Quincey moves further away from securing a linear self-narrative, finding that his "being" is inseparable from the others his self-narrative intersects with and draws into itself. Thus, *Confessions* signals De Quincey's initial break with self-sovereign ontology, exposing his "being" as an empty void that precludes attempts at self-definition. Yet this void contains both the "pleasures" and "pains" he associates with his opium habit, the impetus for his exploration of the self's relapsing and remitting nature. De Quincey's opium use models Zen sickness in that it involves both an attachment to emptiness and a deeply disorienting return to self-awareness that cannot be consolidated with the self's inherent emptiness. Like the impetus for Coleridge's dream, opium incites the ontological struggle that structures *Confessions* and leads De Quincey to experience his "being" as a self-other hybrid, though it becomes increasingly unclear to him what defines "self" and "other" as

such: a difference remains, but De Quincey is at a loss to explain what exactly constitutes it.

In contrast to the fictive world that Beckford depicts in *Vathek*, then, Coleridge and De Quincey's texts emerge from an autobiographical position. Both authors take their own subjectivity as the object of study, and their writing becomes a practice of both resisting and engaging with emptiness: it defines a self-narrative through which the self emerges as a character or construct, therefore drawing into question that self's ontological status because it often depends on "other" characters to define itself. These "other" characters do not exist apart from the initial self-narrative within which they are contained, but are really externalized manifestations of self used to explore the inability to reduce subjectivity to a single self-narrative and the ways subjectivity intersects with otherness. This practice leads both authors to experience their own versions of the hellish life-in-death that Beckford imagines. However, this chapter argues that this state is neither as cut-and-dried nor as inescapable in Coleridge and De Quincey's texts as it is in Beckford's novel.

For Coleridge and De Quincey, self-emptiness begins as an ecstatic experience of intoxicating pleasure that eventually gives way to a troubling ontological disruption. Their respective works thus evince a drive to recover the lost state of ecstasy as a means of recuperating their selves from the damage caused by intoxication, a cycle of relapse and recovery modelled by their opium addictions. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, opium, for these writers, becomes a stand-in for the concept of emptiness, a formalized version of it that can be used to dose out the ecstatic experience as a means of anaesthetizing the subject against the ontological disruption the experience of emptiness connotes. Unlike

Vathek, “Kubla Khan” and *Confessions* show us that the experience of self-loss *can* be a source of self-liberation that reveals one’s self-lessness as the manifestation of nature in human form. The end result, however, is much the same: the Romantic subject struggles to account for individual existence after having experienced a oneness with everything, and thus the return to self-awareness becomes a source of alienation, as self now feels like a foreign concept. As I will argue, a Buddhist model accounts for this effect through the logic of *not one, not two*. Oneness and separation (i.e., oneness and twoness) are merely fluctuating modes by which we perceive the world, though all things being empty, the appearance of separation is illusory, given that it depends on ascribing to things a self-nature. Although Coleridge and De Quincey use opium as a means of trying to maintain the experience of oneness, privileging emptiness over form, they end up perpetually trying to return to emptiness as a means of escaping the ontological discomfort they encounter as a result of exploring their own self-emptiness. Thus, they succumb to the form of Zen sickness outlined in Chapter 1. The self, they learn, is not a historically verifiable reality, and without the self, they stand to fall into nothingness.

Coleridge and De Quincey focus on different aspects of the experience of self-emptiness: “Kubla Khan” depicts a moment of ecstatic and rapturous self-loss in which selfness and otherness become indistinct, whereas *Confessions* is a psychological analysis of self-nature’s relationship to narrative. But they are nevertheless engaged in the same practice of writing-as-self-exploration that questions the assumptions of a self-oriented ontology and, as we will see, moves towards a “hybrid consciousness” that is aware of its relationship to otherness. I will first take up De Quincey’s more sustained exploration of the psychological and ontological consequences of a self-other hybrid, which will then

allow us to see the same effect emerging in Coleridge's poem. I will then read Coleridge's account of self-dissolution in "Kubla Khan" for how it foreshadows a similar ontological struggle in *Confessions*. Finally, I will return to De Quincey's *Confessions* to address the ontological struggle that arises after repeated exposure to self-emptiness.

3.1 The Romantic Subject's "Hybrid Consciousness"

Rather than the Saidian model in which the other is always something separate from a Western European self, "Kubla Khan" and *Confessions* represent selfness and otherness existing together in an uncomfortable state of what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as "hybridity." Bhabha explains that colonial power maintains its presence by disavowing itself of any association between it and the other it colonizes in order to safeguard its "identity of authority" (154). But such a disavowal "denies the *différance* of colonialist power" (153), which takes shape not as a rigidly defined binary of self and other—colonizer and colonized—but rather through hybridization, marking "a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (156). This process draws into question not just the "identity of authority" but also the *authority of identity*, as hybridity "represents [an] ambivalent 'turn' of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification—a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority" (155). That is, inasmuch as colonial presence may try to discriminate between itself and the colonized other, the two do not really exist separately. Therefore, self-identity is always under threat from the other it defines its self

against, as hybridity “breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/Other, inside/outside” (158), thus allowing the other to infiltrate and then “reside” within self-consciousness.

Bhabha’s model allows us to see that even though Romantic Orientalization may be a celebration of a unified East and West, there are certain ontological consequences that come with such self-effacement. What begins as an ecstatic self-loss eventually gives way to an awareness that self cannot be understood through traditional epistemic modes. “The subject” must now find a way to account for not just its selfness but also its otherness, connoting a dis-ease of “being.” Barrell and Leask have both characterized De Quincey’s interactions with the East, for instance, as a kind of infection of self by an Oriental other, citing De Quincey’s opium use as the example *par excellence*.⁹⁸ Leask argues that De Quincey, through his fascination with the East, succumbed to “what in medical language is called an *iatrogenic* illness, that is to say, an illness which is caused by that which was intended as a cure” (10). He thus posits that Romanticism desires the Orient as a “heraldic device,” but finds that “the ontology of the oriental image is never stable,” as it “always tends to shift its meaning from an emblem of symbolic incorporation to one of parasitic tenure” and manifests as an “anxiety of not knowing any longer where it is exactly that one is standing” (9).

This anxiety is ultimately a fear of losing the self in the face of the other, which Leask refers to as the *anxiety of empire*. This concept speaks directly to the concept of

⁹⁸ It should be noted, however, that similar to the present study, Leask sees Coleridge and De Quincey as a linked pair, arguing that De Quincey is doubling of Coleridge (216-22). Therefore, the argument Leask lays out should be understood as also applying to Coleridge, as will become clear in my reading of “Kubla Khan” below, where I argue that Coleridge also desires a state he imagines in the Orient in spite of its pernicious effects on his sense of self.

hybridity in that it responds to the anxiety Bhabha identifies in a colonially-inscribed self realizing it has doubled itself in the other and no longer exists as a singularity.⁹⁹ We see this anxiety present itself in the “pains” of De Quincey’s opium dreams in which he is frequently fleeing from an Oriental other that exists only within his own consciousness. That opium, a product of the Orient, “supplied” this image/awareness to his consciousness speaks to the fact that even though there is a desire to surrender the self to the other in a moment of celebratory self-emptiness, there is nonetheless a deep-seated desire to retain the ontological stability that the self offers, as it accounts for one’s “being,” but that account is now looked upon with existential suspicion.¹⁰⁰

Barrell argues that De Quincey’s opium use speaks to a larger practice of inoculating himself against otherness, which is seen as an Oriental contagion (17). However, Barrell notes that “to be inoculated *against* the disease is at the same time to be inoculated *with* it” (16; Barrell’s italics). The other therefore becomes a part of De Quincey’s self-consciousness and disrupts his ability to define self and other separately:

the terms self and other can be thought of as superseded by “this” and “that,” in a narrative which now says, there is *this* here, and it is different from *that* there, but the difference between them, though in its own way important, is nothing compared with the difference between the two of them considered together, and that third thing, way over there, which is truly other to them both . . . what at first seems “other” can be made over to the side of the self . . . as long as a new, and newly absolute “other” is constituted to fill the discursive space that has thus been evacuated. (10)

⁹⁹ Bhabha remarks that hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures . . . in a dialectical play of ‘recognition.’ . . . [C]olonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling” (156).

¹⁰⁰ Similarly Leask argues that “in the case of De Quincey, opium (like the term consumption, with its double meaning) becomes a metaphor for imperialism as both a cure for national torpor, a stimulant, and a compulsive narcotic, a wasting away. Hopes about the invigorating effects of imperial expansion on the metropolitan society turn into a nightmare realization that it has become economically dependent on (or addicted to) its subjugated Other; the relations of power have been grotesquely reversed” (9).

Barrell suggests that the traditional distinctions made between self and other are inadequate for expressing the ontology that develops in De Quincey's writing, which Barrell reads as a practice of "taking something of the East into himself, and projecting whatever he could not acknowledge as his to a farther East, an East *beyond* the East" (16; Barrell's italics). The concept of otherness is challenged but not rendered fully irrelevant. There is unification of East and West, but there is also a new source of otherness stemming from the only vaguely perceptible East beyond the East, "where something lurks [that] is *equally threatening to both [self and other]*, and which enables or obliges them to reconcile their differences" (11; my italics). That is, in realizing the unification, there is also a growing awareness of an ontological otherness (the thing that is truly other to them both), leaving the subject in an ontologically groundless state with no way to tether their identity to a definitive source.¹⁰¹

In light of this awareness, De Quincey's writing becomes a practice of exploring his own self-emptiness. He is mystified by its sublimity, yet terrified of the self-erasure it connotes. Opium acts as a means of asserting control over emptiness, to enhance the

¹⁰¹ Daniel Sanjiv Roberts also highlights this relationship, but in a somewhat different way. He argues that "the orient was not always portrayed unfavourably in the cultural landscape of De Quincey's early years. Through the Bible and through reports of orientalist scholarship, De Quincey had also received versions of orientalism which were far from merely critical of the Eastern nations and their ways. While recent critical scholarship has been largely oblivious to these favourable strains of orientalism in relation to the young De Quincey, my contention is that they deeply inform the development of his later imperialism, disturbing and complicating his ideology in revealing and anxious ways. Among the more puzzling and outrageous effects of logical systems, as Egyptian gods are 'inoculated' with the Hindu pantheon through 'kindred feelings' of revulsion . . . Such fusions are often ascribed to the action of [opium], as if opium itself may be credited with casting a certain confusion over nineteenth-century orientalism, suffusing its users with a geographical and mythological haziness whereby the East was homogenized into a Saidian form of orientalism. On the other hand, opium, it must be pointed out, is not actually an hallucinogenic drug, nor by any means was De Quincey's geography hazy, however prejudiced his later pronouncements on the Eastern nations were. My more mundane thesis is that these imagistic and mythological fusions can be traced back to some of the earlier orientalist scholarship of the Indomania variety, prior to Indophobia, when the commercial interests of the East India Company gave way to a muscular evangelical form of missionary intervention in the colonies on the one hand and to utilitarian forms of imperialism in governance and education on the other" (24-27). For my discussion of "Indomania" and "Indophobia," see Chapter 1 pp. 18-26

sublimity while palliating the terror, but this strategy is only temporarily effective. Alina Clej argues that for De Quincey, “[o]pium is both a remedy and a poison, simultaneously a source of memory and oblivion, of excitement and anesthesia. Its essence is to be a *conjunction of opposites*, but of a special kind with implications for time, memory, and history” (viii; my italics). Opium is thus a conduit for moving between ontological boundaries, and it alerts the self to the previously unconscious otherness lurking within self. Opium helps De Quincey transition from an intellectual understanding of the inseparability between self and other to the ontological understanding noted by Barrell.¹⁰² Opium intoxication, however, also buffers the negative effects of this practice, that is, those that disrupt ontological stability. “Intoxication,” Clej argues,

offers contact at a distance, continuity through intermittence. It exposes the self to an imaginary loss of self without actually endangering its existence: the subject can endlessly enact a drama of death and resurrection in a safe space. Although intoxication apparently brings the subject into closer contact with itself and the world of experience, it actually fosters alienation. (x)

By intoxicating himself, De Quincey transcends his ordinary ontological limits, but he does so by dismantling his sense of self, undercutting his own ontological ground. He thus becomes aware of an ontology that can be explained neither by selfness nor otherness and instead indicates a void in which all identities are reduced to nothingness (i.e., that which is truly other). What begins as an act of unity takes a hard left turn, leaving De Quincey

¹⁰² Milligan argues that this effect of opium is “a characteristically De Quinceyan paradox,” in which “order is restored to the self only to eradicate that self on another level” (50). He sees this effect as a response to an essentially religious rebellion enacted on the part of the opium eater, suggesting that “opium implicitly usurps the Judaeo-Christian God’s status not only as ultimate lawgiver, but even as creator” in that it grants access to both an “essential human state” that has been obscured by humanity’s supplication to the Old Testament God’s vengeful tendencies, and it offers humankind a return to “paradise” without needing God’s consent (“Brunonianism” 49-50).

alienated from his own self-existence and the identity he realizes it only *appeared* to contain.

In *Suspiria De Profundis*, De Quincey addresses this point head-on. He acknowledges that there is a perceptible linearity of “being” that humans use to make sense of their experience of time. But he is also aware that day-to-day experience tends to contradict this linearity:

Man is doubtless *one* by some subtle *nexus* that we cannot perceive, extending from the newborn infant to the superannuated dotard: but as regards many affections and passions incident to his nature at different stages, he is *not* one. The unity of man in this respect is coextensive only with the particular stage to which the passion belongs. (155; De Quincey’s italics)

The implication here is that the human subject is not “one,” although a thinking, feeling, human subject desires to think of their self as “one” because a narrative of self-development can be *re-collected* as a single linear narrative of one’s existence. But in *Suspiria*, De Quincey finds it to be an “important truth” that “far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, . . . in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach *us* directly, and in their own abstract shapes,” existing, rather, as what he refers to as an “*involute*” (151; De Quincey’s italics). Here, De Quincey affirms that identity creation is an act of interpretation, of fixating on one’s incomprehensibly complex experiences, which cannot be separated from the conditions that produced them. Therefore, such experiences do not really offer anything concrete on which one might base an interpretation. As Clej argues, De Quincey is “one of the first writers, if not the very first, to experience and work out the symptoms of modernity,” as his writing speaks to our contemporary understanding of “the modern authorial subject,” which “even in its high Romantic mode, is a rhetorical

construct fashioned out of echoes, a ‘self’ opened up to and by others and thoroughly penetrated by them” (249). The self, then, is not innate but rather *added* through the retelling of the narrative, which gives it the appearance of unity and, in turn, of innate presence. Opium intoxication, as Clej argues, both supports and works against this attempt to understand the nature of the self by offering a simultaneous recollection and dissolution of self-narrative that dissociates the intoxicated subject from a sovereign or fixed sense of self and opens them up to the state of psychical dis-ease diagnosed by Barrel and Leask.

In De Quincey’s writing, this effect reaches its clearest expression in *Suspiria* through the “Dark Interpreter” living within De Quincey’s opiated psyche, “originally a mere reflex of [his] inner nature,” but one that becomes a “dark symbolic mirror for reflecting to the daylight what else must be hidden forever” (205). The “dark symbolic mirror” provided by opium intoxication is also at work in *The English Mail-Coach* in which De Quincey’s fear of otherness breaches his own psyche and becomes an anxious fear of the East that stands to threaten his very existence as an English-man, that is, his identity and his masculinity (Faflak Introduction 30).¹⁰³ He notes that “the caprices, the gay arabesques, and the lovely floral luxuriations” of his (opiated) dream consciousness “betray a shocking tendency to pass into finer maniacal splendours” (249) Through this “horrid inoculation upon each other of incompatible natures” (249) the “dreamer finds housed within himself . . . some horrid alien nature” that “contradicts his own, fights with it, perplexes and confounds it” (250-51). As De Quincey’s self-sovereignty becomes increasingly suspect, he appeals to ideas of national sovereignty in order to maintain the

¹⁰³ Leask agrees that De Quincey’s writings about the East represent a “racist psychosis,” stemming from a Bhabhaian notion of hybridity (216).

distance between otherness and his self.¹⁰⁴ He clings (futilely) to his self in order to champion over the “alien nature” he now finds “within himself.” Opium is instrumental in this process, as it provides the necessary anesthesia for De Quincey to cope with his inherent lack of self-sovereignty, but it is also responsible for exposing that lack by altering De Quincey's self-consciousness and expanding it past its normal boundaries.¹⁰⁵

Throughout *Confessions* and its “sequels,” then, De Quincey’s writing becomes an addictive practice of returning to emptiness, in order to palliate the ontological pain he must continually face in his writing about his emptiness, as though perpetually re-authorizing his self-narrative will allow him to defend his self against its own emptiness. In this attempt at self-preservation, De Quincey “the man” is traded for De Quincey “the character,” revealing his identity as a series of stories he has told about himself and attempted to interpret (to little avail). The revised 1856 edition of *Confessions*, nearly quadrupling the autobiography of its opening section, especially evinces this compulsion—indeed addiction—to expanding his self-narrative. The revised edition also highlights the original text’s fragmentation, as it shows De Quincey was not yet satisfied with his understanding of the relationship between his opium use and his ontology. De Quincey’s writing therefore speaks to a drive to overcome the self in a moment of ecstasy, but also to retain its essential functioning.

Writing of his first opium experience in the “Pleasures of Opium” section of *Confessions*, De Quincey draws attention to “an apocalypse of the world within” himself,

¹⁰⁴ De Quincey’s “The Opium and the China Question” also evinces this attitude (*Works* 11:532-72).

¹⁰⁵ In making this argument, I agree with Roberts that opium itself is not responsible for the Orientalization in De Quincey’s writing (see note 101 above). However, I maintain that opium is involved in De Quincey’s realization of what I have been calling an “otherness within himself,” which does, in turn, have an effect on his fear of the Orient.

noting that this “negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of [the] positive effects” he refers to as “the abyss of divine enjoyment” (89). Experiencing the sounds of music, he says, is “like a collection of Arabic characters” that defy semantic definition (96). He is opened up to a form of otherness that exposes “the whole of [his] past life” but “not, as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music” an “no longer painful to dwell upon” (96-97).¹⁰⁶ When comparing the effects of opium to those of wine, he claims that “the opium-eater . . . feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount; that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and over all is the great light of the majestic intellect” (92). Through opium intoxication, De Quincey takes his self to the void, but nevertheless revels in an enhancement of intellectual power, which reifies his sense of self rather than further dismantling it. Self-emptiness is only desired at certain times, and opium fulfills that desire.

3.2 Ecstasy and Emptiness in “Kubla Khan”

While De Quincey’s work offers valuable insights into the psychology of a self contemplating its own emptiness, Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” offers a concise yet telling account of how the self loses itself in the ecstasy of opium intoxication. Although less concerned than *Confessions* with understanding how the self comes to construct an identity, the poem nevertheless explores the dissolving of self through its relationship to otherness. Milligan argues that the damsel with a dulcimer, noted near the end of the poem, is instrumental in this process:

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dogen’s concept of existence-time. See Chapter 2 pp. 73-74.

[b]y imputing inspiration and control of the poem's production to an independent-willed Oriental woman within his consciousness, the speaker partitions that consciousness into male and female, English and Oriental, demonic and docile, then reimagines the seemingly uncontrollable portions as something other than himself—specifically as the at least doubly other (both non-English and nonmale) Oriental Woman. But the alien pieces remain,¹⁰⁷ or at least return periodically, to erode the otherwise presumed stable center of his identity as, among other things, Englishman. (*Pleasures* 39)

Milligan highlights that the poem, rather than trying to define self in terms of singularity, actually enacts a process of self-expansion that allows for binary opposites to co-exist within one consciousness: male/female, Orient/Occident, self/other. They are “partitioned,” but are not independent of each other, an existential merging that suggests the Zen logic of *not one, not two*.¹⁰⁸ The source of the poem's composition in otherness, however, comes as an assault on self-sovereignty.¹⁰⁹ The self, being unable to account for its newly realized “alien pieces,” cannot be put back together as it used to exist, and is thus forced to confront its inherent hybridity. While De Quincey's writing explores this

¹⁰⁷ Milligan also deploys Bhabhaian “hybridity” in his argument.

¹⁰⁸ Similarly, David Vallins argues that in “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge “explore[s] the idea of a creative vision which transforms the speaker's concrete surroundings, or of the mind as profoundly shaping his perceptions, which cannot substantially exist apart from the emotional and imaginative world which they inhabit. Hence the unknown region of Circassia, as of medieval China, allows Coleridge to achieve a greater degree of liberation from the world of concrete particulars familiar from Lockean empiricism than would have been possible in either a British or a confusion of subjective and objective, or of spiritual and material, which the use of more familiar Middle Eastern or Indian settings would have entailed. Hence his search for an imaginative transcendence of dualism seems repeatedly to have led Coleridge, at least in his early poems, to seek settings remote from either Judaeo-Christian Europe or its well-defined ‘others,’ so as to escape the dualistically opposed conception of their values which so many contemporary writings illustrate, and thus to assist his readers in freeing themselves from the similarly opposed conceptions of a fallen, unspiritual world, and one imbued with revelations of a universal creative spirit in which the protagonist, the poet and his readers also share” (“Immanence” 126). I would add, however, that this retreat from a Judaeo-Christian position is at the root of this exploration, as it is both the trap Coleridge seeks to escape and the anchor on which he later relies.

¹⁰⁹ Milligan reads this activity as an invasion by an Oriental other (*Pleasures* 41-42). Milligan, writing from a New Historicist perspective, is interested in Coleridge's historically verified fears of Eastern invasion and sees them being expressed in the poem.

same effect, Coleridge's poem reveals that despite the discomfort that can arise by dissolving the self, there is also the simultaneous opportunity for extreme pleasure.

In "Kubla Khan" the speaker experiences emptiness as ecstatic pleasure, although accompanied by a "savage" element (14) that enacts self-erasure. This self-erasure challenges the idea that the speaker's ecstatic pleasure is unique to him. By the end of the poem, only one solution counteracts the "savaging" of self-sovereignty that the experience of emptiness confers on the subject: a return to the state of emptiness as ecstasy, which ultimately connotes a return to an originary formless state where self-sovereignty is traded for a oneness with the processes of nature that elides the difference between self and other. "Kubla Khan" thus effectively revolves around a scene of ecstasy: the first half of the poem builds to it, and the latter half desires to get back to it. But this ecstasy is two-fold: the poem has opiated origins, but the ecstasy it figures is sexual.

The poem begins by announcing that Kubla has decreed the erection of a "pleasure dome" where "Alph," the "sacred river" runs "through caverns measureless to man" (2-4). These caverns, though, lie beneath the "deep romantic chasm" noted in the second stanza (12). The sexual pun here makes it unsurprising that this is the site of ecstasy in the poem, which depicts an orgasm in and of the natural world in the middle of its second stanza:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail[.] (17-22)

After this moment of natural world ejaculation, the river “reache[s] the caverns measureless to man” (27)—the site of the pleasure dome—and sinks “in tumult to a lifeless ocean” (28). The word “lifeless” stands out in stark contrast against the river’s apparent powers of fertility and creation (i.e., the promotion of life). This “lifelessness” thus seems to speak to a state of non-self-awareness, an indivisibility of subject and object that is recovered during ecstasy (i.e., the “little death”). In contrast to the river’s “mazy motion” (25), the ocean is still and undefined. Unlike the river, the ocean does not exist in singularity; it is the multitude of many rivers meeting and becoming indistinct from each other, that is, becoming one. This image bespeaks an originary formlessness at the root of existence to which the river symbolizes a return. Yet this effect is also apparent on land. The pleasure dome encases “forests ancient as the hills” (10), which antedate humans’ presence on the natural landscape, an effect reinforced in the river’s name, “Alph,” suggesting the beginning or origin—alpha—of all things. The timelessness of the forest, then, evinces a state of nature in which no “being” exists apart from nature’s own processes. We see that recovering this originary formlessness, in which one’s “being” is a manifestation of nature, is precisely the pleasure that is offered under the pleasure dome, though the recovery comes through ecstatic modes in that the moment of orgasm precedes the return to this state.

The first two stanzas of “Kubla Khan” exemplify what Zen Philosopher Kitaro Nishida refers to as a “direct” or “pure experience,” which I detailed in Chapter 1. That is, it is an experience in which the *experiencer* and the *experienced* (subject and object) cannot be perceived as being apart from each other; self-awareness does not arise, and there is only experience. However, in the penultimate line of the second stanza, the pure

experience seems to break. At this point in the poem, the natural-world orgasm and the ecstasy it connotes have ended. For the first time, we meet Kubla in the present. While Kubla is mentioned at the outset of the poem, this first instance seems to be a matter of historical record (“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree” [1-2]), merely explaining that the pleasure dome does indeed exist because of the actions of Kubla Khan. That Kubla is mentioned again, following the experience of ecstasy in which time and “being” return to their originary formlessness, seemingly denotes a return to awareness of subject and object existing dualistically in time. Important in all of this, though, is that Kubla is not the speaker of the poem. In the final stanza appears an “I” who speaks of a lost vision that he seeks to restore. While this “I” does not seem to refer to the same vision as that of the first two stanzas, he does seem to be aware of that vision, as he desires to build the pleasure dome for himself:

I would build that dome in air,
 That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
 And all who heard should see them there,
 And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
 His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
 Weave a circle round him thrice,
 And close your eyes with holy dread
 For he on honey-dew hath fed,
 And drunk the milk of Paradise. (46-54)

We notice here that the speaker switches his perspective from a first-person self-relation to a third-person understanding of the self from the point of view of the other: the self-assured “I” is traded for the much more generic “his.” By re-enacting the ecstasy of Kubla, the speaker loses his sense of self and in so doing enters some kind of mystical trance state. This blurring of subjectivity seems to be the reason why the speaker has knowledge of Kubla without actually being him. That is, these sorts of ecstatic visionary

experiences impose a “death” on the subject’s self. The speaking subject of the poem emerges late because in the early part of the poem he does not perceive a difference between him, Kubla, the river, and the natural landscape.¹¹⁰

Nishida helps to clarify this perspective by explaining that consciousness is the activity that provides unity to one’s subjective experience. That is, the concept of self takes form from the ability of consciousness to create a temporal linkage. But he maintains that this unity of consciousness need not be a subjective experience only. Nishida posits instead that consciousness is not self-possessed. The unity it offers to one’s subjective experience of one’s self can also be applied to the other, and they become one:

That consciousness must be someone’s consciousness simply means that consciousness must have a unity. The idea that there must be a possessor of consciousness above and beyond this unity is an arbitrary assumption. The activity of this unity—apperception—is a matter of similar ideas and feelings constituting a central hub and as such unifying consciousness. From the standpoint of pure experience, this unity of consciousness never entails absolute distinctions between itself and other such unities of consciousness. If we acknowledge that my consciousnesses of yesterday and today are independent and at the same time one consciousness in that they both belong to the same system, then we can recognize the same relationship between one’s own consciousness and that of others. (44)

For Nishida, as for the speaker in Coleridge’s poem, there is “something universal” at “the base of . . . consciousness” (62). The unity that Nishida describes is not just a unification of human subjects but also a unification with nature, as “[o]ur subjective unity

¹¹⁰ Vallins argues similarly that “China in ‘Kubla Khan’ . . . [is used] namely to represent extreme mental states or qualities without incurring a realistic comparison with the familiar experiences or psychological concepts of British or (northern) European cultures, and thus to enable his readers to envisage forms of consciousness exceeding familiar boundaries without necessarily seeming to represent a state of insanity” (“Immanence” 125). He suggests that “the mythologized China [Coleridge] evokes may perhaps have served more readily as the setting for a transcendence of dualism precisely because it was so much less known to Europeans than either the Middle East or India” (“Immanence” 124).

and the objective unifying power of nature are originally identical” (72): when viewed objectively we see “the unifying power of nature,” but when viewed subjectively, we see “the unity of the self’s knowledge, feeling, and volition” (72). Nishida thus attests to an equality between the activity of one’s mind and that of nature. Although subjectivity and nature are more readily perceived as two discrete self-functioning systems, the “movement” that impels the subject’s mind is the same movement that we can much more readily identify as the mutability of nature. We see, then, that subjectivity and nature are linked processes. Despite differing appearances, they are both bound to the same unity by virtue of their emptiness. Having no self-nature, subjectivity and nature act as “vessels” used to play out a cosmic process that includes phenomena.

In light of this, we see that the ecstasy sought in the pleasure dome is akin to the experience of emptiness. Coleridge revels in this state, but he also treats it with caution.¹¹¹ As we see in the verses quoted above, Coleridge thinks of self-dissolution as a kind of magic experience that must be sealed with a ritual to ward off the potential danger it exposes (“Beware! Beware!” [49]). There is a compulsion to repeat this experience. Indeed, the speaker indicates that he is already repeating the experience, but such experiences leave the subject in a state of self-alienation in which the limitations of self are seen as a force that limits one’s capacity to experience one’s true “being.” After having gained an awareness of existing as everything, one becomes aware of one’s self-emptiness, finding it as destructive as it is seductive.¹¹² I noted above that the “deep

¹¹¹ Andrew Warren notes that “‘Kubla Khan’ nervously shuttles between depicting the creation of a unified order and the worry that the order is illusory, fleeting” (“Coleridge” 113).

¹¹² John Beer has also explored this alteration of subjectivity in the poem but reads it along somewhat different lines, arguing that “Kubla Khan” evinces Coleridge’s mind fluctuating between his “primary” and

romantic chasm” was the site of ecstasy in the poem. This chasm is described as being both “holy and enchanted,” but it is also a “savage place” (14), “haunted / By woman wailing for her demon-lover!” (15-16). Here, Coleridge again links ecstasy with unity by using the singular term “woman” to refer to the entire female gender; the expected article (“a”) is absent, making the term both singular and universal.

The use of Gothic images alongside sexual ones suggests that the desired ecstasy carries with it certain dangers.¹¹³ While the actual experience of ecstasy is equated with one’s true nature, it is always transient and in decline. “Ancestral voices prophesying war” (30) are heard when the experience of oneness begins to diminish, as it is also at this point that awareness of Kubla again returns and then gives way to the speaker’s own self-identity, indicating a complete return from self-lessness to self. In this self-less state the speaker is united with the ancestry of humanity, nature, and the cosmos, but this sort of awareness is always “under attack” by virtue of its unsustainability. The desire to repeat the experience *ad infinitum* suggests that maintaining this self-less state interminably is the speaker’s true aim, an effect that is modelled in Coleridge’s opium habit. However, this effect is also emblematic of an attachment to emptiness and is therefore symptomatic of Zen sickness, which at its root is a way of subtly ascribing a self-nature to emptiness that it does not contain: even emptiness is empty, as I noted in Chapter 1.

“secondary” consciousness, which Beer supersedes with the concepts of “commanding genius” and “absolute genius”; he sees the former as tending towards a state of self-dissolution characterized by “energies,” whereas the latter is characterized by self-composure and is thus able to seize control over such an experience (115-17). Beer thus reads the emergence of the “I” in the final stanza as a mode of control. Rather than control, I read this as a loss of ontological stability that the speaker seeks to resolve by returning to emptiness. See also John Livingston Lowes who argues that “Kubla Khan” dramatizes the “blending of the conscious and unconscious in the supreme creative process” (96).

¹¹³ Although her argument is not focused on the poem’s ecstatic themes, Deirdre Coleman argues along similar lines that this section of the poem bespeaks an “alien spirituality” (52) that stems from Coleridge’s attraction to and repulsion from Indian philosophy (39-54).

In Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and De Quincey's *Confessions*, as we will see, the experience of emptiness is treated as a particularly special one due the insights it provides into the nature of one's "being." Yet it is treated as a state that is at odds with ordinary experience, even if it is ordinary everyday experience that incites the experience of emptiness.¹¹⁴ As the Zen philosopher Keiji Nishitani reminds us,

[t]he emptiness of *sūnyatā* is not an emptiness represented as some "thing" outside of being and other than being. It is not simply an "empty nothing," but rather an *absolute emptiness*, emptied even of these representations of emptiness. And for that reason, it is at bottom one with being, even as being is at bottom one with emptiness. At the elemental source where being appears as one with emptiness, at the home-ground of being, emptiness appears as one with being. We speak of an elemental source, but this does not mean some point recessed behind the things that we see with our eyes and think of with our minds. The source is as close as can be, "within hand," of the things themselves. And the things as they are in themselves, where they are on their own home-ground, just what they are an in their *suchness*, are one with emptiness. For the field of emptiness stands opened at the very point that things emerge into being. (123)

All phenomena are empty and do not exist outside of their emptiness. Therefore, emptiness is not something that needs to be found or controlled. This transience at the root of phenomena, however, leads us to a position in which the "being" of things vacillates in and out of existence, and this is especially true of one's experience of self. Coleridge and De Quincey's texts both evince a self that dissolves into emptiness at certain moments, effectively embracing its own death.

Buddhist philosophy, as I noted in Chapter 1, does not think of life and death as separate. Life is instead figured as a dynamic process of birth-and-death. Both exist

¹¹⁴ In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge sought to write poetry in everyday language that addressed the experiences of ordinary people. Later, in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge explains that his poetry was to make the supernatural akin to the everyday, while Wordsworth's was to make the everyday akin to the supernatural (2:6-7).

within each other rather than as linear stages to be experienced and moved on from, or as Nishitani puts it,

[w]e are born in time and we die in time. “To be in time” means to be constantly within the cycle of birth-and-death. On our own home-ground, we are not simply drifting about in birth-and-death: we live and die birth-and-death. We do not simply line *in* time: we *live time*. From one moment in time to the next we are making time to be time, we are bringing time to the “fullness of time.” (159)

Coleridge and De Quincey’s writing evinces a growing awareness of this fact.

Nevertheless, they do not realize that emptiness itself is the “home-ground” of “being,” to use Nishitani’s phrasing above, and as a result they do not come to understand the inseparability of birth-and-death, though they are exposed to a state that Nishitani refers to as “a nihility that . . . stretches out like an abyss over which the existence of the self is held in suspense” (96). They seek to remain in such self-suspense so they need not deal with the ontological rupture that it connotes, ultimately privileging emptiness over form as though emptiness could be manipulated into a new kind of self.

3.3 Emptiness and Zen Sickness in *Confessions*

In my previous section, I addressed the “savage” element that Coleridge detects in the experience of self-dissolution. De Quincey’s *Confessions* explores this effect in greater depth as the “pains of opium.” De Quincey realizes his self-emptiness but struggles to account for his “being” outside of his memories and the self-narrative he has assembled out of them. However, *Confessions* testifies to the fact that such self-narratives do not guarantee ontological stability. The kind of ontological “probing” that De Quincey engages in through his writing reveals that his subjectivity gets blurred with those of “others” who are not truly other. Rather than occupying unique quantifiable spaces in De

Quincey's mind, these "others" bleed into each other. They become (re-)representations of figures from De Quincey's life, with each "other" capable of standing in for one another. Because they exist only as De Quincey's phenomenal representations of them, they have no inherent self-nature and thus do not exist apart from De Quincey himself. By looking back at his life, De Quincey becomes less and less sure of who or what he truly is, as time is no longer able to offer him ontological support to the structure of one's self: the past is constantly impinging on the present and is to be met again in the future.¹¹⁵ Because De Quincey is unable to come to terms with his own self-emptiness, he remains caught in the cycle of birth-and-death, as identified by Buddhism. For him, "being" and *beings* are always arising and falling in and out of existence, positing a self-nature but then retracting it, disappearing, and becoming something or someone else.

Nishitani explains the connection between birth-and-death and the cycle of suffering Buddhism refers to as *samsara* (168), which "signifies the being-in-the-world that is apparent in all sentient beings" and is grasped "in a keenly existential fashion" (169): "Buddhist teaching speaks . . . of the 'sea of samsāric suffering,' likening the world, with all its six ways and its unending turnover from one form of existence to another, to an unfathomable sea and identifying the essential Form of beings made to roll with its restless motion as suffering" (169). However, the "essential Form" he refers to is nothing other than the inherent "nihility and 'nullification'" of emptiness (169). One's

¹¹⁵ Clej makes a similar argument: "[f]or De Quincey what 'returns' is not history, but its absence—the blank treachery of hollowness—that infests his writings, in which the distorted echoes of his precursors mingle and reverberate without adding up to a valid history. Memory for him is no longer a meaningful 'spot of time,' as it was for Wordsworth, but an 'abyss,' an empty chain of signifiers because 'in the lowest deep there still yawns a lower deep' [CW, 12:158]" (254). I prefer my own phrasing because it includes this logic, but also positions it in Zen terms, which adds greater clarity to De Quincey's struggle to understand the self-emptiness he exposes.

true Form is not form at all: form is emptiness, and emptiness is form, to recall the Heart Sutra's central tenet from Chapter 1. There is no existence outside of emptiness, so this is not really a "nullification" but a realization of one's true nature as a self-less "being." To truly realize this self-lessness at the root of all "being" is to understand the path to nirvana, as, in the "*realization of nihility, man takes possession of birth-and-death in its suchness, that is, he takes possession of the original Form of his own Dasein and the original Form of things in the world such as they are. What we have here, in short, is an existential encounter with nihility*" (174; Nishitani's italics). Through a deep existential comprehension of emptiness, one realizes that birth-and-death is the way of all things and begins to see existence as following the same rhythm. The "I" is no longer alive, but neither is it dead. "I" becomes merely a signifier that refers to one part of a greater whole, which cannot be reduced to an ontologically singular concept. Nirvana ceases to be far-away and inchoate and is instead realized to be fundamentally present at all times. To express this point, Nishitani quotes Dogen's *Shobogenzo Shoji*: "Just understand that birth-and-death itself is nirvāna . . . Only then can you be free of birth-and-death" (178).

As noted in the epigraph to this chapter, "nirvana" literally means "extinction" or "cessation." Specifically, nirvana refers to these things in relation to the self. While this is a liberating act, it is not always pleasant. "The self," as a linguistic construction used to denote an existential reference point (an "I"), is capable of returning, though it takes on something of a phantom presence that haunts the subject and must once again be dissolved into emptiness. When this occurs, the subject is left to deal with all kinds of potential discomfort. The self essentially acts as a filter that helps to keep difficult feelings at bay by pushing them out, externalizing them and finding their origin in

something or someone else. Zen practice is focused on ceasing this habit and learning to sit with these feelings, learning to accept things as they are. The self is empty, but so too is the feeling—neither has any lasting presence. To understand this is to understand the reality of life as birth-and-death. Things constantly go into and out of “being”; they are born several times and they die several times, but having no inherent self-nature, they do not truly exist apart from one’s experience of them. Thus, in Buddhism birth is a *no-birth* and death is a *no-death*.

Nishitani makes a crucial point about this practice by signalling the importance of understanding what emptiness truly is, as he implies that only going half way is not enough. Realizing emptiness depends on the experience of nihility, but nihility should not be mistaken for one’s true mode of “being.” The difference between emptiness and mere nihility is that the latter does not in and of itself denote an overcoming of the self. It is a realization of the self’s utter lack of inherent existence, but it is not in and of itself a realization of one’s true mode of “being” as part of nature’s rhythms, flux, and processes, though it is a necessary first step:

If we stray but one step from the path of Existenz¹¹⁶ [*qua* emptiness], nihility can only seem an utterly meaningless notion, devoid of reality. In fact, a great many philosophers, from a great many points of view, have come to that very conclusion. It is like a radio that has not been tuned properly and picks up only senseless static that totally blocks out the real sound of the broadcast. For only in the existential confrontation with nihility do we see the earnest life-or-death struggle for the transcendence of birth-and-death, escape from the unending causality of karma, and attainment of the “yonder shore” beyond the fathomless sea of suffering. It is, in other words, the struggle for *nirvāna*. (174)

¹¹⁶ Jan Van Bragt glosses Nishitani’s use of this term as follows: “The substantive of ‘existential,’ it is clear that Nishitani restricts the use of this notion to man, whereas Dasein can apply equally well to man and to things” (296).

Nishitani figures “Existenz” as the existential reality of emptiness, and one must fully embrace emptiness in order to find the liberation it offers. Otherwise, it appears only as a state of nihility that strips away ontological security, but leaves a self-oriented subject who struggles to explain self-existence, exposing a void but with no means of bridging the gap now opened.

As Clej argues by suggesting how De Quincey’s writing exemplifies a modern subjectivity, this exposed nihility has been the basis of how we understand a Romantic and post-Romantic ontology, which explores self-nature as transitory and fragmentary and subjectivity as lacking substance. De Quincey’s *Confessions* is a case in point, as it is an acute representation of this struggle. This text suggests an inability to distinguish between nihility and emptiness, which is what brings it in line with Zen sickness. As I addressed in Chapter 1, Sheng Yen explains that a form of Zen sickness can result in a student who has a no-self experience but is unprepared for it, that is, a student who has not fully accepted the ontology emptiness, but who has nonetheless had an experience of emptiness, thus destabilizing the self-oriented ontological assumptions the student has previously used to define self-sovereignty.¹¹⁷ In many ways, De Quincey *is* this kind of student.

¹¹⁷ Sheng Yen, elsewhere, makes a distinction between the knowledge and experience of emptiness, noting that “[c]onceptual emptiness is the intellectual understanding that all phenomena are transient and therefore lack fixed and enduring reality. This is not experiential emptiness, which can only come directly from practice” (*Method* 11). He elaborates that “[t]o conceptually understand selflessness, one must first understand impermanence. Next, one must understand emptiness, and then one is in a position to understand to understand selflessness. This is the natural sequence. When you look deeply into phenomena, you will see that everything is transient, ever-changing. This will lead to an understanding that all things are fundamentally without fixed identity. Having a foothold on this knowledge of impermanence, you can then understand emptiness as the true nature of things. If all things are constantly in flux, what can truly exist as a separate entity? Realizing this to yourself [sic], you can also understand that you are subject to the same conditions as all phenomena. What is this ‘I’ that is experiencing all of this constant change?” (30-1). Moreover, Brad Warner adds clarity on why a slow stable practice is essential for coming to terms

For De Quincey the ontology of the self is never stable. As I have suggested, self and other get contained within his consciousness, where they only exist as representations that do not exist as either self *or* other apart from De Quincey narrating them as such. This effect is most obviously apparent in De Quincey's reactions to losing Anne, the prostitute who saves him from starvation on the London streets in *Confessions*. Anne, however, is just a placeholder for the ontological emptiness that De Quincey becomes aware of in his own "being." Because De Quincey is called away from London, he leaves Anne, and the two are never reunited, a loss that comes to be equated with the loss of De Quincey's sister Elizabeth during childhood, which he narrates in *Suspiria*.¹¹⁸ Anne is a recurrent figure in the haunting dreams associated with the "pains of opium." She becomes associated with De Quincey himself, as the trauma of losing her (and the sister doubles) becomes part of his self-narrative, the things he has borne witness to yet cannot understand, what De Quincey calls an "*involute*." Anne becomes a figure akin to the Malay as a figure of otherness who shows up on De Quincey's doorstep. The Malay, who also makes recurrent appearances in De Quincey's opium dreams, along with Anne, comes to symbolize the dissolving boundaries between self and other.¹¹⁹ These are

with emptiness, as it can push someone to a "nervous breakdown" (*Karma* 31): "There's a truckload of extremely good reasons why you don't want to rip to open the doors of your subconscious too quickly. If you're not fully prepared for what's behind those doors, they're better left shut until such time that you are" (*Karma* 31).

¹¹⁸ Barrell argues that De Quincey has a tendency to see in young women the image of his sister, but notes that this effect is particularly strong with Anne, whom he refers to as his sister in several instances (40-5).

¹¹⁹ Joel Faflak argues similarly that "[d]reams collapse boundaries between inside and outside, subject and world, reason and unreason, and make expansion compulsively repetitious, degenerative, consumptive" (Introduction 37). He notes, too, that "[d]reams signify a free-associating imagination that . . . endlessly reproduces itself through the 'lost features' of Anne's face or of any of the '*myriad*' associations of actions of his unconscious through which his identity becomes a series of characters in search of an author" (Introduction 36; Faflak's italics).

ostensibly human subjects different and set apart from De Quincey, yet De Quincey's opium use and the emptiness of self it simulates leads to a mode of perception in which these "other" "beings" are entirely subsumed by De Quincey's experience of his self. Rather than the chronological narrative from which self is inferred, he becomes aware of the timelessness at the root of his "being," and becomes terrified by this ontological rupture, which awakens in him the paranoid threat of the other identified by Bhabha.

De Quincey ends *Confessions* by recounting three of his opium dreams, all of which cast light on his relationship to the self-emptiness and the agony he faces at the prospect that he might not exist as a self-sovereign entity. In losing his self, he becomes responsible for the other, though he can no longer differentiate between these concepts. The chronology on which he has based his self-understanding gets flipped on its head: time, space, and ontology begin to blur. This effect is especially acute in the first two dreams he explores. In the first, dated May 1818, De Quincey refers to the Malay as a "fearful enemy" who has been invading his consciousness "for months" and is blamed for "transport[ing]" De Quincey to "Asiatic scenes" (124). De Quincey abhors the thought of being forced to live in China or the Orient more generally considered; he is equally disturbed by thoughts of Africa and Indostan (124). In this regard, De Quincey is obviously influenced by the paranoia explored by both Leask and Barrell. However, I argue that the terror De Quincey articulates here is not just a fear of being infected by the Oriental other. It is also a reaction to the groundlessness of his own "being," which the Orient comes to symbolize, due to the originary formlessness of humankind it connotes by being the birthplace of the species: "Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, it would alone have a dim and

reverential feeling connected with it” (124). De Quincey attests to the sublimity of the Orient. As much as he is afraid of it, he also finds in it a vague, barely perceivable reverence due to his identification with it as the place from which his Western identity originally emerged. That is, within the Western Christian philosophical stance he occupies, there remains that position’s linkage with the East where “Western” Christianity began.

A similar conflation of East and West takes place in the second opium dream from June 1819: the “scene [is] an oriental one,” but in this Orient it is “also . . . Easter Sunday,” a backdrop De Quincey speculates his psyche may have assembled from “from some picture of Jerusalem” he had seen as a child (127). In this psychic Orient, De Quincey finds Anne; he addresses her, but she answers “not a word” (128). The dream thus depicts a vision in which East and West and self and other (as represented by Anne) are reunited in De Quincey’s consciousness. This psychic reunion disrupts De Quincey’s linear understanding of time and space. It is seventeen years since the two last met, though Anne has not aged. The dream begins against an Oriental backdrop only to transform into the London streets the two previously walked together (128): in the Orient, De Quincey cannot help but find an image of the West. The two zones inevitably blur, revealing that the distinctions De Quincey makes between his self and the selves of others are only conceptual understandings. Anne, therefore, occupies the same “space” as the Malay.¹²⁰ They are both other to De Quincey, and, as such, otherness ceases to be a strictly Oriental trait. Anne’s Westernness becomes equally other, as she is outside of De

¹²⁰ Barrell argues that “De Quincey was all the figures from the Orient that appear in his writings. He *was* the Chinese; he *was* the Malay that haunted his dreams” (19; Barrell’s italics). I would add that the way De Quincey responds to otherness allows us to read Anne’s presence in the same fashion: she is not an Oriental other, but she is nonetheless other to De Quincey himself.

Quincey's own selfhood. Yet "Anne," as he knows her now, only exists within his mind, where she is obviously not the real Anne. "Her" presence haunts De Quincey because it attests to the inseparability between selfness and otherness.

Anne's silence at De Quincey's greeting re-enacts the earlier meeting between him and the Malay at De Quincey's cottage, in which De Quincey and the Malay, speaking different languages, cannot communicate, leaving opium to facilitate a relationship between them.¹²¹ The Malay swallows all at once the entire quantity of opium handed to him by De Quincey: "enough to kill three dragoons and their horses" (108). This exchange creates a both literal and metaphoric meeting of self and other, as opium acts as the conduit through which self is dissolved and becomes aware of its own inherent otherness in that it exposes one's true state of "being" as an empty and undefined "space," much like the Orient it symbolically represents.¹²² It is significant that after this meeting, De Quincey's mind is never again free from the other. First, he worries that the Malay will die from having taken too much opium, but De Quincey never hears from him again (108). Then, when *De Quincey* takes too much opium, the Malay, or the Orient he represents, seldom fails to return as a phantom presence haunting De Quincey's dreams, which forces him to stare down the abyss of his perceived self-nature: emptiness will always take a form, but all forms are empty of inherent self-nature. This is what makes opium so risky. The possibility of addiction is bad enough, but perhaps even more

¹²¹ Charles J. Rzepka makes a similar argument that "opium is a text and the text [*Confessions*] is an opiate" (8), and he suggests that both work to facilitate a relationship through "assimilation or ingestion" rather than communication or interpretation, rending identity "historically inaccessibl[e]" (9).

¹²² In making this argument, I am invoking a similar logic to Said's argument about the West's habit of homogenizing the Orient. However, in opposition to Said, I read this as an effect of these authors' using the Orient as a symbol of the originary formlessness of human civilization. Being the cradle of civilization, the Orient, for these authors, represents a lack of division. That is, it echoes a time before self-other divisions could be made along geopolitical lines.

pressing is that it reveals to De Quincey the groundlessness of his “being,” which leaves him with no practice by which he can come to understand what is exposed to him, as writing only takes him so far. De Quincey’s only means of salvation, then, is to repeat the opium experience, which has led him from the “pleasures” he began with to the “pains” he now feels while attempting to withdraw from the drug.¹²³

In the May 1818 opium dream in which he is haunted by the Malay, De Quincey traverses an amorphous Oriental landscape. China, Indostan, and Egypt are all treated as the same territory, while the English opium-eater thinks of his self as somehow different. De Quincey’s self-assured difference comes under attack, however, as he is threatened by elements of his own psyche, and it is the difference he perceives between his self and the others, symbolically represented in his own mind, that keeps him from acknowledging the equality that actually exists between him and all other “beings.” He is “stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos” (125). The animals and the landscape, or rather dreamscape, come to suggest that the thing that is truly other in this space is De Quincey’s own self-perception, as the groundlessness of the dream will not accommodate such rigid ontological borders. As a result, his self-sovereignty is drawn into question: “I was the idol; I was the priest,” he writes, “I was worshiped; I was sacrificed” (125). As the idol, De Quincey appears separate (and superior) to the others watching him. As the priest, he appears to be one of them. He thus enacts a worship of the otherness his self-oriented ontology absorbs from this priestly

¹²³ Readers interested in modern takes on the connection between drug use and Buddhism may wish to consult Allan Badiner and Alex Grey’s edited collection *Zig Zag Zen: Buddhism and Psychedelics* (2002). In some ways, these essays help to draw out the kinds of experiences that De Quincey and Coleridge have, but because opium is not a psychedelic drug, I have not incorporated this text into the main argument of this chapter.

perspective. The “I” he refers to is also sacrificed because it becomes inseparable from the otherness that infects De Quincey.

Here, what is particularly threatening for De Quincey is that the more permeable borders of his dream consciousness seem to reveal that even his “being” is not really his own, causing him to take flight:

I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia: Vishnu hated me: Seeva laid wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphynxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles; and laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud. (125)

On the surface, De Quincey’s flight is one from Oriental otherness. But taken at a deeper level, he is fleeing from the self-less ontology that he comes to associate with the Orient. His dream evinces a metaphoric death in which he merges with the landscape and architecture of the dream Orient. He is enshrouded by a coffin, making his self seem cryptic and ghost-like; it even takes on the characteristics of disease—ultimately a disease that stems from his “being” being swallowed by the eternal, which De Quincey figures as a pyramid cordoned off from the rest of time. This crypt, after all, is meant to preserve the self, but it does so as a vestigial artifact. De Quincey resides here for a millennium in a state of life-in-death, but this millennium does not follow the usual rules of time, as it is contained within the temporality of De Quincey’s dream state. Time and eternity begin to exist within each other. Rather than being linked with a place outside of time where one can recoup the self, “eternity and infinity” co-exist in a way that drives De Quincey “into an oppression of madness” (125). “Sooner or later,” he writes, “came a reflux of feeling that swallowed up the astonishment [at the Oriental scene], and left me,

not so much in terror, as in hatred and abomination of what I saw” (125). We see, then, that he is perturbed by more than just an Oriental infection or invasion. His panic, paranoia, and eventual hatred are also motivated by the loss of his self to the otherness he himself contains within his own “being.”

De Quincey’s hatred of this realization is curious, given that it is exactly this boundary dissolution he desires in the “Pleasures of Opium.” I noted above that De Quincey loved to experience music after taking opium because under its influence he was unable to discern a difference between himself and the music, what De Quincey calls his “Opera pleasures” (97). While listening to an Italian opera, De Quincey likens himself to Isaac Weld Jr. listening with “pleasure” to “the sweet laughter of Indian [i.e., indigenous] Women” while travelling “in Canada” (97).¹²⁴ Here, De Quincey is able to experience otherness, but he is also able to maintain his Western self-identification by virtue of the experience of otherness being filtered through Italian, which, although he is a “poor Italian scholar,” is still relatively familiar to him; he reads it a “little” but does not speak it (97). We see this self-other conflation intensified in De Quincey’s other alternate Saturday night pleasure, his “sympathising with” the “pleasures of the poor” (97). On Saturday night, he claims, “the most hostile sects unite, and acknowledge a common link of brotherhood” (97-98), and De Quincey likes to celebrate with them by “joining their parties” and offering “opinion[s]” (98). He seeks to merge with them and experience the economic ups and downs of their turbulent lives as though they were his own, but admits that he relies on opium to buffer the pain he feels when the poor suffer financial hardships (98). Just as in *The English Mail-Coach*, De Quincey finds this ontological

¹²⁴ Faflak notes that Weld compared the language of Native Americans to Italian, finding it just as elegant (97 n.1).

mixing disturbing, due to the “incompatible natures” of those involved. That opium facilitates this mixing of self and other links it to De Quincey’s Zen sickness.

De Quincey likes to retreat from his self into the lives of others, yet thinks of himself as an explorer—“the first discoverer of . . . *terrae incognitae*” (98), regions he “doubt[s]” have “been laid down in the modern charts of London” (99)—as if at once touched and untouched by his experience of the encounter. But “[f]or all of this” he pays “a heavy price in distant years,” as “the human face” returns to “tyranniz[e] over [his] dreams” and to incite “perplexities moral or intellectual, that b[ring] confusion to the reason, or anguish and remorse to the conscience” (99). In the early experiments with the self-dissolving powers of opium, De Quincey takes great pleasure because he is able simultaneously to identify with the other and with his self. He sees otherness, but only in those he is already familiar with, as they live within the same geopolitical domain. Thus, otherness is filtered through self-identification: the vague familiarity of Italian opera, or differing but relatable lives of the poor. We see also that De Quincey begins to crave this otherness, as he begins to imagine that this is not really London that he is traversing, but a land unknown. The Orient that comes to haunt De Quincey in later years is therefore prefigured in his own home of England.

In his earlier years, De Quincey takes the ontological ungrounding he experiences rather lightly, and by the time he realizes the emptiness of his “being,” it is too late to recover his footing. It is not just the “English other” his “being” becomes associated with, but also the Oriental other. Losing his grasp on who and what he is, De Quincey tries to create a new self-narrative that can account for his self-emptiness. De Quincey himself admits that he can only write by indulging in tangential stories that occur to him during

his writing process: “my way of writing is . . . to think aloud, and follow my own humours, than much to consider who is listening to me; and, if I stop to consider what is proper to be said to this or that person, I shall soon come to doubt whether any part is proper” (113). By attempting to explain his loss of self, he seeks also to recover it. Yet his inability to do so brings his experiences of emptiness and encounters with self-otherness in line with Zen sickness, as De Quincey is unable to infer that the nihility of self he fears is bound up in the ecstasy he desires. His compulsion to abide in emptiness means that he is unable to experience his daily life as part and parcel with the ecstasy of emptiness that opium, for a time, provides. He must addictively return to the opiated state as a means of recouping himself from his lack of self. And while Coleridge is not as acutely affected by the negative effects of self-dissolution, his ontology, too, is bound up in the same struggle between self-definition and self-effacement. For Coleridge and De Quincey, the Orient facilitates this process, though it is an Orient that they simultaneously read and mis-read, but which for this project makes an implicit connection to Buddhism that helps both authors to at once confront and resist self-emptiness.

Chapter 4

Eternal Intoxication: The Pain of Self-Otherness and the Nepenthe of Love in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

We are all finite, we cannot live out of time and space; inasmuch as we are earth-created, there is no way to grasp the infinite, how can we deliver ourselves from the limitations of existence? . . . Salvation must be sought in the finite itself, there is nothing infinite apart from finite things; if you seek something transcendental, that will cut you off from this world of relativity, which is the same thing as the annihilation of yourself. You do not want salvation at the cost of your own existence . . . No matter how you struggle, Nirvana is to be sought in the midst of Samsara (birth-and-death).

~ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*

In my previous chapter, I argued that Coleridge and De Quincey incline towards experiencing the emptiness of the self as an intoxicating state of ecstatic pleasure, but that they are ultimately unprepared for the ontological effects of that experience, which dissociates self from “being.” I suggested that these authors use opium as a means to attach to emptiness, positing that this was symptomatic of Zen sickness. In this chapter, I explore the ways Shelley approaches something very close to a Buddhist ontology in his lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1821), but remains trapped within the pervading Western Christian paradigm of an eternal self/soul. I argue that this prevents him from coming to terms with emptiness and causes him to subtly reassert in the drama’s third and fourth acts the duality that the first two acts seek to overcome. Shelley wants to transcend the gap between self and other, but such transcendence, he finds, opens up his “being” to the pain of the other. This presents a particular philosophical problem for Shelley, as his drama aligns pain with evil. Shelley sees these things as perversions of the goodness of humankind’s true nature and tries to extricate “being” from such malignancy. Like

Coleridge and De Quincey, Shelley sees eternity as the remedy for the pain of “being.” But for Shelley, access to the eternal is readily available through ordinary consciousness, rendering opium unnecessary. Yet this is not a sober experience, as Shelley finds that glimpsing the eternal produces its own kind of intoxication, which disrupts one’s conventional understanding of time as forward-moving and linear.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley explores the relationship between ontology and time, seeking to understand how eternity’s timelessness relates to one’s finite existence in time, which is ironically what alerts him to the possibility of timelessness. Shelley’s sustained attention to these issues evinces his struggle to develop an ontology of selflessness, which makes *Prometheus* his most significant intersection with Buddhist philosophy. In fact, Shelley’s philosophical similarity to Buddhism is the greatest of any of the authors considered thus far, and he is second only to John Keats (who I will address in my final chapter). However, Shelley’s struggle to develop an ontology of selflessness shows us that he has commitments to ontologies of both self and selflessness, and this dual ontology frustrates his attempts to theorize fully the relation between the finite, the infinite, and eternity. The poem understands eternity in two ways: it is both a timeless realm beyond ordinary finite existence *and* an infinite potential existing “beneath” finite reality. I argue that Shelley’s awareness of reality’s *infinite finitude* leads him to abstract “the infinite” to a locatable place that he seeks to occupy permanently—that is, eternity—where the problems caused by the infinite mutability of the finite world can be resolved once and for all (especially the logical contradiction of an infinite finitude; I will return to this issue in the next section). Shelley attempts to move beyond Christianity and, in so doing, realizes the basis of Buddhist philosophy (i.e., emptiness).

Yet his inability to accept fully the groundlessness of a self-less ontology causes him to pull back towards a Christian understanding of self/soul that coalesces in an eternity beyond time.

In the first two acts of the play, through his exploration of both the infinite and the finite, Shelley recognizes the logic of Buddhist philosophy outlined by Suzuki in this chapter's epigraph. But in Acts 3 and 4, he ultimately rejects this logic, seeking instead something that is more personally satisfying—even if it may not exist. Working to resolve the knots of his ontology, the fourth act is nothing short of Shelley's vision of an eternity that exists apart from time. However, the play's final lines undercut this newfound freedom from time, suggesting that only immortals have access to such ontological stasis and that humankind will have to make do in a world of time and mutability. Still, Shelley's desire to reach the kind of eternity seen in Christianity should not be taken lightly. Robert Browning famously posited that if Shelley had lived long enough, he would have eventually become a Christian.¹²⁵ While I take exception to Browning's assessment, it speaks directly to the "problem of self" that emerges in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the play, Shelley, decidedly non-Christian, has trouble sustaining his moral and ontological considerations independently of Christian philosophy, an effect that is reinforced through Prometheus's similarity to Christ in Act 1. At the same time, Shelley's depiction of Jupiter reflects his attitude that the Christian God is a corrupt and tyrannical authority figure who does more to hinder human potential than enhance it. As a result, Shelley's eternity is divorced from orthodox Christianity and

¹²⁵ Browning: "I shall say what I think, — had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians; his very instinct for helping the weaker side (if numbers make strength), his very 'hate of hate,' which at first mistranslated itself into delirious Queen Mab notes and the like, would have got clearer-sighted by exercise" (1009-10). See *Robert Browning: "The Poems"* 1:1001-13.

is split between Christian and non-Christian modes, at once desiring a final removal from the finite world and recognizing the impossibility of an eternity outside of time, which leads him close to a Buddhist position. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley thus walks the razor's edge between Buddhist and Christian philosophy, unable to align himself fully with either side.

Shelley's concept of "Love" is one of the poem's key thematic considerations. This concept is particularly important because Shelley sees it as the mode of authentic human relationships, and it reflects the poem's relation between Buddhism's emptiness and Christianity's "golden rule." For Shelley, Love allows one to transcend the boundary between self and other. When this happens, one is able to forgive past transgressions, making future transgressions impossible. *Prometheus* expands Shelley's ideas in his essay "On Love,"¹²⁶ which defines "Love" as "the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists" (504). That is, Love pertains to ontological union rather than simply emotional bonding:

We are born into the world, and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness . . . This propensity develops within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed: a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow or evil dare not overlap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. (504)

¹²⁶ When Shelley wrote "On Love" in the summer of 1818, he had already begun planning *Prometheus Unbound*, but would not fully complete the lyrical drama for another two years, due to difficulties with the material he was exploring. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat note that "[n]o other poem but *Queen Mab* cost Shelley more pains to compose or occupied him for so long" (202). As such, "On Love" offers a synoptic account of Shelley's philosophical considerations at the time of writing *Prometheus*.

Shelley's concept of Love, like Buddhism's concept of emptiness, negates self-nature and unites subject and object. Shelley cannot get away from the idea of a soul at the root of "being," but he nevertheless finds that a *single* soul does not capture one's ontological reality. He suggests that there is a soul and a soul *within* the soul, allowing him to express his commitments to both self and self-lessness.

For Shelley, the soul within the soul refers to his capacity to see the other within the self, effectively eliding the gap between them: "Blending two beams of one eternity . . . How beyond refuge I am in thine. Ah me! / I am not thine: I am a part of thee" ("Epipsychidion" 48-52). His concept of soul counterbalances this self-dissolution, thus wedding self-emptiness to self-sovereign existence. This balancing act is central to his philosophy in *Prometheus Unbound*, which evinces Shelley's dual desires to have his "being" dissolved into the vast oneness of all things and to have this self-dissolution act as a mode of self-enhancement that excommunicates the parts of consciousness deemed unsavoury. Shelley seeks a union with all things *except* those he finds threatening, such as pain, suffering, and evil. In Act 1, Prometheus comes to identify these qualities within his consciousness, yet the rest of the play focuses on how they might be eliminated from future occurrences.

Prometheus thus highlights Shelley's impulse to see pain and evil as forces external to his self. However, in doing this, he ascribes to them a self-nature, setting himself at odds with Buddhist philosophy and returning to a Christian position of self/soul (i.e., of non-emptiness) in which good and evil form a dichotomy. Shelley understands the logic of emptiness, but does not accept it as an ontological "endpoint." He seeks instead something that is stable, lasting, and permanent to override the effects of

mutability and time. Shelley works with these themes in a progressive way. In Act 1, he effectively posits an ontological proposition, and each successive act explores and modifies that proposition. After exploring between Shelley's themes and Buddhist and Christian philosophy, I will demonstrate his progressive modification of these themes by working through the text chronologically.

4.1 Shelley's Incomplete Buddhism

The scholarship on *Prometheus Unbound*, more than any other work considered in this study, contains an unrealized dialogue with Buddhist philosophy, and in the case of Carl Grabo, a *realized* one. Grabo argues that Shelley was influenced by Indian philosophy (157) and suggests, as I do, that Shelley's conceptualization of the infinite bears a striking similarity to the Buddhist concept of nirvana in that it reflects "the loss of personality in the One" (115).¹²⁷ Earl Wasserman does not acknowledge a Buddhist connection, but makes a similar argument that Shelley "inclined toward a belief that all individual minds are subsumed in a universal mind, and his natural impulse at all times seems to have been to dissolve individual identity in an all-encompassing unity" (24-25). He reminds us that in "On Life," Shelley explains that the words

I, you, they are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblages of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that I, the person who now write [sic] and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words *I, you, and they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement and totally devoid

¹²⁷ Generally speaking, I agree with Grabo; however, it should be noted that it is not clear how familiar Grabo is with Buddhist philosophy. In some instances, he seems to think of nirvana as a place; in others, he refers to it as a "Buddhist heaven" (124) and as "eternal bliss" (93). But as I have sought to show, this is a misunderstanding. See Chapter 3 p. 118.

of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. (508; Shelley's italics)

Shelley's articulation, here, suggests that he understands emptiness.¹²⁸ He explains that self-nature is a linguistic construction, but it has a practical application for communicating with others. Shelley indicates that in reality there is no such thing as an other, as everything exists together under the "one mind." He sees "forms" as linguistic or mental constructions that take shape relative to other things but actually have no inherent existence at the root of their "being" to keep them separate from each other. Shelley's awareness that form is empty presents him with a path to liberation that he hopes all of humankind will follow, as this global realization of emptiness would bring all of humanity into harmony with the One.

However, I noted in my Introduction that as much as Romantic subjectivity desires self-effacement, it clings to self-sovereignty. It desires to lose self-awareness in an intoxicating and ecstatic transcendence, but also to maintain a home-ground of ontological security independent of other things. This issue becomes Shelley's philosophical dilemma in *Prometheus*. As Wasserman argues, "Shelley was well aware of the trap toward which his philosophy was leading him. Thing and thought, external and internal, are one; time and space are unreal;¹²⁹ and self-consciousness and perception

¹²⁸ Khalip, too, uses these lines as evidence for his reading of Romantic "anonymity" (100), which, as I argued in Chapter 1, is akin to Buddhism's "emptiness." See p. 34.

¹²⁹ Wasserman contends that "Shelley . . . denies the reality of time, space, and motion," believing that "these supposed entities" are "only schemata abstracted from the forms in which our disparate sensations are arranged" out of the "continually changing relations of our perceptions with respect to the perceiving mind or to each other" (21-2). I disagree, however, that Shelley philosophically overcomes the concept of time—even if it is his aim. Shelley, I argue, remains preoccupied with time because in as much as he understands it to be illusory, singular self-existence cannot be constituted outside of chronological considerations. The challenge he faces in *Prometheus* is how to understand self-sovereignty despite his treatment of time as non-linear. Wasserman reads this as time's lack of motion, yet, as I will argue in my

are subsumed under an eternal and self-sustaining ‘Life’” (22), where “Life” represents all of the movements of nature. The philosophical problem that Shelley faces is that Life is all pervading; if one surrenders the self to nature to enter the One, one does so at the expense of attaining for one’s self a personal eternity that will pluck one out of nature’s mutability. If the eternal is to be located within the processes of nature, it cannot be separated from the finite world as it is, which Zen philosophy understands as infinitely finite. As Keiji Nishitani explains,

[t]he finitude of human existence is essentially an *infinite finitude* . . . When man . . . becomes aware of his own finitude as ‘infinitely finite’ in its very essence, something is implied that cannot simply be dismissed as logically meaningless. The logical contradiction¹³⁰ here of something being infinitely finite rather brings out the fact that finitude has been revealed as a radical finitude. It signals a revelation of the essence of finitude *qua* finitude. This revelation of essence is impossible for a conceptual way of thinking about finitude; only an existential self-awareness directly confronting its own finitude can bring it about” (170).

I posit that this logical dilemma is precisely what Shelley butts up against in *Prometheus*. For things to exist in the One, they must be infinite, as oneness precludes divisions, limits, or boundaries. But Shelley struggles with the very real problem that all things (eventually) reveal their finite existence. What Shelley needs, then, is an infinite and thus immortal ontological essence that survives finite existence. However, this proposition ultimately contradicts Shelley’s philosophy of oneness, as this infinite essence connotes a

final section of this chapter, a particular kind of *movement* does exist within Shelley’s eternity in Act 4, though movement is not to synonymous with mutability.

¹³⁰ Nishitani remarks that from a Western philosophical perspective “to be infinitely finite, or in other words, for the finite to continue on infinitely, is ‘bad infinity’ (*schlechte Unendlichkeit*, as Hegel calls it), a concept that logic usually treats as a stepchild. On the one hand, for a logic of *Verstand* (‘understanding’), which takes its stand on a discursive thinking that is at bottom incapable of prehending anything but finite things, to be infinitely finite is a sheer contradiction. Such thinking can only land one in antinomies. On the other hand, in a logic of *Vernunft* (‘reason’), which relies on an intuitive thinking that grasps the whole at a single stroke, the representation of infinity in the shape of an interminable finitude is not the notion of a true infinity. In either case, no valid concept emerges from our talk of an ‘infinitely finite’ or an ‘interminable finitude.’ These things remain as a whole, meaningless” (170).

self-nature that is established by the things Shelley defines it against (i.e., the things it is not). As Wasserman notes, this philosophical contradiction is “the frustrating dilemma that forever racks Shelley,” who “desire[s] on the one side, to attain and express the undifferentiated oneness of reality and, on the other, the fact that the only human means to that end are the diversities in which mortal man is bound,” leading him to perceive a distinction between “self,” “time,” and “space” (22). Shelley considered these perceptions “essential, considered relatively to human identity, for the existence of the human mind” (22). He thus understands the illusion of his apparent self-nature, but cannot extricate himself from the singularity of the human mind, which leads him back to a position of self and leaves him unable to reconcile the infinite with the finite.

As I noted above, Grabo argues that Shelley’s conception of the One has a certain affinity with nirvana, but he notes that Shelley’s “conception of this union stresses rather the enrichment of personality” (115), that is, individuality: “Multiplicity in unity is the essence of Shelley’s belief, but his concern as a poet is more with the enrichment of life through the multiplication and improvement of the *individual forms than their return to unity in Nirvana*” (141-42; my italics). Strictly speaking, nirvana is better understood along the lines of emptiness rather than unity, as the unification Grabo identifies appears as such due to a lack of self-nature. Still, Grabo’s point stands: Shelley is split between beliefs of emptiness and self: he grasps the inherent emptiness of phenomena, but clings to some kind of (in)substantial essence that connotes individuality as its own kind of self-nature. Shelley comes to the brink of realizing what nirvana is,¹³¹ but at the last moment seems to look away in search of a form of salvation that he finds more personally

¹³¹ For my discussion of nirvana see Chapter 1 pp. 38-9, 57 and Chapter 3 pp. 118-19. I will have more to say about nirvana and Shelley’s philosophy below.

gratifying, that is, one that is individualistic and keeps his “being” divorced from the parts of reality he finds threatening. As Grabo puts it, Shelley “is not so much weary of life itself as of human life as it now is, so remote from his dream of what earthly life might become” (142).

Shelley’s model of the One, however, does not actually include all things. It is composed of the things he finds to be pleasant and personally enjoyable. By thinking of certain things as separate from his “being,” Shelley re-introduces a dualism between self and other. Rather than the liberation from suffering connoted by nirvana, Shelley desires to be free from pain entirely, which is more than Buddhism actually promises.

Awakening to nirvana is about realizing the emptiness, and thus impermanence, of all things: *suffering* is eliminated because one realizes that pain has no inherent self-nature; it is simply a momentary experience that goes in and out of “being”—just like all things. This does not necessarily make pain any less painful, though it is no longer suffered.

Shelley presents pain and suffering as the same thing and suggests they can be overcome by eradicating certain traits from human consciousness. However, this belief contradicts Buddhism’s foundational teachings on suffering, known as the Four Noble Truths:

- 1). The truth of the existence of suffering
- 2). The truth of the origin of suffering
- 3). The truth of the cessation of suffering
- 4). The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering

Gautama Buddha’s first teaching after his enlightenment¹³² was the elaboration of these truths, which are laid out in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.¹³³ All of Buddhist

¹³² For my synoptic history of Buddhism see Chapter 1 pp. 17-8

¹³³ See Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* 9-11.

practice works out from these observations about human experience, which, as the first truth states, is characterized by suffering. The origin of suffering noted by the second truth pertains to desire and craving, as these things reify the illusion of the self: it is the “I” that needs, desires, and craves, setting certain things apart as “good” and others as “bad.” As such, desire and craving are undergirded by dualistic thinking, and thus they create a fissure between the world as it is and as we wish it to be. The third truth addresses the end of dualistic thinking, that is, thinking that leads to concepts of good and bad, better or worse, like or dislike, which is possible by following the fourth truth delineating the Noble Eightfold Path.¹³⁴ Shelley’s dualistic tendencies, however, prevent him from realizing these truths and cause him to vacillate between philosophies of self and self-lessness, which is symptomatic of Shelley’s position within the Western Christian philosophical tradition. He attempts to move past Christianity, but continues to draw from it and other religions in his attempts to overcome suffering.

Identifying his own Jovian qualities, Act 1 dramatizes Prometheus’s transcendence of the boundary between self and other. He realizes that his curse was an attempt to assert tyrannical power over Jupiter, making himself an agent of Jovian tyranny. Prometheus thus re-enacts the scene of Magus Zoroaster meeting his own image in the garden, which Earth refers to when Prometheus pleads to be reminded of how he cursed Jupiter:

¹³⁴ The Noble Eightfold Path is comprised of the following elements: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. It should be noted, however, that by “right” one should not understand this in opposition to wrong, but rather to “delusion,” which in Buddhism refers to ascribing to things and phenomena characteristics they do not actually possess. As such, right view becomes the most important, as understanding it brings the other elements of the path into focus. I will not linger on these points, as the Noble Eightfold Path, is not as germane to my argument as the other truths, which pertain more directly to the experience of suffering. Yet it should be understood that Shelley is trying to cultivate right view, but is unable, due to his dualistic tendencies. See also Thich Nhat Hanh 49-58.

Ere Babylon was dust,
 The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,
 Met his own image walking in the garden.
 That apparition, sole of men, he saw.
 For know there are two worlds of life and death:
 One that which thou beholds, but the other
 Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit
 The shadows of all forms that think and live
 Till death unite them, and they part no more. (1.191-99)

Zoroastrianism was considered the oldest religious doctrine focused on resolving the problem of evil, and it offers Shelley a model to conceptualize good and evil dualistically, which allows him to think of evil as originally residing outside his consciousness.¹³⁵ However, Shelley's self-study in *Prometheus*, by eliding the self he understands to be separate from evil, challenges a dualistic understanding of his ontology. As Tilottama Rajan argues, Earth's speech "links the narratological machinery of the drama to a textual unconscious in which characters have *no essential selves* and in which the identity between plot positions and the characters who occupy them is unstable" ("Promethean" 252; my italics).¹³⁶ When Prometheus recalls his curse against Jupiter, he meets Jupiter the same way Zoroaster meets his self. The otherness that Jupiter ostensibly connotes is recognized as a latent potential within Prometheus's own

¹³⁵ Stuart Curran explains that "Zoroastrianism was, in the dominant scholarly view of the early nineteenth century, the first religion whose doctrines confronted and attempted to resolve the most serious of ethical questions, the origin of evil; and its formulations profoundly influenced others. Because of that, whether Shelley agreed with the Persian resolution or not is beside the point. Like the contents of the shadow world Prometheus invokes in Act I, the Zoroastrian formulation, reiterated throughout the ancient world, is an intellectual reality of the human experience. Later religions may have refined it, but the essential antitheses remain" (83). Thus, we can think of Shelley moving through religious traditions in *Prometheus* as an attempt to come to terms with origin of evil and how to overcome it. However, he is unsatisfied with the present options and seeks to arrive at his own model, which anticipates Buddhism but cannot escape its Christian underpinnings and associations.

¹³⁶ Curran argues similarly that Prometheus's "assertion of self" in Act 1 "results in the destruction of self" (116).

“being,” and the difference between self and other ceases to exist. As Curran suggests, “Jupiter is a sense of identity achieved negatively, that is to say, by continually distinguishing otherness” (116). When the curse is eventually recalled, it is by the Phantasm of Jupiter rather than by some kind of mirror image of Prometheus himself (1.240).¹³⁷

Prometheus cannot fully separate himself from the tyranny that Jupiter represents because he participated in it by cursing Jupiter. However, Jupiter is also a symbol of Shelley’s anathema to what he saw as the false authority of the Christian God that Prometheus resists identifying with, as he sees Jovian evil as the root of all pain and suffering in the world. Jupiter represents the repression of one’s innate human nature, and thus the value system that Jupiter represents cannot be accommodated to the Promethean mind. As Timothy Webb argues, Shelley’s “Jupiter as Jehovah is associated” with “a supremely negative expression of religious values (‘Thou shalt Not . . .’),” as “Jupiter denies the natural instincts of humanity” and “betrays man into nihilistic cynicism” (695-96; Webb’s ellipsis). Prometheus’s gift of fire, however, is figured as humanity’s restored passion for living that counteracts Jovian tyranny. This liberation is meant to incite a renovation and eventual perfection of earthly life that will render obsolete the Christian concept of heaven, which for Shelley was soteriologically bankrupt and did not offer a practical solution to human suffering.¹³⁸ Yet Shelley does not fully do away with the

¹³⁷ Reiman and Fraistat note that “[c]ritics have suggested that Prometheus, when he cursed Jupiter, resembled the tyrant . . . and that it is therefore appropriate to have the Phantasm of Jupiter repeat the curse” (216 n.2).

¹³⁸ Christopher R. Miller argues that “there was a strongly political cast to Shelley’s concern with heaven. Conceived as a kingdom, heaven merely replicate[s] earthly notions of monarchy, empire, and class privilege; conceived as a divine reward, it enable[s] a cynical deferral to earthly justice, an illusory coda to

concept of heaven. He seeks to wrest it from its orthodox underpinnings in order to recast salvation as something more tangibly accessible to humanity, something available in this life, which Shelley names Love. Miller notes that

[i]n defining ‘Heaven’ as ‘Love, Shelley avoids equating it with an afterlife. While he could scoff at priestly or grandmotherly notions of heaven, he did not relinquish the idea of the soul’s immortality. The lingering question, however, was how to define the soul. In a letter to Hitchener, Shelley proposes that ‘one of the properties of animal soul is consciousness of identity—if this is destroyed, in consequence the soul whose essence this is must perish.’ If so, then he might as well conflate ‘soul’ with ‘consciousness,’ as he conflates ‘God’ with the universe, and thus pronounce the death of both ideas; but he does not. For Shelley, soul is as indispensable a concept as heaven. (581)

This attempt to recast religious models keeps Shelley suspended between a Christian and Buddhist position. But, as I have suggested, Shelley is not prepared to give up his belief that the soul/consciousness is, in some way, an immortal essence,¹³⁹ which prevents him from fully adopting a Buddhist philosophical position.¹⁴⁰

It is significant that in his later years Shelley came to admire the teachings of Jesus, an admiration apparent in Prometheus’s similarity to Christ. When Prometheus is attacked by the Furies in Act 1, Panthea describes Prometheus as “a youth, / With patient

life’s struggles” (578).

¹³⁹ As Grabo notes, “Shelley in his last four years, the years of his greatest poetry, is, at least with the poetical part of him, however reason may demur, a believer in some form of survival [of the soul],” though he contends that this is not necessarily a “*personal* survival, but the loss of personality in the One” (115; Grabo’s italics). It is only in death that Shelley acknowledges the possibility of de-individualization. As I noted above, Grabo also argues that during life, personality is to be enhanced by rejoining with the One, which I argue leads Shelley back to a self-oriented position.

¹⁴⁰ Masao Abe notes that “[l]ike Christianity, Buddhism is primarily concerned with human salvation—that is, the deliverance from suffering. Unlike Christianity, however, Buddhism does not take the personalistic divine-human relationship (I-thou relationship) as the *basis* of salvation, thereby regarding impersonal nature as something peripheral, but instead takes as the basis of salvation the transpersonal, universal dimension common to human beings and nature” (“Kenotic” 53). He highlights, too, that “unlike Christianity, Buddhism does not accept the notion of a transcendent ruler of the universe or of a savior outside of one’s self. A Buddha is not a supernaturally existing being, but is non-other than a person who awakens to the Dharma, the truth, the suchness or as-it-is-ness of everything in the realization of Sunyata” (“Kenotic” 53). See also Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki 136-49.

looks nailed to a crucifix” (1.584-85). Like Christ, Prometheus suffers for the sake of humanity; he becomes the sacrifice that stands to free humanity from the tyranny that corrupts their inherent good nature. One of the Furies attacking Prometheus reports on the present state of earthly life, claiming that

[t]he wise want love, and those who love want wisdom;
 And all best things are thus confused to ill.
 Many are strong and rich,—and would be just,—
 But live among suffering fellow men
 As if none felt—they know not what they do. (1.627-31)

The Fury’s final words echo those of Christ on the cross as he pleads with God to forgive his executioners. Although Prometheus himself does not utter these words, he remains Christ-like by responding to humanity’s despair, taking it on himself to teach those who “know not.”¹⁴¹ He responds to the Fury by indicating that he “pit[ies] those” who are not “tortured” by such a revelation (1.633). For Prometheus, it is unthinkable that humanity could become indifferent to the collective suffering that plagues all people. This state exists because “Love” has been traded for “Ruin” (1.780). But by confronting the Jovian elements of his own consciousness, Prometheus accounts for humanity’s present state of Loveless ruin.

In choosing Love over hate, Prometheus inverts the Jovian power structure. Jupiter loses his power because it is undercut by Prometheus’s willingness to endure and forgive the pain and suffering it causes, thus allowing him to transcend Jupiter’s

¹⁴¹ Reiman and Fraistat argue that this is also “Prometheus’ ultimate temptation to despair” (229 n.4). That Prometheus resists succumbing to despair suggests that he is guided by something other than his self. That is, he has already seen through the illusion between self and other and is capable of persevering due to his being guided by Love.

tyranny.¹⁴² By not allowing Jovian-induced pain and suffering to rule over him, Prometheus claims an inalienable power that allows him to remain “king over [him]self” (1.492). However, Rajan suggests that the “unilateral nature of Prometheus’ forgiveness of Jove” is a “troubling lacuna,” “on which the entire action [of the play] depends” (“Deconstruction” 197): “it is only the Jove within Prometheus who is overcome by love. The actual Jove, in a scene reminiscent of *Paradise Lost* where Satan is hurled headlong only to rise again, is cast into the abyss: repressed rather than reintegrated” (“Deconstruction” 197). Jupiter is something to be done away with rather than acknowledged and reintegrated as a presence in the world that we are all capable of reifying, that is, something that cannot be done away with.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, Shelley’s ideal is one where all Jovian presence has been wiped from his consciousness and the world is made perfect.

At the end of Act 3, the Spirit of the Hour gives a long monologue detailing the renaissance of earthly life after Jovian evil has been overthrown by Love. The Spirit notes that now there will be equality among people and a profound hope for the future:

None fawned, none trampled; hate disdain or fear,
 Self-love or self-contempt on human brows
 No more inscribed, as o’er the gate of hell,
 “All hope abandon, ye who enter here.” (3.4.133-36)

¹⁴² Ross Woodman offers a different interpretation, suggesting that Prometheus shifting attitude toward Jupiter is motivated by “pity” rather than by forgiveness or love (231). I disagree on the grounds that the text evinces a Christian subtext.

¹⁴³ Curran has argued along similar lines that “[t]he poise achieved in the [play’s] triumphant conclusion is qualified by its delicacy. Jupiter remains a latent potential in the rule of love . . . Though humanity has willed its transcendence of mutability, it has not denied the integrity of change. The conditions of the universal order are unalterable” (111). I agree but would add that the anticipation of the universal order keeps Shelley split between a finite and an infinite position, which leads him back to the self-other dualism he intends to overcome.

The influence of Love has remade the earth as a utopia, although from a Buddhist perspective Shelley's thoughts on utopia are complicated. Buddhist practice attempts to overcome one's attachment to self and, as a result, things like hate, fear, and disdain begin to (slowly) lose their power, as they cease to be "part" of one's self (i.e., *your* hate, *your* fear, etc.). In this way, universal Buddhist practice could help promote an idea *like* utopia. On a practical level, however, Buddhist philosophy acknowledges the diversity of human preferences and, as such, conflicts are bound to arise when people live in proximity to each other. Practice helps one to deal with these conflicts in a more productive manner, but Buddhism sees the kind of perfection Shelley imagines as illusory because it exists in direct opposition to things as they are (in reality). In Buddhist terms, perfection, in so far as it can be discussed at all, is the present state of things (including their impermanence), their as-they-are-ness. Each moment of existence is in and of itself complete and deficient of nothing. But through utopia, Shelley seeks a mode of perfection that exists apart from the world he presently inhabits, which is trapped within time and mutability. Act 4, however, opens with "Time" being borne "to his tomb in eternity" (4.14), thus offering a retreat to this perfect world. In Buddhist terms, Shelley seeks a nirvana apart from samsara, which is ultimately a way of saying he seeks a version of Christianity's heaven.

Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 CE), arguably the most important Buddhist philosopher after Gautama Buddha, helps to clarify the specific challenges Shelley faces. In *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna offers perhaps the most sustained analysis of the importance of emptiness in Buddhist philosophy and systematically shows why emptiness connotes the inseparability of nirvana and samsara. By drawing attention

to this inseparability, Nagarjuna's philosophy sheds light on why *Prometheus's* fourth act was necessary, as Shelley originally intended to end the play at Act 3.¹⁴⁴ Nagarjuna's text is a verse dialogue of question and answer. When clarifying the ontological status of nirvana as being both existent and non-existent (i.e., because it is empty) and how it relates to samsara (also empty), Nagarjuna explains that

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence [i.e., samsara] and nirvāṇa.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvāṇa and cyclic existence. (25.19)

Annotating these verses, translator Jay L. Garfield explains that

To distinguish between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa would be to suppose that each had a nature and that they were different natures. But each is empty, and so there can be no inherent difference. Moreover, since nirvāṇa is by definition the cessation of delusion and of grasping and, hence, of the reification of self and other and of confusing imputed phenomenon for inherently real phenomena, it is by definition the recognition of the ultimate nature of things. (331-32)

Garfield's commentary helps us to see that Nagarjuna's answer about the relation of nirvana to samsara addresses the struggle that Shelley wants to think himself out of in *Prometheus*: if self and other are indistinct, so too are good and evil, although evil is a hindrance to authentic human "being" and must be done away with. However, if time and flux cannot be controlled, "evil" is only a perceptual interpretation and only exists

¹⁴⁴ Reiman and Fraistat note that Edward Dowden's assessment that Act 4 was "a sublime after-thought" in the composition of *Prometheus*, is not exactly accurate. Fraistat shows that the "manuscript evidence indicates that the composition of [the play] was a more fluid, continuous, and revisionary process than has yet been widely recognized"; however, the text was considered to be "tentatively complete" after Shelley finished Act 3, and the composition of Act 4 led to further revisions in the first three acts (202-3).

relative to good, which is itself relative (to evil): thus, evil can return at any time without warning.¹⁴⁵

At the end of the Spirit's Act 3 monologue, Shelley draws attention to his unresolved resolution. The Spirit proudly proclaims the ultimate result of the Love revolution Prometheus has set in motion. Man is to be "the King / Over himself; just, gentle, wise" (3.196-97), suggesting humility and restraint:

but man:
 Passionless? no—*yet free* from guilt or pain
 Which were, for his will made, or suffered them,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
 From chance and death and mutability. (3.198-201; my italics)

Here, Shelley seems to draw back from this utopia as the final goal he seeks. He acknowledges that his philosophy has led humankind to freedom from guilt and pain, which are both produced and suffered by human consciousness. Humans are still not free from death and mutability, though they "rule them like slaves." This is tantamount to a realization of Buddhism's understanding of life as an infinite process of birth-and-death, and thus of nirvana and samsara as inseparable. By referring to the powers of mutability as "slaves," Shelley implies a sense of mastery over them, which is a possible way of understanding the relation of nirvana to samsara: both "exist" because the former

¹⁴⁵ Nishitani explains that from a Buddhist perspective, "we must . . . see evil and sin as elemental issues for man and consider them as problems of reality. The usual thing is to pose questions about these things, too, simply from the field of consciousness. Particularly when it has to do with someone else, but even when it is only we ourselves involved, we speak of the self committing evil. Actually we are making 'self' and 'evil' two separate realities, or at best imagining the self as if it were the trunk of a tree from which stem the leaves and branches of evil. This dichotomy comes about because we are thinking about self and evil by means of representations that are proper to them on the field of consciousness" (22). That is, evil is not an underlying principle of reality that human subjects bring into being, as this is to attribute a self-nature to evil, an existence independent of our experience of it. Nishitani elaborates that "we cannot remain content with speaking of evil as something 'the self commits' . . . It cannot be grasped from the standpoint of the self as agent . . . radical evil [i.e., the root of evil] is not something come to the self from somewhere outside the self" (23). It should be noted that when Nishitani uses the term "self," he is using positive language to speak of self-emptiness. For his complete elaboration of self-emptiness, see 119-67.

removes the power of the latter. But as much as Shelley comes to realize this logic, he seems ultimately to be unsatisfied with it.¹⁴⁶ His use of the phrase “nor yet exempt” implies a future state where exemption “From chance and death and mutability” manifests itself. At the end of Act 3, Shelley is still bothered by the effects of mutability: he understands the logic of birth-and-death but cannot seem actually to free himself from these effects. Thus, he proposes an alternative option in Act 4: his vision of eternity.

For Shelley, eternity is representative of regaining a lost union with the One, which is symbolized in the eventual reunion of Prometheus and Asia. Woodman has characterized this reunion as a mode of androgyny, arguing that Prometheus and Asia are separated by “sexual, rather than physical, distance” and that both of them “may . . . be occupying the same geographical space [sic] suffering the painful bifurcation of the androgyne into male and female” (232).¹⁴⁷ But he suggests that this pain will be remedied through their sexual (re)union once they physically meet again at the end of Act 3. This reunion symbolizes the text’s non-differentiation between self and other, but also yokes together Shelley’s competing interests in conceptualizing this reunion in terms of the One or eternity, that is, time or timelessness. The erotic overtones of this sexual reunion should not be overlooked, as they imply that Prometheus is also anticipating sexual ecstasy, which alerts Shelley to the existence of the One, except that ecstasy’s temporal nature frustrates attempts to resolve the disparate appearances of things.

¹⁴⁶ Woodman agrees, arguing that Shelley implies that man’s ability to rule mutability like a “slave” is a temporal relationship rather than a fixed one (232-33).

¹⁴⁷ Woodman’s concept of the androgyne has its origins in Platonism, which has guided many readings of Shelley’s philosophy, beginning with Notopoulos’s seminal study *The Platonism of Shelley* (1949). Platonism is central to Grabo’s reading, and it is relevant to Wasserman’s as well. However, Wasserman does not assume Shelley is “a Platonist or neoplatonist or skeptic, or Berkeleian (despite Mary Shelley’s statement to the contrary), or . . . a disciple of any other philosopher” (6-7). He suggests rather that Shelley’s “thought is . . . the direct outgrowth of contemporary intellectual forces” (7).

Shelley's project, therefore, becomes one of how to use ecstasy as a means of accessing the eternal: a temporary intoxication that also allows for a moment of clarity. But unlike Coleridge's or De Quincey's use of opium, Shelley finds ecstasy in nature itself. In the Preface to *Prometheus* he notes that the work was "inspir[ed]" by the "intoxicat[ing]" effects of the "flowery glades" and "thickets of odoriferous blossoming tress" in the environment in which he was writing (207).¹⁴⁸ Also, he characterizes his philosophy of Love as a "nepenthe" (3.163)—the drug from Homer's *Odyssey* used to banish pain and sorrow—which, in some ways, echoes Coleridge's or De Quincey's attitudes toward opium. For Coleridge and De Quincey, intoxication is the path to the eternal, whereas for Shelley the eternal is a path of intoxication. It cannot be fully understood by the rational mind, an experience Shelley previously referred to as a "sentiment of extatic wonder, not unallied to madness" when discussing his reaction to seeing Mont Blanc (*Letters* 1.497). Prometheus's Love for Asia bespeaks the same kind of ecstatic wonder, and by anticipating an impending eternity beyond time, Prometheus is able to endure pain and suffering.

¹⁴⁸ Katherine Singer has also explored intoxication in *Prometheus*. However, she focuses more on reading actual substances, *viz.* opium and nitrous oxide, into the text's depictions of natural-world intoxication. She argues that "for Shelley, drugs seem to form a special category of substances which do not simply push the limits of the body but offer the possibility of transcending it altogether, if only for discrete moments. They also present a strange kind of nutrition in edibles that make the body sick, and threaten its vitality in hopes of a monumental convalescence. Unlike Coleridge and De Quincey who consumed laudanum for its own sake, drugs for Shelley are serious business. They do not merely open doors of perception, and the liberation they offer is not recreational or solely artistic. One wouldn't catch Shelley philosophizing from his armchair on opium—or even writing on it. Instead, drugs appear in Shelley's poems at very specific moments as mechanisms of a precise political revolutionary plan aimed at interrogating and sometimes erasing the kinds of habituations and addictions the body often demands" (687). I agree with the sentiment of Singer's argument, yet I am less convinced that material substances need to be ascribed to this drug-like effect in Shelley's writing. I read this drug association less literally, seeing it heuristically as a means to explain the ecstatic process Shelley has in mind. It should be noted, however, that Shelley was known to take opium to manage his anxiety. See Shelley's *Letters* 1:571 and 2:313-14 and Newman White 1:343.

4.2 Suffering Evil: Pain and the Anodyne of Eternity

Pain and suffering are the basis of Shelley's philosophy in Act 1, and, as such, these concepts become the drama's greatest thematic concern and are opposed to Shelley's philosophy of Love. The battle between these thematic interests prevents Shelley from fully accepting a Buddhist position that sees Love, suffering, and pain non-dualistically. Shelley only identifies with Love and attempts to eliminate pain and suffering, which, for him, exist due to the presence of evil. Thus, when Prometheus "wish[es]" for "no living thing to suffer pain" (1.305), he is making a statement about the nature of evil, as this is the moment he takes responsibility for his curse against Jupiter and the pain it has caused: "It doth repent me" (1.303). Pain and suffering are the consequence of Jovian tyranny manifesting itself through corrupt or false authority. Near the opening of the act, Prometheus bemoans his painful reality: "No change, no pause, no hope!—Yet I endure . . . Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, forever!" (1.24-30). Because his pain will not remit or change, the passage of time becomes imperceptible and meaningless. Prometheus exists in time, but has no awareness of it. As Ellen Brown Herson puts it, "he exists in a time that does not exist for him" (383). His existence is cut off from the world around him and, as a result, he remains attached to the apparent sovereignty of his self-nature. However, his forgiveness of Jupiter changes this relationship to time, self, and otherness.

Prometheus's act of recalling the curse is both a withdrawal and recollection, a retraction that also posits. As soon as the curse is recalled, the Furies arrive to re-enact it (1.337). By recalling the curse, Prometheus experiences the past in the present *as* the present. When Prometheus recovers awareness of time, he realizes that it is not a linear

process. He begins to see that time and existence are one and cannot be sectioned off from each other. He thus intuits the logic of Dogen's existence-time, as explored in Chapter 2, which suggests that all of time is at hand *all of the time* and is a part of "being." Thus, the time he cursed Jupiter is still with him: "Whilst I behold such execrable shapes, / Methinks I grow like what I contemplate / And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy" (1.449-51). This newfound sympathy causes Prometheus to recognize that he is responsible for his own bondage, as Jupiter only has power over him because he has unintentionally allowed it: "I gave [Jupiter] all / He has; and in return he chains me here" (1.380-82). In recognizing this, Prometheus realizes the emptiness of self-nature and the impermanence of both his pain and Jupiter's reign, as neither exists independently of the conditions under which they are perceived: subject and object, self and other, as Shelley suggests in "On Life," do not really exist outside of their linguistic implications. It is important to understand that Prometheus's realization is contingent on his renewed understanding of time, as time is the agent of mutability and impermanence, which now will not even grant its own lasting presence as a linear progression. However, Shelley imagines an end to this process. Time may not move teleologically, but it does move toward some kind of barely perceptible end point, a "far goal" (3.4.174) that renders it obsolete.

Time, then, is figured as a universal prime mover that will self-destruct upon reaching its far goal of eternity. But Prometheus understands eternity and emptiness as essentially the same thing, which leads to the problem of how eternity relates to time. Abe explains that from a Buddhist perspective "transcendence [of time] . . . is possible by cutting off the spatio-temporal process of living-dying [i.e., birth-and-death] and opening

up the bottomless depth of the transtemporal, eternal dimension. This is the ‘absolute present,’ which is the fountainhead of all possibilities—past, present, future” (“Rejoinder” 201): “Through the cutting off of time and the opening up of eternity one rises up from the bottomless depth of eternity to the dimension of temporality and moves forward toward the endless end along the process of living-dying” (“Rejoinder” 201). Buddhism does not think of time and eternity as separate. Rather, it construes eternity as the emptiness of time that can have no lasting presence apart from time. On the one hand, Prometheus recognizes this sense of eternity as the source of his strength to endure his pain. But on the other, this realization frustrates Shelley's attempts to imagine an end to time and mutability. As a result, the eternal gets abstracted as a locatable “place” at the end of time that humanity will eventually enter, although Shelley cannot fully verify the existence of such a place, which leads to the play’s treatment of eternity as being paradoxically within and without time. Thus, the eternal and the infinite become two different things: the latter existing within time and the former existing outside of it.

These models of eternity are linked through Shelley’s concept of Love, which is Shelley’s means of conceptualizing emptiness. At the end of Act 1, Prometheus expresses his longing to be reunited with Asia: “How fair these air-born shapes! and yet I feel / Most vain all hope but love, and thou art far, / Asia!” (1.807-09). By associating Asia with Love, Prometheus attests to the infinite nature of their non-dualistic ontology. By peering into the infinite, Prometheus becomes aware that nature perpetually reintroduces mutability into the world. In other words, mutability is the nature of infinity and thus all worldly appearances are finite and characterized by their impermanence. Neither his pain nor Jupiter’s tyranny can last forever. Mercury asks Prometheus about the end of “Jove’s

power,” to which he replies only that “it must come” (1.412-13). The realization of the infinite realm provides Prometheus with a kind of anaesthesia against his pain, allowing him to respond to the Furies’ attacks with indifference: “Pain is my element as hate is thine; / Ye rend me now: I care not” (1.477-78). But this anaesthesia is also a mode of intoxication. Asia becomes the “golden chalice” to contain the “bright wine” of Prometheus’s “being,” which has “overflowed” and would otherwise be wasted on the “thirsty dust” (1.809-11). Instead, this intoxicated “being” dissolves the perceived distance between Asia and Prometheus.¹⁴⁹ This reunion of self and other, then, echoes Prometheus’s relationship to Jupiter, suggesting that nothing can exist independently of the One. It must be understood, however, that intoxication and ecstasy are two ways of understanding the same thing, as they are both produced by glimpsing the infinite, which is itself a perceivable “flash” of the eternity Shelley imagines as the far goal of time.

Intoxication, ecstasy, and eternity are central to Act 2, which revolves around Asia and Panthea’s descent to Demogorgon’s cave. Act 2, scene 1 dramatizes the elision between self and other, although this time Shelley offers a much fuller depiction of Love’s power to unify apparent dualisms. The scene focuses on Asia’s interpretation of Panthea’s two dreams. Dream vision, as a narrative device, allows Shelley to express an ontological awareness of something normally veiled from human consciousness, something perceptible but not necessarily accounted for by ordinary psychological modes that perceive a distinction between self and other. For Shelley, to enter into dream consciousness is to enter into a universal consciousness. This entry marks the recognition

¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that these characters’ reunion also symbolizes a coming together of Occident and Orient, as Prometheus is a figure of the West, and Asia the East. This effect is also apparent in Shelley’s decision to change the Prometheus story’s setting from the European to the Indian Caucasus, as the latter was believed to be the origin of humanity.

that the two are actually one, and, more importantly, that they are one with all things. But this union defies easy expression. Asia attempts to “read” Panthea’s dream by gazing into her “eyes” (2.1.55-56), yet Panthea still has to recount her personal narrative of the experience. She explains that as she slept at Prometheus’s feet, she became aware of Love’s “all-dissolving power” (2.1.76) and realized that she and Prometheus were *not two*:

I saw not—heard not—moved not—only felt
 His presence flow and mingle through my blood
 Till it became his life and his grew mine
 And I was thus absorbed—until it past[.] (2.1.79-82)

These last words reveal that such an experience is temporal. Panthea refers to it as an “intoxication of keen joy” (2.1.67). Paradoxically, it is an utterly personal experience of losing individual personhood, a temporary merging with the infinite. Thus, her attempts to narrativize this dream experience for Asia cannot be completely understood by the latter: “Thou speakest, but thy words / Are as the air. I feel them not . . . oh, lift / Thine eyes that I may read his written soul!” (2.1.108-10; Shelley’s ellipsis). By attempting to read—that is, interpret—Panthea’s dream through her eyes, Asia blurs the line between intellectual and phenomenological understanding.

Gazing into the eyes of another is a literal act of seeing one’s reflection in the other. This suggests that Asia’s true motivation is to cross the boundary between self and other, to see as Panthea saw in her dream. Asia desires to understand herself as an embodiment of Love, just as Prometheus understands her at the end of Act 1. However, Asia, attempting to read someone else’s experience as a way to interpret her own, comes up short. She intellectually grasps existential oneness, but has not yet experienced it for herself. Panthea’s explanation only takes Asia so far, which Panthea knows, noting that

her eyes “droop beneath the load / Of that they would express—what canst thou see / But thine own fairest shadow imaged there?” (2.1.111-13): her eyes cannot fully show Asia what they saw. But the term “seeing” is only a practical way of explaining the sensory/experiential side of an ontological shift. Panthea now sees reality and existence differently; she becomes aware of the universal spirituality her name implies. Asia’s attempts to see her self in Panthea eventually reaches a critical mass, and she too begins to perceive differently—seeing into the infinite within the finite realm where individual subjectivity is transcended:

There is a change: beyond their inmost depth
I see a shade—a shape—’tis He, arrayed
In soft light of his own smiles which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.
Prometheus, it is thou—depart not yet! (2.1.119-23)

Asia has become aware of her inseparability from Prometheus and from Panthea, who has acted as a conduit to the infinite. When Panthea asks Asia, “Why lookest thou as if a spirit past” (2.1.118), it is because the latter’s “being” has ceased to exist as a self/soul, as she is now aware of her place in the One.

At this point, Panthea’s previously forgotten dream reappears as a physical presence that is quickly reabsorbed by her consciousness, which Asia now has access to and is thus free to “follow” Panthea and the dream to Demogorgon’s cave (2.1.131-208). To fully understand this meeting’s significance, we must first acknowledge that, in Act 3, Demogorgon, coming to claim Jupiter, will announce himself as “Eternity” (3.52). This association with eternity renders Act 2’s brief second scene as a rehearsal of the spiritual action in Act 4, where eternity is finally won. As I have been arguing, Shelley acknowledges two kinds of eternity: one outside of time, and one within it (i.e., the

infinite). Demogorgon represents both of these, underscoring Shelley's uncertainty of how eternity relates to time. Shelley sees that these two modes of eternity are related, as the infinite seems to anticipate eternity. But it does so by exposing the emptiness of self-nature in one's present reality. Demogorgon thus becomes a key mediator between Shelley's Buddhist and Christian philosophical inclinations. Associated with eternity, Demogorgon is also linked to emptiness and intoxication; indeed, intoxication facilitates entry to his cave, although this intoxication differs from that of opium. Panthea announces that she and Asia have been transported

to the realm
 Of Demogorgon, and the mighty portal,
Like a Volcano's meteor-breathing chasm,
 Whence the oracular vapour is hurled up
 Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth
 And call truth, virtue, love, genius or joy—
 That maddening wine of life, whose dregs they drain
 To deep intoxication, and uplift
 Like Maenads who cry loud, Evoe! Evoe!
 The voice which is contagion to the world. (2.3.1-10; my italics)¹⁵⁰

Panthea makes a key distinction here: the entrance to Demogorgon's cave is *like* a volcano, but not identical to it. She draws a subtle distinction between the intoxication it causes, which is detrimental, and the intoxication caused by the infinite, which is beneficial.¹⁵¹ Here, Shelley seems to criticize the kind of drug-addled philosophy that informs Coleridge and De Quincey's work. He is skeptical that such intoxication

¹⁵⁰ Singer associates the "oracular vapour" with the recently synthesized nitrous oxide. However, I have found no evidence that volcanoes emit this gas, nor reason to believe that Shelley thought otherwise, though I agree with Singer that these lines allude to the gases inhaled by Delphic oracles (689).

¹⁵¹ Cf. 3.3.124-47, where Earth also refers to the intoxication of this cavern as beneficial. Singer argues that this passage bespeaks opium, as it contains "purple" "flowers" with "translucid bowls . . . mantling with aerial dew," which produce "calm and happy thoughts" (3.3.142-46). However, I read this as the intoxication of having glimpsed eternity, which alters perception of nature.

produces any real understanding of how “being” relates to reality. Nevertheless, intoxication is the only way Shelley is able to convey the experience of the infinite: “vapour dim[s]” both Panthea and Asia’s “brain[s]” before they descend into Demogorgon’s cave (2.3.18), which takes them

Through the cloudy strife
Of Death and Life;
Through the veil and the bar
Of things which seem and are[.] (2.3.57-60)

They become aware of the inseparability of life and death, awareness of which grants access to the true nature of reality and not just its appearances.¹⁵² They know what questions to ask, but rely on Demogorgon for answers, though his meaning is unclear.

In scene 4, Asia asks Demogorgon, “Who made the living world” and “all / That it contains—thought, passion, reason, will, / Imagination?”, to which he answers, “God, Almighty God” (2.4.8-11). That Demogorgon’s answer appeals both to familiar Christian concepts and to a natural supernaturalism betrays his struggle to articulate his ideas clearly. “God” is the best answer available, but there is no reason to associate it exclusively, or at all, with Christianity.¹⁵³ Demogorgon notes that “Jove is the supreme of living things” (2.4.113), but is less willing to claim that he is the God he referred to previously. His response to Asia’s questions shifts from repeating “God” to the even less clear “He reigns,” as the difficulty of the questions increases (2.4.29, 31). Asia wants to know where “terror, madness, crime, [and] remorse” came from (2.4.19); if God has

¹⁵² Reiman and Freistat read a similar effect at 2.5.103. See 255 n.3.

¹⁵³ Reiman and Fraistat note that the “metaphysical implication of Asia’s statement [at 2.4.10] is that all the universe is made up of mental activities, yet this—like Asia’s other assertions—is neither confirmed nor denied by Demogorgon and should be seen as a useful myth rather than Shelley’s beliefs about reality” (247 n.8). I would add, too, that this lack of commitment also evinces Shelley’s struggle to accommodate this model of reality, as shown by his appeal to the language of Christianity to get outside of Christianity.

authorized their existence, his benevolence is compromised, and he becomes the spokesperson for Jovian tyranny. Shelley appeals to something in the world capable of superseding Jupiter. Yet as we have already seen, this force is mutability—specifically the impermanence mutability connotes, as indicated by Asia’s long speech on time, change, and humankind’s inexplicable fall from a perfect golden age into Jovian tyranny (2.4.32-109). This speech also implies a coming end to Jupiter’s reign, and when Demogorgon overthrows Jupiter at the start of Act 3, he is acting as the eternity within time, the infinite, which, like emptiness, speaks to an infinite finitude: life as birth-and-death.

Demogorgon, then, is the personification of this never-ending cycle of mutability. He is ultimately a representation of emptiness, which for Shelley offers a novel revolutionary power, as nothing can supersede or outlast it.¹⁵⁴ Shelley’s attempt to give a concrete form to emptiness indicates his underlying fears about it. He is not able fully to let go into emptiness and seeks something permanent in the world: “eternal Love” (2.4.120), which he claims is the only thing not subject to “Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change” (2.4.119). Conceptualizing Love this way, however, Shelley imbues it with a self-nature that in turn tries to impose a self-nature on emptiness. But as I addressed in Chapter 1, even emptiness is empty of any permanent or lasting conditions. Shelley

¹⁵⁴ Rajan and Wasserman both read Jupiter’s downfall as Shelley’s commentary on the French Revolution: that revolutionary power in and of itself is not enough, as it tends to become the tyranny it sought to overthrow; thus, Shelley seeks a new kind of revolution that is not motivated by gaining power over another. I agree that Shelley is responding to the historical conditions of his age. However, due to *Prometheus*’s concerns with time, suffering, and ontology, I argue that Shelley’s concept of revolution can only be properly understood in the context of “being.” Shelley’s philosophic considerations are not limited to power; he is also deeply concerned the mutability and impermanence of phenomena and conditions, which he personifies through Demogorgon. Rajan expresses a similar sentiment: “Demogorgon, previously an abstract force outside time, now becomes historically specified as a revolutionary power within the world of time, liable to be consumed by the future as he has consumed the past” (“Deconstruction” 197).

seems to accept this impermanence, but it frustrates his desire to annihilate evil in the world. At the end of Act 2, Asia and Panthea imagine the world without evil (2.5.15-110), a vision that will manifest after the Love revolution in Act 3. Yet the world in Act 3 is not divorced from the *possibility* of future evil, as the Spirit of the Hour explains that the chariot that has ushered in the world's new found peace is "[y]olked" to its steeds with an "amphisbaenic snake" (3.4.119), that is, a snake with a head at each end. This image suggests that the newly won peace is just as transient as anything else in the world. Such peace is perpetually trying to pull away from itself.¹⁵⁵ The amphisbaenic snake, by moving forwards and backwards, symbolizes time as a non-linear process, reinforcing the notion that nothing can truly exist independently of the conditions that produced it. Past and future become irrelevant, as do subject and object, self and other. These things only exist relative to each other and thus cannot be thought of dualistically, though this is not Shelley's philosophical conclusion. To end things here is to admit defeat in the fight to vanquish evil, even if evil itself is secondary to the mutability that allows it to return. Love, by outlasting all things, acts as Shelley's antidote for mutability, as it rejoins "beings" to the One, which accounts for all multiplicity. On the one hand, this realization is a triumph, but on the other, it exposes Shelley's philosophical dilemma: if the One contains all things, it must also contain Jovian evil. Therefore, Love and evil are not as disparate as they may seem. In response to this, Shelley, in Acts 3 and 4, shifts back towards the dualism of good and evil expressed in Christian and Zoroastrian philosophy.

¹⁵⁵ Webb argues that the amphisbaenic snake is an image "entirely appropriate to Shelley's moral purpose" (709). He suggests that "[w]hether [or not] we enact and perpetuate a Promethean revolution depends on us; we have the opportunity to move in either direction" (709).

4.3 Oneness, Twoness: Shelley's Almost a Buddhist

Shelley's vision of the world after the Love revolution is contingent on maintaining contact with emptiness/the infinite interminably. He desires a transcendence of self and other, but also craves self-sovereignty amidst time and mutability, even if this is not a realistic goal for humankind. In Act 3, scene 3 Hercules liberates Prometheus from his bondage, returning him to his beloved Asia, which in turn returns them to the One. Seeing the One's infinitude has allowed them to endure separation and because they are one "being" that will not be divided again, their sexual (re)union goes beyond a return to infinitude, instead allowing them to cross over ecstatically into eternity. They retreat to a cave where they will be free from the effects of time and mutability, an act that echoes Asia and Panthea's trip to Demogorgon's cave. But rather than the emptiness associated with Demogorgon, they are exposed to an eternity that will allow them to reconstitute their self-nature. They "will sit and talk of time and change / As the world ebbs and flows," but will themselves remain "unchanged" (3.3.23-24). They are afforded the possibility that Shelley only wishes was available to humankind, as shown in Prometheus's question: "What can hide man from Mutability?" (3.3.25).¹⁵⁶

Being immortal, Prometheus and Asia live Shelley's ideal of simultaneous self-dissolution and enhancement. They are self and other united as one entity, but neither has to sacrifice their own individual existences, which now coalesce into a state of permanence free from time and change. This sentiment is reinforced by Earth's reminding Asia that as an immortal Asia does not understand the relationship between

¹⁵⁶ As Wasserman notes, "Shelley never thought of earthly man, in contradistinction to Prometheus, as ever to be released from the strenuous moral resolution made necessary by the continuous threat of resurrected evil" (112).

humans and death (3.3.108-12). Shelley once again intersects with the logic of birth-and-death, though he is ultimately undecided about it being a good or bad thing. *Adonais* (1821), written after the death of John Keats, mobilizes similar ideas. In this poem, Shelley suggests that the One can only be truly accessed through death and that finite existence is bound to be unsatisfying:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
 Life, like a dome of many coloured-glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
 Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
 If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek! (460-65)¹⁵⁷

Individual life prevents one from fully crossing over into the One, which offers refuge from mutability, and obscures eternity, where individuality can be reconstituted outside of mutability. Death opens up these possibilities, but it does so at the expense of individual life, a consideration that begins in *Prometheus*.

There are two instances in Act 3 where Shelley begins to work out the verses that would later become his “Painted Veil” sonnet (1818-1820). Earth explains to Asia that “Death is the veil which those who live call life: / They sleep—and it is lifted” (3.3.13-14), and the Spirit of the Hour later mentions that the “painted veil, by those who were, called life” is “torn aside” (3.4.190-92). Here, life and death are rendered as two ways of understanding the same process. To sleep is to enter dream consciousness and gain access to the One, as Asia and Panthea do in Act 2. In the One, life is in accordance with reality, which is initially obscured by the painted veil; tearing it aside reveals the One. However, because the “Painted Veil” sonnet contains an alternate version of these lines, their

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Shelley's conclusion to *Alastor*. See Chapter 1 p. 53

expression in *Prometheus* should not be thought of as Shelley's last word on the matter. In the sonnet, Shelley changes his tune: "Lift *not* the painted veil, which those who live / Call Life" (1-2; my italics). He condones living in the illusion and is skeptical that there is "truth" to be "found" at all behind the veil: "I knew one who had lifted it . . . he sought, / For his lost heart was tender, things to love / But found them not" (7-9; Shelley's ellipsis). Shelley admits that as much as one may desire Love as the essence of all "being," it is not necessarily reciprocated. Behind the veil "lurk Fear / And Hope," which Shelley thinks of as "twin Destinies" (2-3): like Love and evil, they cannot be fully separated from each other. As Tibetan Buddhist teacher Lodro Rinzler argues, "hope is just an inversion of fear" (123): each term expresses the same logic but from opposite perspectives, one optimistic, one pessimistic. Buddhist practice is to move forward in spite of uncertainty without clinging to expectations what "should" happen at a given end. In the "Painted Veil" sonnet, Shelley realizes the essence of Buddhism's understanding of the concept of hope, exposing its conceptual problems in relation to fear. But at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley relies on hope to end suffering at some future time, which leads him back to a dualistic paradigm in that he resists things as they are in his present.

At the close of Act 3, the Spirit of the Hour's important monologue attests to the fact that Jupiter's decline has restored hope to the world: "No more inscribed, as o'er the gates of hell, / 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here'" (3.4.135-36). This newfound hope marks the utopian society that Shelley imagines is the next best thing to entering eternity. However, utopia implies a dualistic distinction between Love and evil, and it opens up a space for Shelley to assign a self-nature to things. Utopia exists because it is singular and

separate from evil. Yet as we have seen above, this is not really the case in the philosophy Shelley is developing. Shelley fears the return of evil, though he remains hopeful of the ultimate end to both mutability and evil. He seeks a stable and lasting ontological framework that will allow for the kind of existence afforded to Asia and Prometheus, but is presently unavailable to humankind, who can rule over mutability “like a slave,” but remains nonetheless affected by it.

Act 4 begins with the “[s]pectres” of “dead Hours . . . bear[ing] Time to his tomb in eternity” (4.12-14). This is not an indication of stagnant existence. Mutability is ended, but this does not mean all movement ceases. Rather, Shelley’s eternity beyond time is rich with life. Even the dead Hours are “unite[d]” with Spirits (4.79). But Shelley implies that the Hours’s new vivification is not a recovery of the Hours’s previous mode of “being,” which was oriented towards death and destruction:

Once the hungry Hours were hounds
Which chased the Day, like a bleeding deer
And it limped and stumbled with many wounds
Through the nightly dells of the desert year. (4.73-74)

In eternity, the destructive effects of mutability are recast as *process*, which includes all things. Process accounts for variability, although ultimately it keeps things as self-stable entities: things do not change, but they do move.¹⁵⁸ The Spirits attest to this fact by singing of their origin:

We come from the mind

¹⁵⁸ In *Shelley’s Process* (1988), Jerrold E. Hogle argues that Shelley presents the self as an “illusion” (14) that arises in conjunction with the experiences of memory and time (14-16). This process of self-definition leads him to posit that in Acts 3 and 4 of *Prometheus*, there is a kind of movement within Shelley’s concept of “being” (193-212). I agree with these points, but have reached a different conclusion. Hogle reads this movement as part of a mytho-poetics that subsumes Shelleyan “being” in such a way that self becomes completely elided into process. However, I disagree on the grounds that Shelley emphasizes an individual element of “being” that accommodates variability, allowing it to remain set off from otherness while existing within it—which is the appeal of the eternity of Act 4.

Of human kind
 Which was late so dusk and obscene and blind;
 Now 'tis an Ocean
 Of clear emotion
 A Heaven of serene and mighty motion. (4.93-98)

It is important to note that the Spirits are freed from the singular human mind, but they nonetheless exist as independent self-entities. As such, they lay the foundation of Shelley's eternity as a mixture of both Buddhist and Christian ideas.¹⁵⁹ Shelley, ever aware that the One exists behind the many appearances of reality, draws it to the foreground in Act 4. The One is no longer the underlying principle of reality, but its obvious appearance. It is inescapably clear that things are interconnected and interdependent, and thus Love becomes humankind's guiding principle and universal maxim. I say "universal" because although Shelley imagines eternity to be "[b]eyond Heaven's constellated wilderness" (4.532), it exists on an earthly plane: "a Heaven where . . . Heaven could never be" (4.165). Love allows for all "beings" to be seen as self, rendering otherness obsolete: "Man, one harmonious Soul of many a soul / Whose nature is its own divine controul / Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea" (4.400-02).

The "One soul" is a multiplicity of individual existences. But this does not compromise one's individual self-sovereignty: "Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought / Of love and might to be divided not" (4.394-95). The unity Shelley imagines makes the plural "men" inappropriate, as an individual human experience ("man") is representative of all human possibilities. Shelley emphasizes the importance of one's singular experience of life, one's existence as a "chain of linked thought." Individuality

¹⁵⁹ James B. Twitchell reads Act 4 as Shelley reworking his philosophy along "proto-Christian lines" (43). However, I differ in that his treatment of self does not exactly match Christian philosophy, and I insist on the importance of evaluating Act 4 with Buddhist philosophy also in mind.

cannot be overcome, but it can find itself in the totality of existence. For Shelley, this ontology does not efface individual self-sovereignty. One retains one's "Will" (4.406), that is, individual existence and the proclivity for "mean passions, bad delights" and "selfish cares" associated with it (4.406-07). Now that Love is the essence of reality, these negative self-qualities lose their power, and the self is thereby enhanced through the power of Love. All other things are given to movement, but the self is made into a stable entity, which brings Shelley from a Buddhist ontology back to a Christian one, as it allows for him to think of evil and the pain and suffering it causes as separate from human "being." Shelley characterizes "Hate and Fear and Pain" as "light-vanquished shadows" that are to "[l]eave Man, who was a many-sided mirror" (4.381-82): a non-self entity that is to be made solid in eternity. He thus reneges on Act 1's revelation that evil is a latent capacity of human "being" that can only be understood relativistically, though this relativism is an effect of mutability, which will end in eternity.

Shelley's idea of eternity does not fully cohere with the standards of Christianity, as he imagines that humans themselves must find a way to usher in eternity. He has not fully given up on the idea of revolution, but finds that it needs to be paired with a rapture, which here we should not think of as a supernatural act. The rapture Shelley imagines is a mental revolution that brings human consciousness in line with moral decency. The human mind must become its own saviour and its own God, as it alone has the power to create. This principle is important because at the end of the play, Demogorgon announces that the timeless eternity of Act 4 is not actually stable. It is subject to the same movement as the things it contains:

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance,—
These are the seals of that most firm assurance

Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
 And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
 Mother of many acts and hours, should free
 The serpent that would clasp her with his length,—
 These are the spells by which to reassume
 An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
 To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;
 To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;
 To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
 Neither to change nor falter nor repent:
 This like thy glory, Titan! is to be
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory. (4.562-78)

The return of Demogorgon reintroduces Shelley's split commitments between an eternity both outside of and inside of time. Eternity is stable as long as the qualities associated with it are present. Indeed, they are always available, which allows for eternity to be restored after its "infirmity." That eternity is always at hand makes it possible to suffer life's mutability. These momentary glimpses of eternity anticipate a future rapture that will free the eternal from the temporality that obscures it. This solution keeps humanity within the flux of mutability but has them anxiously looking forward to its eventual demise: hoping until "Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates" (573-74). Shelley thus anticipates a final apocalyptic moment when the world will become what it was destined to become.¹⁶⁰

However, Demogorgon's speech indicates the fragility of this newfound freedom.

Only divine figures like Prometheus and Asia can abide in an eternity beyond time.

¹⁶⁰ Wasserman argues that "The scope of Promethean action is cosmic, not human; its end is apocalyptic, not utopian" (112). However, I argue that it is nonetheless important to assess Shelley's modelling his earthly heaven on utopian ideals, as they philosophically position him against understanding all things, including evil, as part of his own nature. By doing this, Shelley resists the Buddhist conclusions he seems to be working towards.

Humans must enact their own salvation and create eternity on earth by using the Promethean model of simultaneous defiance, forgiveness, and Love in order to purge human consciousness of the capacity for wrong doing, effectively to have the mind come to a peaceful stasis that mimics eternity by eliding the experience that time passes. Shelley desires an eternity beyond time but finds that humanity can only access the eternal from within time, which will have to do for now. He thus appeals to an idea like nirvana, though nirvana does not fully appeal to him. Shelley seeks to abide in nirvana, to free himself from the cyclic existence of birth-and-death, not fully accepting that birth-and-death is nirvana. Act 4 evinces a mental phantasmagoria that is not unlike the drug-induced visions of eternity we saw in Chapter 3,¹⁶¹ making Demogorgon's final speech the come-down from the high Shelley seeks to restore. Yet it is important not to see this intoxication as diminishing the similarity between Shelley's philosophy and Buddhism. Although Shelley does not fully dismiss the concept of the self, he casts aspersions on a new model of self-understanding that does not rely on a dualism between self and other. That Shelley cannot fully resolve his philosophical knot without returning to dualistic notions is symptomatic of his Western Christian philosophical orientation and his undying idealism.

¹⁶¹ Indeed, Twitchell argues that Act 4 can be understood in terms of a "psychedelic consciousness" (33).

Chapter 5

Dying into Life: The Great Death in Keats's Hyperion Poems

*Chao Chou asked T'ou Tzu, "How is it when a man who has died the great death returns to life?"
T'ou Tzu said, "He must not go by night: he must get there in daylight."*

~ Case 41, *The Blue Cliff Record*¹⁶²

John Keats grapples with Buddhist themes more acutely than any other author considered in this study. His life was marked by death, his own and that of those close to him. At age 8, Keats suffered the loss of his father, the first in a string of family deaths that also claimed his mother, grandparents, and eventually his brother Tom in December 1818, whom John was nursing while writing the first *Hyperion* poem. Keats had little choice but to confront the existential impermanence underlying reality and the suffering it causes, and the influence of this confrontation can be read in *Hyperion* (abandoned 1818, published 1820) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (abandoned 1819, first published 1857). These poems show that Keats, by exploring impermanence and suffering, had entered the philosophical terrain Buddhism is founded on, and had reached the same conclusions regarding the existence of the self. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse dated 27 Oct. 1818, one month after he began writing *Hyperion*, Keats addresses "the poetical Character" his temperament falls under, claiming that "it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing

¹⁶² My epigraph to this chapter is a *koan*, which, literally translated, means "public case" and carries a legal connotation. Koans are unique to Zen Buddhism and are emphasized in the Rinzai tradition. They appear to be non-sensical stories or questions. However, their illogical nature is meant to frustrate dualistic thinking, impelling students towards realization. Each koan addresses a fundamental Buddhist truth and can be understood as a moment in which enlightenment is realized or tested. This particular koan addresses the duality of life and death, suggesting that neither can be thought of in opposition to the other.

and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated” (*Letters* 226; my italics). He elaborates that a “Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body,” be it human form or nature itself, which “annihilate[s]” his self (547). Thus, he cannot claim self-sovereignty over his existence. In this regard, his ontological philosophy is similar to Shelley’s in *Prometheus Unbound*. However, Keats’s “negative capability,” which I will return to, allows him to deal with ontological uncertainty without reaching a particular conclusion on the matter.

In this chapter, I argue that Keats, in the *Hyperions*, tries to account for his “being” dualistically, but these distinctions continually break down. The self, he finds, cannot be dissociated from its other, making the pain of the other the pain of the self. Keats struggles with this ontological ungrounding. But unlike Shelley, he does not return to the familiar comforts of Christian philosophical convention in order to re-establish ontological distance between his “being” and suffering. Keats’s willingness to endure suffering in the *Hyperions* allows him to confront self-emptiness directly, that is, without an anaesthetic or anodyne of any kind, an experience Keats refers to in the first *Hyperion* as “dying into life.” In *Hyperion*, Keats, then, is not dying the little death of ecstatic intoxication seen in previous chapters. Rather, he comes head-to-head with Zen Buddhism’s Great Death, though he struggles to dramatize the experience without framing it in terms of intoxication, which appears in both poems, but not as the source of ecstasy. In this regard, Keats’s ontological considerations once again resemble Shelley’s, who, as I argued in my previous chapter, uses intoxication heuristically. But for Keats, such intoxication is only a nexus into a much more totalizing kind of self-loss—one that

seeks not the eternal, but to re-enter life with a new understanding of reality after having come to terms with death.

In *The Fall*, Keats's speaker becomes incapacitated after drinking a mysterious draught, which is powerful but fortified by neither "Asian poppy, nor elixir fine" (1.47). That he speaks of returning to life upon regaining consciousness implies that the incapacitation was experienced as a death. The speaker does not leave his self and then return to it; he leaves *life* and then returns to it, though life and death can no longer be thought of as discrete stages: the speaker "hast felt / What 'tis to die and live again" (1.141-42). When Keats appeals to intoxication, he does not do so as a means to glimpse eternity in order to recoup his existence amidst a world of mutability and impermanence. Keats is not concerned with eternity; his desire is to come to terms with his "being" in the here and now. Although Keats does not succumb to the ecstatic intoxication of eternity, the *Hyperion* poems are nevertheless symptomatic of a kind of Zen sickness. In these poems, Keats encounters the Great Death, but struggles to find his way back to life as such. Instead, he remains haunted by the death of his self, and the *Hyperions* are Keats's attempt to understand this state of life-in-death. Keats contracted tuberculosis—the disease that would eventually kill him—while struggling to finish the *Hyperion* poem he had imagined. As such, his own death is bound up in his process of composition and thus the existential crisis the *Hyperions* explore is ultimately with death itself. Keats's failure to complete either poem attests to his inability to achieve a full understanding of his life-in-death and thus he remains ontologically adrift, bringing him in accord with the mode of Zen sickness diagnosed by Sheg Yen in my Chapter 1.

My analysis in this chapter is broken into two sections. In the first, I address the thematic considerations of the *Hyperion* poems and suggest that these poems reflect an attempt to continue the ontological philosophy that Keats had begun developing in other works and letters. By attending to this philosophical development, we see how the *Hyperions* explore a self-less ontology and its relationship to time, as well as the ways these poems intersect with fundamentally Buddhist themes, particularly regarding life and death. With this understanding in mind, I move on to my second section, in which I analyze the poems as texts that seek to define the ontology that Keats's philosophical development leads him to realize, as both texts intersect with time, memory, self, and suffering.

5.1 Time and Potential Ontologies of Self in the *Hyperions*

The plot of *Hyperion* is structured around the aftermath of a war fought between the Titans and the Olympians, focusing on the ontological changes each group experiences as they rise and fall from power. But the throne-succession model Keats begins with proves inadequate to dramatize the ontological and existential themes his poem explores, prompting him to rework the material not as an epic, but as dream vision, though the poem's revision as *The Fall of Hyperion* was also to be abandoned. Officially, Keats gave up the *Hyperion* poem due his discomfort with its "Miltonic inversions" that rendered it too similar to *Paradise Lost*, as he claims in a letter sent to John Hamilton Reynolds 22 Sept. 1819 (*Letters* 384). However, Keats's difficulties in elaborating his ontological and existential considerations were a far bigger issue. Walter Jackson Bate and Dorothy Van Ghent have both commented on the formal problems of Keats's

original design for the poem, suggesting it was inadequate to adumbrate the themes he was exploring.¹⁶³ Bate argues that as an epic “*Hyperion* was contrary to the development of romantic poetry,” which he sees as being a “personal” exploration, which is incompatible with the objectivity he associates with epic (408).¹⁶⁴ This issue is of particular concern for the way Keats imagines power transferring from the Titans to the Olympians. Objectively considered, the Olympians displace the Titans. But Keats struggles to imbue the Olympians with any quality that truly sets them apart from the Titans. Rather than something new and modern, the Olympians bear all the scars of the generation they have ostensibly left behind. Van Ghent argues that this “problem” has been “noted by most readers of *Hyperion*” (185), and she suggests that although

Keats projects his narrative on the pattern of the violent succession of father by son [i.e., Titans by Olympians], the Titans have to be beautiful and beneficent . . . because their beauty and beneficence gives necessary ethical support to the fact that they have the role of fathers—whose sons, in duplicating their functions as planetary and weather daemons, are their reincarnations. (187)

Van Ghent uses reincarnation as a way to think through a transmission of essence from one body/form to another.¹⁶⁵ That is, the Olympians are a new *form* of the Titans that preserves but replaces these Titanic identities. Indeed, reincarnation is an apt way to discuss the relation between the Titans and the Olympians.

¹⁶³ Bate notes, too, that *Hyperion*'s similarity to *Paradise Lost* was only moderate in terms of rhetorical conventions (such as noun-adjective inversion) and not out of step with Keats's contemporaries—including those who did not seek to imitate Milton (408-09). He comments that “[w]here Keats really begins to approach Milton is . . . in rhythm and pausing” (409).

¹⁶⁴ Tilottama Rajan makes a similar argument about why the poem could not be completed under this model, noting that “[t]he end of *Hyperion* raises curious problems and suggests an emergent awareness of the split in the poem's strata of awareness that makes it impossible to complete” (*Dark* 159). I would add that this new awareness is that the Olympians are ontologically linked with the Titans.

¹⁶⁵ Rajan similarly argues along the lines of rebirth (*Dark* 162).

Yet I wish to note that from a Buddhist perspective, Van Ghent's model of reincarnation is untenable, as it hinges on a self-nature that is transferred from one "being" to another and thus is contrary to the doctrine of emptiness. To be clear, Van Ghent's methodology makes no commitments to Buddhist philosophy, and, taken on its own terms, her argument is not problematic. However, I posit that reading the relationship between the Titans and Olympians under a Buddhist model of reincarnation more accurately reveals the problem of self that Keats explores in *Hyperion*. Because Buddhism does not endorse the existence of a self/soul, there is no entity to be reincarnated *qua* reproduced as a distinctly new form. Various Buddhist traditions understand reincarnation in different ways and place differing degrees of emphasis on it as something that happens after death. The Zen school de-emphasizes this sort of understanding, seeing reincarnation as an important teaching about the present experience of one's life. The self, having no inherent existence, is reborn in various forms over the course of one's life: self appears in many different forms (over time), but none of them constitute an essence that is passed on and received by a future self. Each self-iteration "exists" interdependently with the phenomenological conditions under which it arises, and thus Zen practice focuses on realizing the self as an experience that relapses and remits. In contrast to Ghent, I do not see the Olympians as duplications of Titanic self-identity. Rather, the Titans and Olympians act as two modes of ontological understanding that cannot escape each other. That is, the Olympians' rise to power connotes an ontological splitting rather than a duplication.

The Titans are existentially tied to their identities as gods, and thus their godhood connotes an ontology that sees its self as fixed and permanent. This is why they

experience self-ruin in the aftermath of the Olympian revolution, which reveals that they do not actually possess the self-sovereignty they had previously assumed.¹⁶⁶ In Book 1, Saturn poignantly attests to this fact:

I am gone
 Away from my own bosom: I have left
 My strong identity, my real self,
 Somewhere between the throne and where I sit
 Here on this spot of earth. (1.112-16)

Being unable to adapt to an ontology in flux, Saturn finds existence in a world of change to be existentially crippling, as it effaces the self-sovereignty that defines his godhood.¹⁶⁷

As Michael Sider argues,

[t]he Titans' fall is a fall from the innocence of a world of pleasure and transcendence into a world of experience and time. Keats's representation of this fall permits him to express the concept of diachronous time, a historical awareness that is forced on the Titans by their fall, but which the Titans, as ideal forms without the ability to comprehend time, can experience only as the source of disunifying knowledge. (115)

Sider elaborates that they are “define[d] by their inability to take part in the changes time brings to the world” (119), rendering their “existence . . . inherently non-developmental” (120). However, Titanic godhood is contrasted by Olympian godhood, which is characterized by a lack of self-nature: the very thing Saturn is bemoaning because for him

¹⁶⁶ Nancy M. Goslee argues along similar lines that “Saturn’s physical stasis, and that of all the Titans, is in terms of the emerging plot—as readers and Titans learn of it—the result of their fall from divinity, of their inability to control the forces of the natural world. Moreover, Saturn’s physical stasis is accompanied by emotional turmoil—further evidence, suggests the admonishing sky-god Coelus, for the Titans’ loss of divinity” (135-36).

¹⁶⁷ Martin Aske argues likewise that “Saturn is, then, a thing of fragments; parts of him are magnified but never the whole. But . . . as an emblem of silent desolation the figure of Saturn is overdetermined” (89-90). That is, Saturn is defined by his fragmentary “being”: the various “fragments” speak to his “being,” but he is incapable of bringing those fragments together. Thus, he cannot reclaim his self-sovereignty. This struggle is mirrored by the poem’s fragmentariness, which suggests Keats was unable to put “self” back together once it had been ruptured.

it is akin to death.¹⁶⁸ Apollo's deification is depicted in similar terms as Saturn's loss of godhood. Apollo's experience is "like the struggle at the gate of death; / Or liker still to one who should take leave / Of pale immortal death, and . . . die into life" (3.126-30). It is important to note that Saturn's fall from divinity is also a dying into life understood from a different perspective, which becomes the basis for the ontological linkage between Saturn and Apollo: one loses divinity, while the other gains it through the very same mode of self-loss. But this begs the question, what was Apollo before he was deified?

Van Ghent considers "the apparently paradoxical situation that [John] Middleton Murry points out when he asks: 'Why should Apollo, who was already a god, endure such agony in order to become what he already was?'" (192), responding that

Apollo has to be reborn, not to become what he already was, which was the Romantic poet fevered by contradiction and chaos of sheer multiplicity impinging on his nerves, but to become the truly Apolline god of unity, measure, harmony. But the Titans already represent unity, measure, harmony. The Titans *are* Apolline The intellectual intention of the poem—the theme of "progress"—is frustrated by the unconscious archetypal impulsion The impasse reached at the end of *Hyperion*, where it is evidently impossible merely to turn Apollo into his opposite, a Titan, accounts for Keats's hopeless struggle with the poem[.] (192-93; Van Ghent's italics)

The Titans and Olympians do not represent two discrete camps, but rather are ontologically interdependent: the Titans symbolize an ego-self identity that is ruptured by the inner revolution represented by the Olympian war, ushering in a new ontological

¹⁶⁸ Goslee makes a similar argument, but does not identify the transition from Titanic to Olympian rule as ontological. She suggests that "[d]eity is transformed from a 'human form divine' which is external, physical, and sculptural in its representation to what we might term a 'human feeling divine' which envisages and responds to the circumstances of mortality. This is indeed an evolutionary change in the course of both cosmic and individual history Yet if the opposition between Titan and Olympian represents this change most subjectively and broadly, in fact consciousness and self-consciousness deepen in all the characters in the course of the poem, so that Apollo is only the final perceiving and feeling and envisaging character in a progression of them" (137). I would add, too, that for Apollo this is more accurately described as a deepened understanding of "being" rather than of self, as I read his deification as a moment of self-loss.

mode that renders the two divine castes as utterly inseparable. Keats advances an ontology in which self and other become indistinct through a realization of life as a process of birth-and-death, but more profoundly and completely than the authors considered in Chapters 2 and 3. Through these means, Keats seems to have reached an understanding of the basis of Zen philosophy, but his difficulties with elaborating this position in the *Hyperions* are symptomatic of his being unable to fully account for the alternative mode of “being” he had realized but still did not completely understand. Keats certainly had great insights into ontological self-lessness and his philosophical similarity to Zen is undeniable. Still, I am less optimistic than Richard P. Benton that Keats had intuited a full understanding of Zen at the time he began work on the *Hyperions*.¹⁶⁹ Benton suggests that Keats’s difficulty with articulating this philosophy in *The Fall of Hyperion* is due to the poem’s “Greek mythological machinery g[etting] in the way of [Keats’s] ideas” (42). Yet I argue that Keats’s difficulty with finishing the *Hyperion* poem indicates that there were parts of Zen philosophy with which Keats continued to struggle. I read the *Hyperions* as part of Keats’s process of development towards a Zen awakening and not as a final conclusion on the matter. The poems put forth a new ontological understanding, but both fragment before that ontology can be fully articulated. Written at the time Keats himself contracted tuberculous, both poems are to a large extent unfinished because of Keats’s impending death, fragmentary because his existence is cut short.

¹⁶⁹ Benton argues that passages of *Endymion* and the Great Odes depict states analogous to nirvana, and he posits that Keats’s writing offers evidence of his having had several enlightenment experiences (33-47). I agree that Keats’s insight is the most penetrating of any author considered in this study. However, in light of McGann’s work in *The Romantic Ideology*, I think it prudent to observe that such examples may be influenced by a desire for a particular mode of self-representation.

In my previous chapter, I explored Shelley's use of Christian philosophy to fill in the "gaps" that opened up as he moved closer towards a Buddhist understanding of reality and self-nature. Like Shelley, Keats has a similar tendency of borrowing Christian terminology to explain his thinking but finds that such concepts need to be re-theorized in order to accommodate the new mode of "being" that both authors encounter. Specifically, Keats uses the term soul to describe the apparent chronological unity of human subjectivity. Ironically, he sees this not as the basis of self-sovereignty, but as humans' capacity to negate their self-nature, allowing self to associate with other. Unlike Shelley in *Prometheus*, Keats, in the *Hyperions*, does not arrive at this model through a Christian understanding of forgiveness that allows for the position of power to shift back to the oppressed and thus to facilitate a healing process that has the eradication of pain and suffering as its goal. Rather, Keats's capacity for negative capability allows him to see pain and suffering as necessary features of the human condition. He even suggests that the human capacity to continue living despite suffering can only be adequately understood as part of a spiritual element inseparable from life, and he posits that the major religions of his day were systematized by abstracting upon this spiritual element. Keats develops three key concepts to elaborate his thinking on these existential and spiritual issues. Yet these concepts should not be understood as three independent pieces of his philosophy that work together, but as a single thesis about the self's relation to reality that is developed through successive iterations, nominally distinguished as "negative capability," the "pleasure thermometer," and "The Vale of Soul-Making."

In a letter to George and Tom Keats dated 21 Dec. 1817, John elaborates his theory of negative capability: "that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties,

mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (*Letters* 71).

Keats’s sentiment here is important because it implies a willingness to let go of the mind’s chaotic activity from which one draws out and interprets their self-narrative in order to understand how one relates to that experience. By giving up on fact and reason, negative capability speaks to one’s capacity to suspend the authority of the self-driven mind in favour of sensory rather than intellectual experience, shifting the locus from one’s *relation* to the experience, to one’s *experience* of the experience. On 30 Jan. 1818, a month after his letter on negative capability, Keats returned to these ideas in a letter sent to John Taylor prescribing emendations to lines of *Endymion*. In this letter, Keats claims that the following lines “set before [him] the gradations of happiness,” acting “like a kind of pleasure thermometer” (90):

Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
 A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
 Full alchemiz’d, and free of space. Behold
 The clear religion of heaven! Fold
 A rose leaf round thy finger’s taperness,
 And soothe thy lips: hush, when the airy stress
 Of music’s kiss impregnates the free winds,
 And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
 Aeolian magic from their lucid wombs:

· · · · ·
 Feel we these things? — that moment have we stept
 Into a sort of oneness, and our state
 Is like a floating spirit’s. But there are
 Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
 More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
 To the chief intensity: the crown of these
 Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
 Upon the forehead of humanity.
 All its more ponderous and bulky worth
 Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
 A steady splendour; but at the tip-top,
 There hangs by unseen film, an orb’d drop
 Of light, and that is love: its influence,

Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
 At which we start and fret; till in the end,
 Melting into its radiance, we blend,
 Mingle, and so become a part of it[.] (1.777-811)

Here, Keats indicates that happiness is not an intellectual exercise: happiness emerges as a response to *feeling* one's environment rather than thinking about it. He describes a moment in which mental activity is interrupted and one is beckoned into the "self-destroying" sensory world and enters "a sort of oneness" with the activity that ruptured self-awareness ("become a part of it"). Keats thinks of this rupture *qua* sensory takeover as the path to divinity, though the divine is not personally won. It is only accessed by entering into a "friendship" with the conditions of life, that is, by not intellectually fixating on them as either meeting or not meeting one's personal expectations and desires. (Keats essentially advocates for the opposite of the position Vathek endorses in Chapter 2.) For Keats, the more completely one can enter into this state of self-lessness, the happier one will be. Thus, the process works like a thermometer used to gauge one's present level of self-attachment, which Keats figures to be inversely correlated to happiness.

Assessing happiness in this way, Keats rises to roughly the same level as Shelley in Chapter 3, but he surpasses this level by accepting pain and suffering as a necessary part of this process. For Keats, if happiness cannot be found amidst suffering—the face of death in particular—then it is not truly happiness. Before going any further, I wish to point out Keats's model-in-development touches on the foundations of Zen practice, which is focused on dissolving the self and accepting present conditions as one's "being," a practice that reveals that when happiness is not sought (by the self, for the self), it is always at hand. Keats also addresses both emptiness and impermanence: happiness has

no self nature and thus will go in and out of “being.” However, Keats’s position within Western Christian philosophical trends is apparent in the above lines, where he thinks of this practice as enacting the “religion of heaven.” Keats himself was no Christian,¹⁷⁰ but was nevertheless obliged to use Christian religious language as a means to extrapolate on his spiritual ideas, as the language of Christianity is the spiritual language most readily available to Western Europeans. These limitations are more or less sidestepped in the pleasure thermometer, but in “The Vale of Soul-Making,” Keats’s fullest iteration of these ideas, Christian semantics become more of a hindrance, as Keats moves past the usual understanding that “soul” and “self” refer to an ontological essence.

The vale of soul-making is a concept Keats explains in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, dated 14 Feb.-3 May 1819 in which he comments on the “use of the world” (334-35). Keats, in opposition to Christian convention, thinks of the soul as something to be developed over the course of one’s life rather than as a self-stabilizing essence implanted at birth. Keats sees man as being “formed by circumstances” to which his “heart” responds by “fortif[y]ing or alter[ing] . . . his nature,” and this altered nature is itself “his soul” (336). Moreover, he sees suffering as instrumental in this process: “Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?” (335), as Intelligence, on its own, exists “without Identity” (336)—which is what transmutes Intelligence into a soul. Keats finds value in suffering due to its capacity to render one individually unique—as no two people suffer exactly the same way—but, at the same time, identical with others, given that suffering of some kind is

¹⁷⁰ G. Douglas Atkins notes that “Keats consistently expressed disapproval of conventional religion, especially Christianity, its founder, its fundamental text, and its clergy, he tried on different replacements largely of his own making. The ‘vale of soul-making’ is perhaps his most extended treatment [of religious ideas]” (“Grander”45).

inescapable. Individual identity is important for Keats, not because it grants self-sovereignty, but because it offers the possibility for a universal matrix of self-other relations: identity connotes an awareness of subjective experience that allows for subjective experience to be understood objectively as a condition from which one cannot be removed. The self knows itself only because it exists in a world of otherness it can (temporarily) define itself against. Otherness becomes the “environment” through which the self is experienced, and thus the self suffers otherness as a condition of its own “being.” Self and other, then, are interdependent, denoting a unity rather than a division. Keats thus experiences the same kind of self-other conflation seen in Chapter 3, but is more successful in resolving the tension it causes than are Coleridge or De Quincey.

To illustrate this unity, Keats imagines a rose’s experience of itself: “suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself—but there comes a cold wind, a hot sun—it can not escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances—they are as native to the world as to itself—no more can man be happy in spite, the worldly elements prey upon his nature” (334). Humans live under the same conditions, though the annoyances are often caused by other humans. But Keats encourages us to see each other as a worldly condition that allows “being” to understand itself as neither self nor other, a realization that can only be made by confronting the nature of suffering. This confrontation is itself the process of soul-making, a spiritual exercise Keats believes to be superior to “the chrystain religion” (335) and that he thinks is likely the “Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption [i.e., other religions]” (336). In these sentences, Keats explicitly outgrows the Christian philosophical model, and this letter, considered generally, suggests his realization of Buddhism’s fundamental tenets. By

theorizing the soul as both individually unique and at the same time identical with all other souls, Keats intersects with the issue of time as an important remainder of the Western philosophical model Keats inherits. Keats's soul-identity model remains split between acknowledging the importance of time and seeing it as ultimately irrelevant. That is, the soul-identity model places a particular value on one's chronological self-narrative, but nevertheless implies that model's obsolescence, as such a narrative is really only an individual manifestation of a greater unity (the *identity* of souls). For Keats, historical interpretation and self-definition are a poetic exercise. As such, they revolve around a confrontation with self-lessness, given that Keats understands "the poetical character" to have no self. This idea, along with the "pleasure thermometer" and "soul-making," compose the basis of Keats's ontological understanding at the time he was writing the *Hyperions*, which becomes something of a literary thought experiment to test these ideas, particularly their relationship to "being" and time.

Michael O'Neill argues that *Hyperion* is "[a]bove all . . . a poem which uses its story to explore Keats's view of the role of the poet in relation to history, but fails to complete itself as a story. It is a Romantic fragment poem whose fragmentariness articulates its inability to believe full-bloodedly in a liberal, optimistic version of history" ("When"153). However, this effect is not limited to *Hyperion*. Both poems intersect with history in this way, and find that narrative fails to secure the self's existential reality, as these narratives bespeak the very otherness they seek to define the self against. History and time offer Keats a means to explain and account for change and growth. Yet in the *Hyperions*, Keats finds that so-called changes, occurring over time, from one thing to another fail to produce any real distinction. History, rather than working to establish self-

narrative, seems only to efface it, an effect that draws history's apparent movement and ontological status into question: if history fails as a mode of self-definition, history itself must be contrived, that is, defined relative to other conditions, and self-narrative, being propped up by history, must, then, also be false. One perceives change in the world, but the antecedent reality is not replaced by a subsequent one that is truly other to the former's conditions, but rather re-positions the antecedent in a new form that *replaces* rather than displaces the established principle.

Keats imagines ontological shifts taking place, but he cannot escape the mode of "being" that his poetic narratives seek to systematically outmode (i.e., the self). He remains haunted by a past (self), which continues to intrude on the present and presents a challenge to the possibility of linear growth. In this way, Keats's ontological struggle resembles the one Beckford dramatizes in *Vathek*, as I explored in Chapter 2. But in contrast to *Vathek*, the *Hyperion* poems only tenuously link history to self. As Joel Faflak argues, "the *Hyperions* posit an identity that is (de)mystified by its (lack of) transcendence over its past and (de)constructed at its threshold with the future" ("Romantic" 306).¹⁷¹ Rather than a concrete change from one ontological reality to another, existence becomes cyclical, playing itself out only to re-posit its initial conditions to start the cycle again but in a new form: the Titans are re-formed as the Olympians, *Hyperion* as *The Fall*—which, in turn, reworks the "division" between Saturn and Apollo, but introduces dreamers and poets (and fanatics) as new ontological categories that are no more capable of being sectioned off than Keats's original "division"

¹⁷¹ Faflak continues by noting that "[t]he poems resist historicization . . . in the way that Romanticism resists historicization. That Romanticism is defensively concerned about how it would be historicized by its future readers is symptomatic of how it already anticipates the limitations any historicist analyses of it" ("Romantic" 306).

between the Titans and Olympians. He continues to ask himself, what is “self” and what is “other”? In *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats tries again to conceptualize a model that will account for the ontological unity he has realized. He attempts to define new ontological categories, but finds they exist as *potentialities* of each other that cannot truly be separated.

The Fall opens by setting up a dichotomy between fanatics and poets. The former refers to those who seek “[a] paradise for a sect” (1.2), a religious truth to resolve the pain of earthly “being,” and the latter, an individual expression of personal spiritual experience that resists orthodoxy:

For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
With the fine spell of words alone can save
Imagination from the sable charm
And dumb enchantment. (1.9-11)

But these categories begin to break down by the end of the first verse paragraph, as Keats is unable to say with any certainty whether or not his poem is the dream of a poet or fanatic. Despite his writing poetry, Keats is uncomfortable identifying himself as a poet and considers the possibility of his own fanaticism, that he is merely sketching another religious model that uses poetry seductively rather than philosophically to offer a vision of a paradise for a sect only. Keats is thus unnerved most of all by the possibility that he may never fully understand the difference between poet and fanatic during his life, suggesting that only posterity—and not he—will be able to decide his status:

every man whose soul is not a clod
Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved,
And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.
Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse
Be Poet’s or Fanatic’s will be known
When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave. (1.13-18)

Keats, then, is figured as writing himself to death. However, his impetus for this is to write *for his life*, to truly understand what his “being” is and means in the face of death. This conflation between life and death becomes a structural apparatus for the *The Fall*’s composition. Indeed, both poems dramatize a meeting of death during life that only the poet-figure is capable of realizing and working with, a role occupied by Apollo in the first poem.¹⁷² As such, the poet meets his death and survives it: life cannot be separated from death any more than poet can be separated from fanatic. Despite this undecidability, Keats attempts to derive a system that will account for the ontological self-lessness the *Hyperions* address.¹⁷³ Thus, Keats’s inability to understand himself as either poet or fanatic is only a preamble to the even more difficult distinction he tries to elaborate between poets and dreamers.¹⁷⁴ In theory, *The Fall* presents “poet and dreamer” as “distinct”: “[d]iverse, sheer opposite, antipodes” (1.199-200). The poet “pours out a balm over the world,” and the dreamer “vexes it” (1.201-02). But in praxis, Keats finds that positing dualistic categories in *The Fall* reveals the same ontological inseparability that derailed the poem’s first iteration. The poet and the dreamer constellate the same faulty distinction seen between Titans and Olympians.

¹⁷² Van Ghent imagines a similar process when she addresses Apollo’s psyche splitting into “dark” and “light,” which she sees as a struggle between “ego” and “identity” (196). Due to the poem’s ontological themes, I prefer to think of this split in terms of life and death, as these things are made apparent via the self’s emptiness.

¹⁷³ Rajan notes that Keats’s “inconsistent dichotomies” suggest “that what he is looking for is a third category of poetic vision which eludes classification in such standard antitheses” (*Dark* 191). I agree that this is what Keats is looking for, but I am not convinced that Keats knows this is what he is seeking, as I see his difficulty with these terms as symptomatic of his inability to realize what it is he seeks.

¹⁷⁴ As O’Neill argues, “[t]he poem is never able to clarify its sense of the difference between the dreams of poet and fanatic (any more than it is able fully to accept Moneta’s assertion that ‘The poet and the dreamer are distinct’” (151). I wish to add that the distinction between poet and dreamer is really a reconceptualization of this dichotomy, but one that grants Keats no more ontological clarity.

The difficulty in discerning the difference between poets and dreamers is that dreamers seem to possess the attributes needed to become poets, but they get distracted by ecstatic visions and the self-aggrandizement such visions offer. Dreamers are effectively imitation poets: “mock lyrists, large self-worshippers / And careless hectorers” who produce “proud bad verse” (1.207), and thus do not meet the Keatsian ideal of the self-less poet. The poem’s speaker, identified as a dreamer, shares an uneasy kinship with these figures: “Though I breathe death with them it will be life / To see them sprawl before me into graves” (1.209-10). That the speaker welcomes death as the bringer of life suggests that he is not referring to a biological death, but rather a death of the self and subsequent entry into the self-less poetical character. The speaker’s uneasiness comes from the fact that he is presently experiencing the kind of dream vision he is critiquing. However, his vision is not filled with the “egotistical sublime”¹⁷⁵ Keats criticizes here and in his letter on the poetical character’s self-lessness (*Letters* 226). Rather, the speaker’s vision is rife with self-effacement, beginning with a death experience reminiscent of Apollo’s dying into life in the first poem:¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Keats thinks of Wordsworth’s insistence upon a sovereign self as an “egotistical sublime” that is counterintuitive to true poetical character.

¹⁷⁶ Bate agrees that the poet and dreamer are inseparable from each other, arguing that the poet is always at risk of becoming a dreamer too enamoured with visions: “[t]he poet . . . is—or can be—equivalent to those other benefactors of humanity [i.e., dreamers] who have ‘no thought to come’ to this place. They each have ‘visions,’ and the poet’s endowment of speech is no liability—the others ‘would speak’ thus if they could . . . In the poet, on the other hand, the habitual use of ‘vision’ and his inevitable concentration on his art as art can always tempt him toward becoming a ‘visionary’—toward cherishing ‘vision’ in and for itself, and in such a way that he beings to dwell in a separate and sealed world, as the ‘dreamer’ Lycius, in *Lamia*, had tried to do” (598). However, I see this relationship working in the opposite direction. That is, the dreamer possesses some poetic ability but does not become a poet due to his attachment to visions, which becomes worldly vexation rather than healing. It should be noted, though, that Sider criticizes Bate’s approach for rendering the poet and dreamer as “approximately the same thing” (130). He contends that Bate’s argument that Keats intended to omit the lines detailing the distinction between dreamer and poet is what allows him to read the poet and dreamer as the same thing, thus making Moneta’s pronouncements about dreamers really about poets. I agree with Sider’s objection over abstracting the characteristics of dreamers to be

I strove hard to escape
 The numbness, strove to gain the lowest step.
 Slow, heavy, deadly was my pace: the cold
 Grew stifling, suffocating, at my heart;
 And when I clasped my hands I felt them not.
 One minute before death, my iced foot touched
 The lowest stair; and as it touched, life seemed
 To pour in at the toes

“What am I that should be saved from death?[]” (1.127-39)

The speaker, here, is questioning Moneta, who facilitates this experience the same way Mnemosyne does for Apollo in the first poem. I will address Moneta and Mnemosyne more fully in the next section, but first it is necessary to address Keats’s themes of life and death.

Upon ascending the steps, the speaker feels the life go out of him. His self-awareness is extinguished, but then returns through his re-establishing contact with the world, as this draws him back into the world of sensory experience. This scene also re-enacts the speaker’s induction into the visionary world after drinking the draught, where Keats refers to regaining consciousness as the moment “[w]hen sense of life returned” (1.58): life is contingent on the senses, death on moving past them. In the draught-drinking scene, the speaker is stupefied by an overflow of sensory experience. He enters into an abandoned feast scene that is still replete with sensory delights. He eats, drinks, and becomes intoxicated. In this way, the speaker is, indeed, a dreamer experiencing an ecstatic loss of self. But the experience of his dream moves past this kind of intoxication.

identical to those of poets; moreover, Jack Stillinger notes that Woodhouse’s claim that Keats intended to delete this lines—which Bate relies on—is only “critical conjecture” (672). Yet I maintain the value of Bate’s insight that the two categories cannot be fully separated from each other. Thus, I have posited my argument as one of potentiality rather than similarity: dreamers, sharing certain characteristics with poets, have the potential to become poets, to trade vexation for healing—but only if they can overcome fully the concept of self, seeing their vision not just as their own experience, but also that of others.

After the speaker's death experience inside the temple, he becomes aware of his own self-lack. Moneta explains that he is unlike other people in that he does not possess the self-sovereignty they use to "find a haven in the world" (1.150) that allows them to keep pain and joy "distinct" (1.174). The speaker is thus set in contrast with self-sovereign people who would have "[r]ot[ted] on the pavement where [the speaker only] rotted'st half" (1.153). He is able to survive his death experience because he is not mired in an ontology of self. He is "less than they" (1.166) in the sense that his self is not so rigidly defined, and for this reason he cannot separate his "being" from suffering in the world. For him, "the miseries of the world / Are misery" (1.148-49). They are personally experienced. He thereby "venoms all his days, / Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve" (1.175-76).

The text delineates these attributes as those of dreamers, and thus it is through their capacity for suffering others' pain that they vex the world. The speaker's lack of self-sovereignty would seem to bring him in line with Keats's poetic ideal of selflessness. But in *The Fall*, Keats adds a new element to his poetic ideal. It is not enough that the poet is self-less: he must do more than simply suffer others' pain; he must also relieve it. Therefore, the poet is a dreamer capable of moving past the dream experience and applying what he learns from it to his waking life (i.e., life after the experience of selflessness). The difference between dreamer and poet, then, lies in each's relationship to selflessness. The former seeing it as an ecstatic vision so "that happiness be somewhat shared" (1.178) in exchange for bearing others' suffering, whereas the latter sees it as a mode of learning how use that suffering to effect healing. The poet has lost *all* self-concern, whereas the dreamer retains a small amount. The dreamer desires selflessness, but has not yet realized how to avoid making selflessness about himself (i.e., using it as

a mode of self-enhancement). Keats advocates that ecstatic visions, which play at self-erasure, are not enough; a true poet becomes a poet by embracing death as life and life as death.

However, this complicates Moneta's pronouncement that the speaker is a dreamer. He begins by dreaming—yes—but, as the plot continues, we see that his death experience allows him to participate in Saturn's suffering, which is itself another moment in which the speaker confronts death (1.389-99). The speaker seems to be imbued with the potential to be a poet, but is unsure of how to effect healing and thus remains trapped between the ontologies of dreamer and poet, which are made even more difficult to parse given that the poem is structured as a dream vision. This feature is what seems to prompt Moneta to diagnose the speaker as a "dreaming thing" (1.168), though she also calls that diagnosis into question, asking the speaker, "Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?" (1.198).¹⁷⁷ She thus shifts the onus onto the speaker to determine for himself the parameters of his ontology. The remainder of the poem becomes the speaker's attempt to understand his "being," as this alone seems to offer insight into how to pour out the balm of healing. Because the speaker defies easy classification as either dreamer or poet, he can only be properly spoken of as a dreamer-poet, a split ontology that echoes Keats's uncertainty about self-nature. Ultimately, the poem attempts to elaborate a more complete

¹⁷⁷ Rajan has noted as similar effect, suggesting that "Moneta is, in fact, disturbingly contradictory in her pronouncements, suggesting that she is not so much an external goddess or muse as a projection that constellates for the speaker his own simultaneous sense of self-doubt and visionary power. At one moment she is critical of those who find 'a haven in the world.' Yet only a few lines later she accuses the speaker of being a dreaming thing unable to find a 'haven' in the ordinary world A kind of logic can be imposed on Moneta's statements by arguing that she has in mind an ascending scale of value, in which the dreamer is superior to the torpid multitude that sleeps away its days, but inferior to the poet and humanitarian activist above him" (*Dark* 188-9). I agree, but I argue that the Keats's engagement with self-doubt begins with his initial (failed) distinction between fanatics and poets.

understanding of what it means to die into life: to die the Great Death rather than the little death.

5.2 The Great Death, the Un-Making of Self, and the Buddhism of the *Hyperions*

In Chapter 1, I addressed Buddhism's understanding of reality as a non-dual process of birth-and-death that is realized and overcome in the experience known as the Great Death in which the self, as a conceptual object, is extinguished. However, the mind, as a linguistic informational nexus, is still capable of positing an "I" as a mode of conceptual understanding. But after the Great Death, this "I" is understood to be interdependent with the conditions under which one becomes aware of it as mental "chatter." Self therefore becomes an experience that comes and goes, a phenomenological principle rather than an ontological anchor: an "ego" as opposed to a self/soul. The ego experiences birth-and-death at each moment, and thus reality is rendered as a process of living-dying in which one loses all ontological support offered by the self. As Masao Abe explains,

in Buddhism . . . the endless process of living and dying *itself* is regarded as "death" in the real absolute sense. That is Great Death. How to cope with Great Death? That is a crucial problem. In order to cope with Great Death, you must clearly realize the beginninglessness and endlessness of the whole process of living-dying at this moment. In this realization, the whole process of living-dying will be concentrated into your present being. In other words, your present being can embrace the endless and beginningless process of living-dying within itself. In this way you can overcome the process of living-dying, and thus break through Great Death. ("Great Death" 81-82; Abe's italics)

With this logic in mind, we can read the *Hyperions* as Keats's struggle to cope with the Great Death, as both poems construe death as the only way to truly experience life. As much as these poems evince Keats's understanding of the reality of the Great Death, his writing in them shows that he struggles to work out the difference between self (as

ontological anchor) and ego (the “self” of language). The texts explore an ontological shift that can be qualitatively measured, but exactly what this new ontological status is defies concrete definition, given that it is both life and death at once. The self is destroyed, but it retains a ghost-like presence as the ego, an awareness that there is an identifiable difference between one body and another. But at the same time, this difference is brought into question: self and other are *not one* and yet *not two*.

This paradox resonates throughout both poems: Keats’s attempts to posit the ontological status of his characters are undercut by the conditions under which that status is realized. Both poems revolve around a consideration of mortality and immortality by linking them to concepts of godhood and divinity, where, on one hand, immortality reflects a psyche that thinks its self fixed and stable and thus renders its self as a god. Mortality, on the other hand, reflects the capacity to adapt to the beginninglessness and endlessness of time and mutability, connoting a state of divinity that allows for one to overcome self in order to embrace the other. It is vital to understand “mortality” and “immortality” as functions of the text’s mythological architectonics rather than value judgements on one’s capacity to die. What these terms really address is one’s ability to adapt to self-death. Mortality is thus rendered as an advantage over immortality, as it alone offers one the capacity to experience self-death and survive: death becomes the gateway to life. By contrast, immortality bespeaks an inability to let go of the concept of self, even after its illusory nature is revealed; as such, it is always positioned towards death and ruin, due to its inability to adapt to time and change: it is a self that is always under threat of being annihilated, making existence a life and death struggle that limits one’s capacity to simply *live*. This is the mental state Saturn is in at the opening of Book

1. Yet *Hyperion* cannot be properly understood through linear analysis, as the poem's fragmentary "ending" contains the information necessary to understand Saturn's plight at the text's apparent "beginning," and therefore must be considered first.¹⁷⁸

Apollo's moment of deification in Book 3 is important for the way it sets up the distinction between Titans and Olympians as one of godhood and divinity, revealing Apollo's psychical filiation with Saturn and the Titans. Specifically, Apollo becomes aware of himself as a god through his interaction with Mnemosyne, a personification of memory who grants Apollo access to the history of the Titans, as though it was a repressed memory Apollo suddenly cannot deny:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal. (3.113-20)

In this moment, time is blurred and memory becomes collective and objective as opposed to personal and subjective, which we might assume if we are inclined to read Apollo and Saturn dualistically. However, Apollo's deification makes such a reading logically suspect, as he has psychically become a Titan, though he does not abide in a state of

¹⁷⁸ As Aske argues, "[n]o modern poem, perhaps is as burdened by the gravity of beginnings as *Hyperion*. But it is an ambivalent gravity, for the poem's beginning witnesses not the commencement but the end of action: the war is over, the Titans have been vanquished. Starting not in medias res but rather on the threshold of absence and loss, the poem acquires by ironic paradox a premature sense of an ending. The poem emerges into a scene of inaction, immobility, silence. From the very beginning, then, Keats's epic threatens to collapse under an impossible contradiction: how can a narrative move beyond its origin when that origin is itself both beginning and end, start and finish squeezed together to a point where nothing might intervene, a vortex of narrative absence? The promise of undeviating progression inspired by [the opening of the poem] turns ironically back on itself, threatening instead a motion of infinite regression, backwards and inwards in the direction of a centre which is no centre but rather a lack, indeed an abyss" (88).

Titanic godhood: immortality shifts to a mode of mortality *qua* self-death. But it is important to understand that this shift is already occurring when Apollo becomes psychically Titanic, a shift in which he gives up his self as he has previously understood it. He becomes instead the manifestation of the beginninglessness and endlessness of time, a raw experience of “being” that Keats can only depict using the language of intoxication, as he has no other means to convey such a rupture of “being” and time and its attendant incapacitation of self-other paradigms. Apollo’s deification is an experience that transforms immortality into a mode capable of accommodating death, that is, a kind of mortality in the sense that contains the capacity to endure self-death:

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
 All the immortal fairness of his limbs—
 Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
 Or liker still to one who should take leave
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
 As hot as death’s is chill, with fierce convulse
 Die into life[.] (3.124-30)

By taking leave of immortal death, Apollo overcomes the kind of death that Saturn, as an immortal *qua* fixed-self, experiences when he is thrown into time and change, ruining the illusion of his self-sovereignty. Yet Apollo is able to adapt to time and change, indeed, he understands it as the nature of his “being,” and thus he achieves a state of divinity other than Titanic godhood.¹⁷⁹ However, it is important to appreciate that Apollo’s experience is an inversion of Saturn’s in Book 1. Apollo greets death as a mode of life: Saturn finds life to be a mode of death.

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted that Keats deleted the words “he was the God!” from his MS of *Hyperion*. I argue that this deletion is more than stylistic, as it suggests Apollo has become something other than a Titanic-style god. See Stillinger 356 n.135 and 643 n.135-36.

In Book 1, Saturn has lost his godhood and entered life, but he does not experience its vivacity. His environment is given to change, but it is not animate: The “air” does not “stir,” “not one light seed from the feathered grass” will grow, and “where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest” (1.7-10). This stasis amidst change is further compounded by a “voiceless stream” that is “deadened” by Saturn’s “fallen divinity” (1.11-2). Saturn has fallen from divinity in that he has lost the state of cosmic absorption that secures his “being,” a state that is roughly analogous to the visions of the dreamer in *The Fall*, which allow for ecstatic self-lessness to become a substitute self that is ultimately an hinderance to understanding one’s ontological reality in the world of mutability. The state Saturn has fallen from thus resembles that of the individuals who become intoxicated by meditative absorption addressed in Chapter 1. Saturn’s loss of divinity, then, is a fall from an ecstatic vision of the eternal and a return to ordinary self-consciousness, which now seems alien and other. Saturn wails that he is

smother’d up,
 And buried from all godlike exercise
 Of influence benign on planets pale,
 Of admonitions to the winds and seas,
 Of peaceful sway above man’s harvesting,
 And all those acts which Deity supreme
 Doth ease its heart of love in. (1.106-12)

These are precisely the conditions that have caused him to lose his “strong identity” and “real self” (1.114). Saturn was previously the ruler of a universe he believed was ordered. But now he finds that all existence is “Chaos” (1.145) and wishes he could “fashion forth / Another world” out of chaos that he could rule over and thereby restore his vision of order—ultimately a desire to be released from time, change, and the new awareness of his

fragmented sense of self. This fragmentation, though, is an effect of his fall from the unity and constancy of the Titans' pre-fall "being."

This pre-fall unity and freedom from time allows the Titans to think of themselves as a cohesive group. Each god is part of a self-regulating system that covers up appearances of separation. In effect they work as one unified consciousness, which grants them a self-awareness that does not know its self to be a set of ordered fragments. Their fall, however, reveals the illusory nature of this apparent unity, and they cease to be a consciousness governed by a single self-sovereign voice and become one of many competing voices. They find this new chaotic "being" threatening and long for a return to the simplicity of unified self-consciousness:

The Titans fierce, self-hid, or prison-bound,
Groaned for the old allegiance once more
And listened in sharp pain for Saturn's voice
But one of the whole mammoth-brood still kept
His sovereignty, and rule, and majesty
Blazing Hyperion on his orbèd fire
Still sat[.] (1.161-77)

Saturn was previously the sovereign voice ruling over Titanic consciousness. But in the chaos that has disrupted that consciousness, he is no longer the figure of absolute authority. Hyperion, who has not yet fallen, exists as the only remainder and reminder of Titanic consciousness's past unity. He thus becomes the symbolic hope for the Titans returning to that unity.

When Hyperion enters in Book 1, he does so "full of wrath" (1.213). He is affected by the Titan's fall even though he still reigns, which allows him to continue existing outside of time. The "weak etherial Hours" are "scared" of his presence (1.216).

But Hyperion knows his sovereignty is under threat.¹⁸⁰ He sees that the Titans have become “monstrous forms” and “effigies of pain” that he can barely recognize (1.228):

Why do I know ye? why have I seen ye? why
Is my eternal essence thus distraught
To see and to behold these horrors new?
Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall? (1.231-34)

Hyperion becomes aware of the disjunct in Titanic consciousness and understands himself as separate from the other gods. He experiences a perceptual shift in response to this new knowledge, but it does not offer him a greater sense of existential clarity. Although he continues to exist apart from time, he nevertheless becomes aware of time and change in the wake of the Titans’ fall. Yet this new awareness is also a forfeiture of divine omniscience, which is revealed to be an illusion produced by his previously being unaware of time and change in the universe. After experiencing these things vicariously through the Titans’ fall, Hyperion realizes the limits of his perception:

The blaze, the splendour, and the symmetry,
I cannot see—but darkness, death and darkness.
Even here, into my centre of repose,
The shady visions come to domineer,
Insult, and blind, and stifle my pomp. (1.241-45)

He longs for the same return to unity as the other Titans. However, he realizes that the only way to reclaim this unity is to bend “his spirit to the sorrow of time” (1.301). That is, he must give up his power over time and submit himself to time as the new authority of his “being,” which Keats compares to an act of torture performed on a “rack of clouds” that stretch his divinity to its breaking point (1.302). Coelus, god (and personification) of the sky, sees Hyperion’s anguish and responds by whispering that Hyperion has become

¹⁸⁰ Rajan agrees, arguing that “Keats shows Hyperion as the victim of the same corrosive awareness of mortality that strikes the dreamer at the foot of the stairs in *The Fall of Hyperion*[.]” (*Dark* 158)

like the other Titans, who are “new-formed” to a fragmented existence (1.319). Coelus explains that his sons (the Titans) have become “most unlike Gods” (1.328), and that he detects in Hyperion “fear, hope, and wrath; / Actions of rage and passion,” which he associates with “the mortal world beneath” (1.332-34). Hyperion has thus taken on the qualities of the fallen Titans and become another piece of the fragmented consciousness they represent. His fall from divinity and subsequent parity with the other Titans signals the full rupture of the Titans’ hopes of returning to their previous state of autonomy.¹⁸¹

The full effects of this rupture, however, do not become clear until Book 2, which is structured as a forum that showcases the Titans’ disunity. The majority of the Titans do not speak, although Oceanus, Clymene, and Enceladus each offer their reaction to the Titans’ downfall, but advocate for their experiences to represent Titanic consciousness generally. Taken together, their responses thus act as divergent mental voices within a psyche that has become aware of its own disunity and inherent fragmentation, with each voice lobbying for a different way of understanding and reacting to the Olympians’ rise to power. Oceanus and Clymene move Titanic consciousness towards acceptance of what has happened and a realization of self-emptiness. Oceanus has no desire to be “a bellows unto ire” (2.176), suggesting that the Titans’ fell “by course of Nature’s law” and thus revenge is neither necessary nor useful (2.181). Saturn, he says, “is not the beginning nor the end” (2.190), positing that time neither began nor ended with Titanic rule. They

¹⁸¹ Faflak reads a similar effect in the poems but from a psychoanalytic perspective: “In ‘Hyperion’ various subjects, now differentiated from themselves as fragmented, de-centred, and dependent others, search for their once integrated and autonomous cultural identities, now part of an unconscious past they can no longer read Yet dialogue in both poems is dramatic in that it stages the subject as part of the ‘discourse of the other’ through which the subject reads her own (de)centred identity, and is social in that it interpolates this identity through a multiplicity of discursive ‘others,’ the personal always already inscribed by the social or cultural, yet simultaneously resisting its ideological containment” (“Romantic” 309-10). I would add, however, that the “discourse of the other” is one that operates across the ontological categories Keats articulates (i.e., Titans and Olympians, dreamers and poets).

emerged from “Chaos and parental Darkness” (2.191) and to it they shall return (2.214-17)—not because they are “conquer’d” (2.216), but because the Olympians were “fated to excel” (2.214) as a new form of consciousness that has taken the place of Titanic consciousness’s self-orientation.¹⁸²

The Titans’ death experience is one of life for the Olympians, but neither pantheon exists independently of the other. Clymene’s speech brings this point into focus. She finds that after the fall, things cannot be separated into dualisms: “joy” exists relative to “grief” (2.275), “death” has the qualities of “living” (2.281), sounds are separate, yet occur “all at once” (2.283). This effect reaches its climax when she realizes that it is the beauty of Apollo’s music that caused this congress of opposites. She all but suggests that the two pantheons exist likewise, but Titanic consciousness’s self-orientation prevents her from engaging in self-dissociation. As a result, her experience of this congress of opposites is one of pain and not pleasure. She senses an ontological connection to the Olympians, but her Titanic self-orientation bars her from living non-dualistically. Enceladus’s speech is, then, a timely reaction to the threat of self-death Clymene’s reaction implicitly exposes. He urges the Titans to fight back and reclaim their divinity, citing Hyperion’s intact sovereignty as evidence that their collective self-consciousness is not completely lost. Enceladus acts as the ego voice that refuses to go quietly, pushing the Titanic mind towards rebellion in order to reclaim the self-sovereignty that was lost. But Hyperion’s entry into the world of time at the end of Book 1 shows that this mode of self-

¹⁸² Rajan reads Oceanus’s speech as an “attempt to see history as the *Bildungsroman* of a single consciousness” (*Dark* 158). However, she sees this consciousness as being the same as that of the Olympians. I agree that these consciousnesses are linked, but maintain that the Titanic form of this consciousness is not exactly the same as its Olympian form, the difference being the capacity to adapt to selflessness.

recovery is no longer an option: the realization of time has forced the Titans into making self-interpretations that their collective consciousness cannot agree on, as indicated by the psychic fragmentation in Book 2. Any attempt at rebellion would stand to further fragment the Titans' sense of self.

Book 3, however, shows this experience of self-loss from the opposite perspective—the way Apollo experiences it. The truncated final book testifies to the pain of self-loss, but shows that it is ultimately one of liberation. Book 3 addresses directly the Great Death that the first two books deal with only implicitly. Keats explores the emptiness of time and self, reaching the conclusion that duality exists only as appearance, and thus cannot be used as a mode of understanding reality. Specifically, Apollo learns that memory fails to reify self-nature as a concrete entity, finding instead that, like the Keatsian soul, the individuality it seems to connote is actually a bridge into a world of myriad possibilities and thus the mind of everyone. At the start of Book 3, Apollo is victorious, but he is not in high spirits. Rather, he suffers the effects of acute trauma after having participated in the war against the Titans, and his understanding of self and other is altered. He struggles to comprehend his memories as his own self-narrative, and he resists taking ownership over them. Memory appears as an agent outside of his own mind, coming to him in the form of Mnemosyne, who has arrived to help him confront the new ontology he now faces. She is familiar to Apollo, but he does not know why: “Goddess! I have beheld those eyes before, / And their eternal calm, and all that face, / Or I have dream’d” (3.59-61).

It is significant that Mnemosyne, a Titaness, arrives to help Apollo come to terms with his post-war trauma. That is to say, Apollo's memory is not Olympian. Therefore, it

is other to his sense of self, which is why he has to “[e]xplain” his “grief” to Mnemosyne (3.70), an odd act given that he is effectively explaining his memory to his memory: “The watcher of [his] sleep and hours of life” (3.72). This act is part of the greater ontological shift that Apollo is undergoing, which knows no difference between self and other.¹⁸³ Mnemosyne implores him to “[s]how [his] heart’s secret to” her, “an ancient Power / Who hath forsaken old and sacred thrones / For prophecies of” Apollo (3.76-88) so that he will realize the linkage between Titans and Olympians. Mnemosyne has defected from the Titans in order to usher in the new Olympian consciousness, which contains Titanic consciousness, but moves past its rigid distinctions between self and other. Mnemosyne therefore forces Apollo to confront the disjunct in his self-narrative, showing him that simply remembering the past he has experienced does not account for the totality of his “being.” This confrontation allows Apollo to realize the otherness within his own sense of self, but he does not yet understand the ontological rupture about to take place when he experiences the memory of Titanic consciousness for himself: “Mnemosyne! / Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how” (3.83). By recognizing the otherness within his own memory (of his self-narrative), Apollo accesses the “knowledge enormous” (3.113) that leads to his deification based on his overcoming of the concepts of self and other: his Olympian godhood is thus characterized by his ability to become Titanic. Yet this is also the moment that frustrates Keats’s attempts to finish the poem, which remains unable to represent his themes accurately through contrasting classifications of godhood. The

¹⁸³ Rajan, in contrast, reads this scene as “a return through memory to lost sources of plentitude within the self” (*Dark* 159). However, I disagree on the grounds that her very presence outside of Apollo renders the self a problematic concept.

moment of dying into life, Keats learns, is one more applicable to mortal human figures, as they are the ones who must necessarily confront death directly.

In *Hyperion*, Keats dramatizes a moment in which life and death become utterly indistinguishable from each other, and the Titans and Olympians, respectively, represent the mind's inclination towards and against discerning a difference between self and other. The moment of dying into life is therefore one in which self-sovereignty is surrendered and self-emptiness is embraced. Life is rendered as a series of deaths, or, in the language of Buddhism, as a beginningless and endless process of living-dying/birth-and-death. The text thus stages a moment of what Zen refers to as the Great Death, though Keats struggles to work with these themes, finding that the terms "self" and "other" can only be defined relative to each other and offer no absolute value of ontological status in the world. Nevertheless he is compelled to return to these themes in *The Fall* in an effort to better understand the consequences of a self-less ontology. What seems to be an accident of spiritual awakening in the first text is explored deliberately in the second. Having realized the inseparability between the Titans and Olympians, Keats re-structures this relationship in *The Fall*. The dreamer-poet, taking the place of Apollo, experiences memory as an abstract form existing independently of his own consciousness, which he gradually comes to understand as the nexus between self and other by undergoing repeated experiences of dying into life. The more the death experience is repeated, the more the dreamer-poet appears less and less like a dreamer and more and more like a poet as the layers of his self are shed, leaving him increasingly exposed to the plight of the other, which he experiences as his own.

The Fall dramatizes each death experience as progressively “larger” than the last. The first is the little death of the dreamer-poet’s intoxication, which awakens him to the ecstatic visions associated with dreamers. But dying the little death is only practice for the Great Death still to come, which shifts the speaker’s alignment from dreamer to poet. The little death is “the parent of [Keats’s] theme” (1.46), but it is not his theme in and of itself. Similar to the scene of Apollo’s deification in the first poem, Keats needs a familiar mode to elaborate the change in self-experience that he explores in the second poem. However, Keats does not linger on the little death, as it is not his primary concern. He looks for a way of accessing the insight offered by dreams and visions, but without succumbing to their intoxicating effects. The difference between little death and Great Death is therefore roughly the same as the difference between dreamer and poet, and as the dreamer-poet shifts increasingly towards the characteristics of the poet, intoxication proportionally disappears from the experience.

After drinking the draught that transports him to Saturn’s temple, the dreamer-poet awakens once again to find that sensory delights lead him to the second death experience on the temple’s stairs. He inhales a “Maian incense” that imparts the regenerating effects of spring that induces “[f]orgetfulness of everything but bliss” (1.103-04) and is powerful enough that “even the dying man forgets his shroud” (1.101). But this seeming intoxication is contrasted by the dreamer-poet’s “sober-paced” approach to the altar from which these stimuli emanate (1.93). The dreamer-poet is thus rendered immune to the appeal of sensory intoxication, and he begins to court an experience of self-loss more totalizing than ecstatic visions. Unlike the first, this second death experience is not buffered by an anodyne, and it becomes the entryway into the dreamer-

poet's confrontation with self-emptiness: his third death experience in which he encounters the Great Death. However, due to the gravity of the ontological rupture it connotes, Keats takes far more time to explore this experience.

The Fall replaces Mnemosyne with Moneta, but the dreamer-poet's encounter with this latter figure of memory is similar to Apollo's experience with the former in *Hyperion*. The key difference is that Keats pulls back from characterizing the act of dying into life as one of deification. Indeed, the dreamer-poet is granted access to a "power of enormous ken" that allows him to "see as a God sees" (1.303-04), and this power is the impetus for the dreamer-poet's ontological rupture. But he himself does not become a god. His insight dissolves the last remnants of his self-sovereignty, allowing him to see through the illusion of self-nature. Thus, he comes to understand what it is that causes suffering for the gods in *The Fall*. The Titans in the first and second poem have in common their self-ruin in the wake of defeat. But in *The Fall*, Keats more deliberately represents godhood as a sense of identity that thinks its self immutable and indestructible. When the dreamer-poet hears Saturn's grief, it strikes him as that of "some old man of the earth / Bewailing earthly loss" (1.440-41). The dreamer-poet, however, is a figure now free of this very problem, having overcome his self-sovereignty. He is able to understand the source of the Titans' suffering and experiences it as his own, as he is all too familiar with self-suffering. He sees as a god sees in that he understands the gods' struggle with self to be analogous to his own struggle with what he is (dreamer/poet). The distance between self and other is thus elided for the dreamer-poet, and, as such, his witnessing of

the Titans' pain is a non-dual experience:¹⁸⁴ their pain is his pain, and because the dreamer-poet has died into life—rendering life and death inseparable—death cannot be understood as it once was and thus offers no means of escape:

Oftentimes I pray'd
Intense, that death would take me from the vale
And all its burthens. Gasping with despair
Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself:
Until old Saturn raised his faded eyes[.] (1.396-400)

Here, Keats evinces his struggle to understand the dreamer-poet's self-less ontology. The poet-dreamer curses himself because it is the source of his and Saturn's shared suffering. Yet this change is not an easy one, so he struggles to navigate his way through the world as a combined experience of life and death. His loss of self-sovereignty, as a death into life, connotes a non-dual relationship between him and Saturn.

However, Saturn's claim that "there is no death in all the universe, / No smell of death—there shall be death" attests to Keats's difficulty in locating a definitive difference between self, other, life, and death (1.423-24). This is not the only place in the text that this difficulty arises, as the dreamer-poet expresses a similar sentiment when he observes that the Moneta's face is

[n]ot pin'd by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage[.] (1.257-61)

¹⁸⁴ O'Neill argues that "[a] concern with suffering, and more especially the artist's need to suffer his poem's subject, is present, in different ways, in both poems. The poet's duty is less to warn than to bear witness to his concern to bear witness" (156). I agree, but would add that this concern to bear witness is what emerges in place of a capacity to heal, which the poem never fully demonstrates. That is, taking away another's suffering is not possible, but a healing effect is possible through understanding another's suffering as one's own.

These two related passages signal that memory is no longer a subjective way of organizing time. Rather, Moneta, by offering the dreamer-poet the chance to see into his own self-emptiness, acts as a mode of restructuring memory objectively, that is, as an aggregate of all human knowledge and experience. Her “immortal sickness,” then, is her inability to produce a single self-narrative based on this ken, as all self-appearances fail to manifest concretely, going in and out of “being.” Even ecstasy—that is, “happy death”—is not available to her as an interruption to the constant mutability that defines her. In other words, her relationship to time (and one’s awareness of it via memory) does not contain the possibility of an eternity outside of time. Considered in this light, Moneta acts as a personification of emptiness. She acts as a mirror to show self-emptiness to persons capable of overcoming the self, leading them to the Great Death in which they realize the true nature of “being” (i.e., its emptiness). Her power is a “curse” (1.243) because it introduces death as the most authentic means of expressing life. Yet she admits that from the dreamer-poet’s perspective it will seem a “wonder” (1.244), as it stands to open up a new ontology that is not rigidly personal. The dreamer-poet, making no explicit claims on having reached an understanding of his self-lessness, is expected to experience this wonder “free from all pain,” provided that “wonder pain [him] not” (1.248), though as we have already seen, this is not the case. The dreamer-poet is deeply affected by Saturn’s suffering, as he can no longer discern a concrete difference between him and the fallen god.¹⁸⁵ Although the dreamer-poet makes explicit claims on his ontological status,

¹⁸⁵ Bate makes a similar argument, noting that “Moneta, with mysterious irony, tells the poet that, in the experience ahead, he will be ‘Free from pain, if wonder pain thee not.’ The implication being that he will be ‘free’ from pain precisely because he *is* a dreamer—because the heavy weight of consciousness she bears will be to him only a mere ‘wonder.’ But of course it is not mere wonder that he experiences. Instead it is a fearful and empathic sharing of misery exceeding anything he has yet suffered” (599; Bate’s italics).

it becomes difficult to see him as existing under different conditions than Moneta does, and thus he cannot escape the realization of his emptiness once it has been made.

In Canto 2 of *The Fall*, Keats runs into the same problems as in *Hyperion*, as it is unable to balance this mode of “being” against awareness of the ego-self: one’s ability to think and utter the phrase “I am.” As a result, Canto 2 breaks off after only 61 lines, which re-posit material from the first iteration (especially ll. 10-17). Hyperion’s entrance in *The Fall* highlights this struggle. Up to this point, Keats’s text has emphasized death as the only mode of truly experiencing life. However, because Hyperion’s self-sovereignty is still intact while he wanders amidst the other Titans who are in the grips of an existential crisis, he reasserts the possibility of returning to a self-sovereign ontology in the same fashion as in the first poem. *The Fall* therefore demonstrates Keats’s realization that the self is illusory, and thus a self-stable entity like Hyperion does not help to resolve the problem “being” now that it has been exposed as a beginningless and endless process of living-dying. Hyperion’s being endowed with self-sovereignty suggests that the self has not been fully outmoded and offers a particular appeal for stabilizing one’s existence in the wake of time and change, which exposes the self’s lack of “selfness” (i.e., abiding presence). Self is dissolved but ego remains and appears to offer a way back to self-sovereignty that Keats himself does not believe in, and thus the poem fragments, just as the self does.

The *Hyperions*, then, cover the same material but from different perspectives, but neither allows Keats to fully dramatize the ontological shift that Keats attempts to theorize in writing them. They confront death as Keats confronts death; their abrupt end is ultimately the result of Keats’s fragmented existence. After contracting tuberculosis,

Keats's life became a practice for death in that he was forced to face the reality of his finite existence. There was no effective treatment for tuberculosis until the twentieth century, meaning that Keats had no chance of surviving the disease. But by accepting his biological death, Keats learned to dissociate from his sense of self: the death of his body and mind also meant the end to his sense of self. This awareness allowed Keats to face self-death during life and forced him to reconsider his ontological status, and he began to see life and death non-dualistically, moving towards the experience Zen refers to as the Great Death. Thus, Keats shows more aptitude for making the philosophical realizations that Buddhism lays out than any other author considered in this study.

Yet as much as Keats comes to see the inseparability of life and death, he ultimately encounters struggles similar to the other authors. The texts show that Keats perceives a difference between the little death and Great Death, and his awareness of his own mortality causes him to see the little death as a fallacy that will not truly relieve suffering. The *Hyperions* speak to Keats's realization that the only way to triumph over death is to die into life, thereby removing biological death's power to destroy the self, freeing one to be a part of life's flux and flow. However, his inability to complete either poem suggests that he had not fully found a way of actualizing this realization during his life. The *Hyperions* are indications that despite making realizations about the nature of the self's emptiness, Keats was ultimately unprepared to travel in this unknown and unknowable ontological terrain. Having no philosophical support by which to measure his experience and realization, Keats succumbs to a Zen sickness not unlike those of the other authors considered in this study. Nevertheless, his work is a testament to the

undeniable similarity between Romanticism and Zen Buddhism, and he is far and away the “most Buddhist” of any of the English Romantics.

Afterword

The Legacy of Zen Sickness in the West

This study has argued that English Romanticism philosophically approaches the self in a manner very similar to Zen Buddhism, effectively achieving the status of an incomplete Buddhism that arose as part of a breakaway movement from Hindu philosophy. As I have suggested, the Romantics palpated the limits of a Western, Christian understanding of a self/soul at the root of identity and converged upon what Buddhists think of as the emptiness of the self. This study has attempted to show the deep-seated desire for an intellectual “unity of being” that exists in the Romantic texts it considers. While all of the authors in this study question the existence of the self, none are able to fully give up on the idea that something, however ineffable, keeps the mind and body joined as some sort of significant “unit,” despite an awareness that all attempts to claim such unity as a site of sovereignty break down and are swallowed up by time. However, this rupture between “being” and time would seem to be the most troubling aspect of the Romantic project; as much as it makes realizations in line with Buddhist philosophy, it does not accept them, nor does it seem to desire such an acceptance.

What Romanticism seems to denote, then, is the historical moment in which the usefulness for the concept of self had run its course and a new ontological model was direly needed. Romanticism thus marks the beginning of the West’s earnest attempts to articulate such a model. Yet one of the key differences between Romanticism and Buddhism is the former’s emphasis on intellectualism, specifically writing, as its mode of what Buddhists call “practice,” as writing allows Romantic subjects to return

intellectually to a moment that defied intellectual self-understanding. Buddhism, conversely, advocates *against* intellectualism, a point perhaps best articulated by the Chinese Chan Master Linji Yixuan (c. ?-866) (also known as Rinzai in Japan): “Just desist from thinking, and never seek outside . . . Have faith in your activity revealed now—there isn’t a thing to do” (16). Thinking connotes a return to self-awareness and thus to a state of delusion in which things exist as subject and object; therefore, everyday practice is not based on intellectual understanding but rather through lived experience. This phenomenological practice can only exist in the present and thus cannot be sectioned off as a future “thing to do,” that is, something to perfect or realize that exists apart from the experience that is taking place at the present moment.

Because Romanticism is so often temporally backward-looking, it never quite comes to terms with the reality that all time is *now*, even if it intellectually comes to understand that this is really the only option. Romantic consciousness tries, but ultimately fails, to understand self as a chronological entity, and thus self-nature falls into the void of emptiness never to be fully recovered. The Romantics in this study intellectually understand that there could not be a sovereign self-entity at the root of existence, and yet all self-study they engage in seems to be done in the name of locating such an entity, as though through intellectual understanding they could “master” or “outsmart” self-nature and control its flux. Of particular importance here is the legacy of the Romantic project, as this intellectual state of non-selfhood has been a primary concern in the development of Western philosophy—which has come to a similar conclusion that there is no essential existential core at the root of our “being.” But this revelation has hardly been championed as a mode of liberation from the world (as it is in Buddhism). Rather, the so-called

“postmodern subject” becomes crushed by the weight of the world, subsumed into an ontological “metanarrative,” and struggles to achieve any true “authenticity”: the self is known to be a fallacy, and yet the existential suffering it abhors continues to cause the subject various ontological crises, ultimately suggesting that such a concept has, in fact, *not* been overcome. For as much as the West may philosophically and intellectually doubt the existence of the self, Western consciousness stubbornly resists giving up on such a concept and finds ways to preserve it as a *negative presence*, which, again, comes from an adherence to intellectualism—a philosophical *praxis* as opposed to the everyday *practice* of Zen.

Schopenhauer was the first Westerner to take up Buddhism with any real philosophical rigour and it was an influence on his *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). However, Schopenhauer’s interaction with Buddhist philosophy results in something similar to the English Romanticism’s more accidental intersection with Buddhism. For Schopenhauer, the most practical way of overcoming the suffering connoted by the Will—a naturalistic power in the world that supersedes human agency and desires—is through aesthetic and philosophical contemplation. Schopenhauer’s concept of the Will bears some similarity to Buddhism’s understanding of the link between suffering and desire, as laid out in the Four Noble Truths. However, Schopenhauer’s prescription for remedying that suffering resembles that of the English Romantics in this study. The only real difference is that for Schopenhauer art’s ability to draw one out of their self is a generalized feature of aesthetic representation, whereas the Romantic’s writing-as-practice re-creates the aesthetic by mentally returning to a moment in the past. What we notice, though, is that both of these are intellectual appraisals of

something Buddhist philosophy resists intellectualizing (i.e., emptiness). This gap is further exposed through Schopenhauer's belief that this aesthetically induced ecstasy connects one to what he called the "Ideas"—essentially a reworking of Plato's "Forms"—which suggest that there is some sort of stable self-entity that is intellectually available to us through contemplation but not experience. The effect of this, though, is that ordinary life becomes rather meaningless because the real Truth seems to be "elsewhere."

In this regard, we must pay some attention to the influence of Schopenhauer on Nietzsche, as this lineage shows how the West has tended to absorb the influence of Buddhism as one of nihilism. However, nihilism only responds to the meaninglessness of one's individual experience of the world. It negates the world as such by throwing all its contents into nothingness. Yet curiously the self is able to survive this being "thrown" into nothingness. To ascribe no meaning to worldly events is a proposition that comes from a position of self-orientation: the world is meaningless because it is not personally satisfying; it is not what *I* want, need, or desire. For Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is capable of living in a state of nihilism without needing assurance of purpose or personal significance. However, by drawing all things into nothingness, nihilistic philosophy thus only leaves open the option for a personal or self-oriented experience of the world. While Buddhism is sometimes misunderstood as a form of nihilism, it, in fact, resists such a position by working around notions of personal meaning in favour of a closed system within which all things, in their emptiness, exist: there is no individuated self and thus meaning cannot be realized on a personal level, as such a realization is not one's own. Rather, it is the product of the universe manifesting itself through human form. Meaning

is therefore granted due to one's being part of a process in which separation is apparent but not truly existent: *not one, not two—form is emptiness, emptiness form*. With this logic, Buddhism steers a middle course between Nihilism and Idealism. For Buddhists the world is illusory, but not altogether non-existent. Although one cannot overcome one's personal viewpoint of the world, one can realize its limitations by understanding that experience in the world is not the individual phenomenon it seems to be.

In Chapter 1, I briefly noted the similarity between Heidegger's concept of *being and time* and Dogen's concept of *existence-time*, as both speak to an inescapable relation between ontology and the flux of time. A crucial difference between them, however, is that although Heidegger is aware of certain problems associated with defining the self, he does not fully divest his philosophy from such a concept. Being influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger's philosophy runs into similar issues about the nature of meaning in the world, and the individual's difficulty in achieving an authentic mode of being-in-the-world, as it is always compromised by the authority of *das Man*. Of particular concern to Heidegger is the omnipresence, but only scarcely perceptible influence, of *das Nichts*—the void of nothingness and death that stands to overcome the existence of all individuals. The majority of our lives, he argues, is spent avoiding the confrontation with this fundamental nothingness at the root of our "being." In this way, his philosophy, like that of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, comes to a conclusion that reflects a partial affinity with Buddhism. However, by emphasizing striving for authentic "being" through resisting the influences connoted by the surrounding world, Heidegger's philosophy, like his quasi-Buddhist philosophical forefathers, ascribes a concept of self associated with an individuality that exists apart from the conditions of the world it finds itself in, or in Heidegger's language,

the world into which it is *thrown*. In other words, Heidegger is intellectually invested in reifying self, even as his philosophy seems to suggest that “being” cannot escape its own nothingness, which would seem to draw notions of self and “the individual” into question, as his own metaphysics seems to resist ascribing individuality to some sort of unifying self-entity. But selfhood for Heidegger is ultimately granted by the passage of time, and thus it is only through intellectual reasoning that selfness can emerge at all.

Following Heidegger, Sartre finds that human subjects are composed of a *being and nothingness*, suggesting that subjectivity is inherently fragmented and comes into “being” precisely because it is objectified by another’s field of awareness, which causes the subject’s awareness of self to emerge. While nothingness is the source of freedom for Sartre, we struggle to use it as such due to our being limited by subjectivity’s discomfort with it. Once again, Western philosophy shows a growing awareness of the illusory nature of the self, bringing it into absolute question, but it nonetheless “remains.” However, the most extreme form of Western philosophy’s habit of affirming self in spite of self-negation is brought forward in poststructuralist theory. Derrida, for instance, is convinced that nothing in the world contains any sort of in-born self-nature and that all things are culturally encoded and therefore cannot possibly possess inherent meaning. Meaning, in so far as it can be spoken of at all, is always added after the fact by linguistic constructions. Still, within his deconstruction of self-nature, he argues for the existence of the “trace,” which speaks to a “something” in the absence of that thing. The trace, then, appears in conjunction with its opposite; because there is “nothing,” there is the implication of an unavailable “something”: the other side of the binary pair, which, in its absence, announces its existence.

Deleuze arguably comes the closest of the postmodern theorists to articulating something like a philosophy of emptiness, given that he does not see self as synonymous with “I.” For Deleuze self is a series of fragments that is psychically organized and then linguistically brought together (out of the inherent difference of these fragments) under the auspices of the “I,” which he considers to be the “universal form of psychic life,” and the self, which is “the universal matter of the form” (*Difference and Repetition* 320). Thus, “[t]he I and the Self explicate one another, and do so endlessly throughout the entire history of the Cogito,” or as Deleuze expresses it in shorthand: “*I think Myself*” (320). The Deleuzian self possesses no natural presence in and of itself; it is, rather, something that becomes intellectually narrated into the equation in a very similar manner to Zen Buddhism. But by positing the idea of an “I” that thinks self into existence, Deleuze essentially reproduces the understanding of self and time that I have argued begins with the Romantics, albeit in more systematic terms than are able to take shape in the more fluid domain of Romantic poetry and prose. Moreover, Deleuzian ontology rests upon a self that thinks itself into existence, which connotes a subtle separation between subjectivity and experience, as it would seem to section-off thought as a somehow unique experience (due to its ability to create a union out of difference). Yet this is not the case under Zen philosophy.¹⁸⁶

Under a Zen model, self is also the product of narration and perception, but what Deleuze delineates as difference gets superseded by emptiness, the common characteristic of all things. In other words, Zen philosophy takes Deleuze’s theory to the next level by removing the significance of the intellectual element and locating

¹⁸⁶ Carl Olson raises a similar point, suggesting that from the point of Zen, Deleuze “manipulates experience” (123).

experience as the more significant component. While Zen does not deny the existence of narration, it is not seen as the defining feature of the construction of self or “I,” as such things are only phenomenologically apparent to us. Therefore, the intellectual unification that Deleuze espouses is only an illusory aspect of an ontology that does not, in its purest experience, depend on it. Intellectual unity (via thought) is replaced with a cosmic unity (via experience), thus overcoming the fragmentation that Deleuze associates with self-nature. This cosmic unity is achieved by realizing the emptiness of all things and experiences; fragmentation is overcome by giving up the rational, intellectual mind’s proclivity for grasping at things, quantifying them, and separating them into discrete units of spacetime and instead embracing the flow of all things into the stream of life’s processes.

In light of this, what I have diagnosed as the Romantic’s Zen sickness continues throughout Western philosophy’s subsequent development. Ecstasy is no longer its primary symptom, yet the dis-ease associated with being ill equipped to understand selflessness has remained. Just as with the Romantics, this has mainly played out through writing, that is, an intellectual attempt to come to terms with the experiences of life, and with such intellectual accomplishment comes a degree of intoxication. This intoxication arises from the self seeming to have mastered itself by becoming aware of its lack of actual presence in reality. This intoxication is thus one of pride: pride in knowing the truth about self, an “enlightenment” to the reality of selflessness that only serves to bolster the nature of the self (through intellectually understanding what “it” “is”). As much as our contemporary philosophical climate is comfortable with quasi-Buddhist ontology, this intellectual progress has failed to actually resolve the problem of self, and has resulted instead in a zeitgeist of hopelessness and nihilism: the self is not real, but the

pain we feel on its behalf nevertheless remains personally our own and preoccupies much of our lives. Contemporary ontological theories are self-less in praxis, but not practice. That is, the theory is applied to life, but contains no practice that allows that philosophy to become more than an intellectual awareness. Thus, we may begin to understand the Western philosophical tradition as being afflicted with a Zen sickness. It has encountered Buddhist philosophy and, in its own way, corroborated those teachings, but has been unable to find liberation in them.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name: Logan M. Rohde

Post-Secondary Education and Degrees: Thompson Rivers University
Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada
2008-2012 B.A.

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
2012-2013 M.A.

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
2013-2018 Ph.D.

Awards and Honours: Graduate Thesis Research Award
2015-2016

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2013-2017

Western University Dean's Entrance Scholarship
2013

SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Master's Scholarship
2012-2013

Western Graduate Research Scholarship (declined)
2012-2013

Related Work Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant
Western University
2012-2017

Colloquia: "Romantic Buddhism," *Fieldnotes*, Western University, London Ontario, 12 Apr. 2017.