

Spinozist Alterity and British Romanticism

Alterity is a subjective experience with the capacity to transform human beingness and sense of reality. It destabilizes identity, time, and place within a perceptual disorientation often accompanied by a sense of non-movement and beatitude or overwhelming terror. It can last a few seconds but feel infinite. And it demands the ethical response of recognizing its truth. My own literary introduction to alterity was through William Wordsworth's encounters with the sublime as represented in his epic *The Prelude* (c. 1805) and the odes. The haunting "Intimations of Immortality" ode (1807) exemplifies language's incapacity to render the sublime experience fully. Only metaphor, poetic rhythm, and rhyme can do even partial justice to the experience of alterity. Reading Longinus's tract on the rhetorical relation between poetic language and sublime affect helped inform how I understood the power of Wordsworth's poetry on me; Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's theories of the sublime contextualized the Romantics' centering of the sublime despite their interest in other forms of alterity. These alternative modes of Otherness, although subordinated by the period's investment in the sublime, are present in Romantic literature and represented in the scholarship to varying degrees. *Romantic Immanence* explores one of the least recognized or discussed: Spinozist alterity, which I refer to throughout as "immanence," a term that recalls Spinoza's indebtedness to Greek Stoic thought.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "opium dream" poem "Kubla Khan" (c. 1797) provides a good example of Romantic recognition of a quite different mode of the absolute from the sublime: immanence. As Coleridge's footnote explains, the poem produced by the dream encodes alterity by

recounting the visionary dream while gesturing toward the uncaptured, unrepresentable excess of the experience. Interrupted during his opium-fueled dream, he afterward “retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away.”¹ Those lines are like bodies, scattered but interconnected and gesturing toward a larger vision of an alterity that is neither sublime nor Gothic, neither religious nor rhetorical. It is an Otherness more attuned to the rhythms of the universe, to the affective interrelation of things and ideas, and concerned with what is expressible as bodily felt sense but beyond language. Coleridge’s poem attempts repeatedly to regain the dream’s insight concerning a deep interconnection and interbeing of substance shared by bodies and ideas, dreams and things. Attempts to capture this universal truth of immanent life in poetic language is the focus of the present study.

All experiences of Otherness including immanence, all experiences of unrepresentable, untimely excess, convey a promise that the vision is true and that its truth is transformative. Also included is a felt mandate: the experience must be shared. Genres other than epic or lyric poetry, such as Gothic novels or essays insofar as they use imagistic and rhythmic language, can express an engagement with this excess, disseminating the experience to a variety of audiences. Whatever the genre, to render alterity verbally requires a use of language that suggests the bodily rhythms and imaginative figurations of a nonrepresentable and excessive encounter. In the sublime, by contrast, the bodily is transcended as the ego-mind merges with a higher, transcendental power such as God. Unlike the sublime, immanence accords well with the poetic or with chanting because harmony, whether that of language or of actants, is revealed through and as expressive, breathing, and moving bodies, bodies that articulate and affect each other. The very essence of the poetic is that its rhythms move us, its images affect us. It breathes as we do. It is therefore the art best suited to sharing immanence revealed in its truth.

As indebted as the Romantic period is to Enlightenment thought, and particularly to Enlightenment explorations of reason that find their apogee perhaps in the skepticism of David Hume and the critiques of Immanuel Kant, Romantics also found the counter-strains of Spinozism to be generative, more accessible, and more adaptable. Spinozist immanence, which relies on the principal notion that God and nature are the same—so that there is no separation between the mundane and the sacred—provides a variant of Otherness that contrasts with the sublime, in which

the mundane is stripped away so that only the divine or transcendental appears. I am describing the sublime as Romantic odes depict it or yearn for it to appear, rather than its effects catalogued by Edmund Burke and Kant.

If the sublime is the most recognizable form of alterity in the Romantic period, representing the terrifying, existential experience of Otherness that tears the human self out of its carefully tended territory, there are also less violent and less terrific forms of Otherness familiar to readers of Romantic literature such as the Gothic and religious expression (as in Coleridge's "Religious Musings," with its apostrophic cry "Believe though, O my soul . . . !" [*Coleridge's Poetry* 33]). These literary treatments of alterity offer various ways for readers to access affective experiences that lent a persuasive solemnity to the existential angst produced by revolutionary crisis. But there were other world-changing phenomena that made people want their uneasiness voiced about how fast things around them were changing, and then assuaged through revelatory works of art. The period generally was one of heightened awareness of human difference stemming from an increasingly global commerce and an emerging theory of human raciality arising with the fractures arising in the Atlantic triangle trade. Additional factors were the defamiliarizing effects of increasingly visual microscopic and telescopic worlds; experimentation with opioids, especially laudanum; and the estranging yet alluring qualities of human and material representatives of cultures beyond British and continental borders. In *Sublime Understanding*, Kirk Pillow has made the argument that a major importance of the sublime was how it orients interpretation of indeterminacy and fragmented knowledge beyond the normal scope of understanding. As Pillow makes clear, however, Kant's theorization of the sublime, and then Hegel's (which Pillow argues expands on Kant's), aestheticizes this interpretive model: that is, the sublime distances the experiencer from the indeterminacy just as a painting of a sublime landscape does. The resurgent interest in earlier philosophies such as that of Baruch Spinoza as well as antinomian religious traditions were indications that alterity in forms other than the sublime, forms that made the indeterminacy of Otherness sensorily immanent rather than aesthetically distant, could provide a more proximate and pliable relief from a too-rapidly changing and expanding world.

What interest in Spinoza yielded, along with the Greek Stoic philosophy that influenced him, was a mode of alterity that had gone underground along with antinomianism during the Enlightenment. Its claims are

antithetical to reason and science, and far distant from Deist explanations. Although Spinozism does bear some resemblance to the secret knowledge of Freemasonry, it is far removed from symbolic rituals and other nods to arcane wisdom embedded in Masonic practices. Whereas Enlightenment interest in Freemasonry lay in its claims to ancient knowledge, Spinozism offered the nonrepresentable and nontranslatable experience of immanence, less appealing to the rationalist mentality. This sudden but gentler experience of alterity than the sublime is characterized by a sense of unity and inclusivity. It is the antipode to the sublime's eradication of anything outside its terrible presence, but precisely for this its appeal was to the Romantic rather than Enlightenment sensibility. Together immanence, the sublime, the Gothic, antinomianism, and Unitarianism were all ways to experience Otherness without absolute terror.

Moreover, what immanence offers is that excess and nonrepresentability in an immanent encounter do not eviscerate the self, emptying it out as does the sublime, but rather open the self into the infinite vastness of nondivision, of radical inclusivity. In this it has allegiance to antinomian thought, which had remained under cover since the end of the English Civil Wars. Like antinomianism, immanence is the experience of internal rather than external authority. The wholeness that includes everything and everyone is internal down to the lowest level of the opened-up self, which is no longer partitioned off but is integrally bound to all else. That "all" is Nature itself, in Spinozist terms, or in Stoic terms (by which Spinoza was highly influenced), the All as One. In this, immanence offers a possible antidote to the eighteenth-century's scientific categorizing of human and natural bodies into classes separate from the "universal subject" of white, male, Anglo privilege. We recognize this "antidote" in the project of Romantic nature poetry, which expresses in various ways the many in the one and radical inclusivity.

Romantic Immanence focuses on Spinozist alterity, arguing that although scholars have studied various forms of Otherness during the Romantic period, immanence has rarely been identified as such even when the texts it appears in are well-known. Yet immanence was a pervasive strand of intellectual and imaginative thought in Romanticism, appealing to the republican, idealist, and radical alike. Despite this, the political, even utopian promise of immanence was all but drowned out in the revolutionary failures of the Reign of Terror's aftermath. Even the Gothic lost much of its huge appeal after the 1790s. The sublime may have seemed a more potent source of spiritual and imaginative defense

against the reactionary times of the Napoleonic Wars. But whereas the sublime singles out the individual, immanence holds a more communal promise, and certain artists held on to that promise. Tracing its effects on the Romantic imagination—with its promise of a new world order (chapters 1 through 3) and threat of its loss (chapters 4 and 5)—will enable us to better understand how the first- and second-generation Romantics imagined possible immanent futures for their troubled times.

How do we locate immanence in Romantic thought and art, and how do we know when we see it? Writing of Spinoza's conception of *Deus sive Natura*, the divine as nature, Gilles Deleuze explains that Spinozist philosophy is predicated on the interconnectedness of all things at the deepest level.² In *The Ethics* (1677), Spinoza himself discusses this essential quality as the affective relation between bodies in motion, whether thoughts or things. These bodies share a deep affection through their shared substance, so that the interconnection is thoroughly integrated. Both of these descriptions of immanence contrast sharply with the oppositional self-Other structure of the sublime, and with its tearing, disruptive force rather than affective movement. Another distinction is the sublime's polarity of infinity versus perceived space and time; in immanent alterity that polarity is replaced by a simultaneity of infinity and here-now. The sublime is characterized by violence and fear of death, a thunderclap of nonbeing; immanence reveals life itself as an infinite intra-relation of movement and being that also incorporates stillness and negation into its continuous expression. It is the absolute's expression that reveals itself anywhere, in the material world or in dreams, in foreign lands or next door. By contrast, the sublime's absolute has physical requirements such as the vast height of the alpine mountaintop or the death-filled terror of a storm at sea, a raging battlefield or an immense glacier. Sometimes representations of sublime and immanent alterity bump up against each other in the same literary work, or immanence and the Gothic collide, as if the poet or author were comparing kinds of alterity. Midway through Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the Mariner views an approaching ship, soon revealed as a Gothic apparition inhabited by spectral figures; these are gambling to decide the fate of all onboard. Here Gothic alterity overwhelms with its hallucinatory presence, but almost immediately the Mariner has an intense epiphany in which the slimy sea redacts itself and the terrifying water-snakes appear to him in their immanent perfection. As I demonstrate in chapter 2, Coleridge's treatment of immanence dominates the poem's investments. Similarly, in her *Letters Written During a Short*

Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark (1796), discussed in chapter 3, Mary Wollstonecraft frequently toggles between the scenic sublime she has learned to view from treatises like Burke's, and an immanence opening up before her whose absorptive pull she feels effortlessly.

Immanence emphasizes how delusory "mastery" is. For the sublime and the Gothic, mastery by the Other is the primal effect on the human mind, but in immanence mastery is mere appearance. If the sublime swallows up the human and the Gothic imprisons it, both thereby staging mastery in its infinite power to overwhelm and reduce the human to the alienated self, immanence overwhelms with its leveling force and horizontal distribution. Immanence involves (as in involution) human experience by revealing an integration and deep intimacy that already inhere but go unrecognized until the immanent encounter. As experiences of alterity, the sublime, the Gothic, and immanence are comparable to other modes of alterity: direct revelation of God; the expansive illumination brought on by hallucinogenic drugs; the defamiliarizing estrangement of racial Otherness; the mathematical calculation of infinitude. Each mode of alterity involves either terror, fear of self-loss, intense wonderment, epiphany, transcendence, non-separation, or deep interbeing. Several of these effects describe immanence, especially wonderment and deep interbeing. These present a thorough dissolution of Cartesian dualism and Enlightenment reason so that the experience is instead a non-separation, an integral unity even between corporeal and noncorporeal. Thoughts and dreams are as much a part of the radical inclusiveness of immanence as physical bodies. The sublime emphasizes category; Burke's account registers this effect through his anatomy of sublime qualities such as vastness, darkness, and force: the table of contents lists ninety-six different topics for analyzing the sublime in contrast to the beautiful. Immanence emphasizes a radical oneness, all things are at bottom the same in their thussness, all things are at once the sacral thing.

While the Romantic period saw what might appear to be the superseding of the sublime over immanence, in fact Spinozist immanence continued to influence artists through the nineteenth century, especially after George Eliot's translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Even so, the sublime as a model for understanding eternity was more recognizable for those returning to a Christian faith as political radicalism lost popularity. By contrast, immanence is itself radical, and has been considered so all the way back to Spinoza himself. Immanence does not oppose itself to human limitations but rather dissolves boundaries between subjective and objec-

tive: eternity and here-now are the same, and, as Blake points out, vast space and a grain of sand too are the same. “To see a World in a Grain of Sand . . . Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour” (“Auguries of Innocence,” 1–4). Even binarism itself disappears; space and time dissolve into the present now. Nondualism, the dissolution of binarism, addresses what Barbara Johnson calls “the imperatives of the not-self” by switching emphasis from egotistical frameworks to the vibrancy of all that which is not self.³ Difference does not come back as repetition of the self-same but as the same difference that is the One. Knowledge does not come back as self-mirroring, as delusion, but as intimate knowing of another thing, of all things. Any experience of Otherness has lasting effect, some more transformative and inspirational, some half-forgotten soon after; but all give evidence of a suprahuman force of which occasionally we have intimations. During the Romantic period, artists, poets, and prophets appeared to have more of these experiences, as Blake’s prophetic and Illuminated Books testify, or at least the Romantics were particularly interested in documenting and sharing them.

How to document, how to share such experiences is always problematic. Perhaps because of Longinus’s rhetorical analysis of the sublime in Homer’s and Sappho’s poetry, the sublime has come to be associated with certain genres of poetry: the epic as in Homer and the meditative lyric as in Sappho. But it can also be found in poetic prose, and scholars have argued for it appearing in novels and other prose forms; indeed, we need only think of John Donne’s sermons to realize that poetic language has affiliation with the sublime whether we are reading poetry or prose. Not just the sublime but all literary forms treating alterity require poetic language. Tropes alone cannot do justice to the violent experience of the sublime or the intimate inter-beingness of immanence; there is something that also or especially requires the musicality of the poetic with its meter, its pauses, its sharp stops or abrupt shifts, its sonorosity. This may be why Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, a rhetorical treatment of the sublime, initiated a tradition that, more than any other category of alterity such as the divine or the supernatural, treated the sublime as a category of the aesthetic. Not just Burke’s, but also Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic analysis concretized the historical reception of the sublime as an aesthetic one in a tradition running from Longinus through to Boileau (Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux), Shaftesbury, John Dennis, Addison, and others. Intriguingly, Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) argues that it is the spectator who judges whether an experience is sublime, and who does so from

a distance. Distance is critical to aesthetic experience in aiding an affective and imaginative response to the heightened experience of terror, illumination, awakening, or enlightenment. Kant's analysis transforms sublime alterity into an effect of mind without the body's input, reinforcing a mind-world division. His transcendental reason goes hand in hand with the aesthetic distance he puts between the judging subject and the judged object, the beautiful and the sublime. Hegel goes further; his end goal of the dialectic is absolute knowledge. Therefore his treatment of the sublime in the *Aesthetics* is in terms of the dialectic, treatable through reason's process. This, too, is an important distinction from immanence, which involves the body in a world-making experience and understanding that cannot be distilled by the reason.

Because Spinoza rejected Descartes's rationalism, devising his system in order to contest the Cartesian one, it's important to my project to recognize Kant and Hegel as indebted to Descartes in a way that the German Idealists (Schelling, the Schlegels, and the early Hegel especially) rejected because of, or harmonized with, their embrace of Spinoza and immanence. Like Spinoza, then, and although more poetically just as immersively, the Romantics resist the transcendental model of Enlightenment reason and Cartesian principles. Further, immanence works for them as an alternative alterity to the sublime, which is a model of transcendence that denies immersion. But again, Spinozist immanence is radical through and through. Writers like Coleridge embraced immanence during the early revolutionary enthusiasm of utopian goals but then felt the allure of Christian faith, turning to it as the age eventually strove for political stability after military and colonial unrest. And at the end of the period, writers like De Quincey felt deeply ambivalent about both bodily immanence and a transcendental sublime; the first seemed unbearably present while the second seemed unreachable. The loss of any illusion of control was now not a blessing, as for Coleridge, but a curse derived from industrial and colonial excesses. This marks the turn into a Victorian frame of mind and the end of Romantic ideals as mainstream. However, the embrace of immanence by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women writers like George Eliot and Virginia Woolf—the fact that Romantic immanence does not disappear—reveals that it was not a momentary spasm in aesthetic processes but that it is affectively compliant to counter projects of artists working against mainstream norms and open to alternative ways of understanding what is larger than any one form of human knowing.

One treatment of the sublime that comes close at times to how I am examining immanence is what Barbara Claire Freeman terms the “femi-

nine sublime.”⁴ Freeman’s definition of the feminine sublime rests on an alterity she locates in women’s writing that eschews the violent, patriarchal qualities traditionally assigned to the sublime. Her effort to identify the feminine sublime have implications for my own project in that Freeman examines texts not usually associated with sublime experience, such as women’s domestic fiction; in my case I examine texts not normally associated with Spinozist nature. Moreover, her analysis of women writers reveals an avoidance of the “more or less explicit mode of domination” associated with Longinus when those writers engage with the sublime’s “crisis in relation to language and representation” (Freeman 2). The feminine sublime, like Romantic immanence, occurs in experiences of alterity such as the sense of self-dispersal that eclipses and overrides schemes of domination even in verbal descriptions of the encounter. A strong example of this is George Eliot’s description of “that roar that lies on the other side of silence” (*Middlemarch*, qtd. in Freeman 1). The crisis in language’s ability to represent what lies on the other side of silence provides an interval, in my terms, an expansive or stretched space-time, in which Otherness can reveal itself beyond the subject’s compulsion to objectify and dominate. This is also the definition of immanence. In chapter 3 I return to the problem of whether what Eliot’s “roar” refers to is the feminine sublime or Romantic immanence, and whether there might be a feminine version of immanence.

As Freeman explains, the sublime is conceived of as transcendence, as “a struggle for mastery between opposing powers, as the self’s attempt to appropriate and contain whatever would exceed, and thereby undermine it.” Furthermore, “Within the tradition of romantic aesthetics that sees the sublime as the elevation of the self over an object or experience that threatens it, the sublime becomes a strategy of appropriation” (2–3). Romantic immanence is, by this definition, a counter-sublime that lets go of domination and transcendence for absorption into Otherness as capacious, even infinite, inclusion. But whereas the feminine sublime “does not attempt to master its objects of rapture” (3), immanence has no objects of rapture. The interrelationality of entities or bodies includes the human experiencer, whose subjective boundaries dissolve. The felt sense of this is beyond bodily limitations of perception and intuition, loosening into an incommunicable expressiveness that later, on reflection, can find representation through poetic language as the articulative form most analogous to immanent experience.

Freeman’s examination of Longinus, Burke, and Kant on the sublime reveals that their theories catalog the variety of ways excess resists sensory requirements (immeasurable vastness, gloomy depths, intolerable sound)

in order to illustrate how excess always resists symbolization in language. However, Freeman explains, the standard or masculine sublime can only be defined through its difference from the feminine, which provides a locatable, domesticated base or ground for transforming unsymbolized excess into masculine transcendence and mastery.⁵ By contrast, Romantic speculation about the divine in nature, for example, as in William Wordsworth's "Nutting," discovers a feminine presence that has more resonance with Romantic immanence through Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, "God or Nature." This is no mere pantheism, as Romantic nature poetry is often reductively understood, but rather the imaginative engagement with Spinozist concepts. As Marjorie Levinson notes, Wordsworth's poetry is rife with Spinozist terms such as "joy, nature, affection, appetite, and motion," and with the "unmediated body knowledge" and attention to the body in motion that bespeak more than passing knowledge of Spinozist concepts.⁶ That Wordsworth could never convincingly treat immanence as nature-spirit—needing always to give it a hint of threat or vengeance toward man—may be due to his exaltation of the sublime and his need for a gendered account of transcendence. However, his poetic representations of alterity in nature are closer to Spinoza's conception of the deep interconnection of all things in the *Ethics* and to the Oneness or non-duality of immanence. Furthermore, the threat that informs so much of Wordsworth's nature poetry is always directed at the delusion caused by human egocentrism.

A return to the past's dominant and also less remembered philosophical innovations, from Neoplatonist to Spinozist thought, was part of Romantic intellectuals' exploration of how the present could be felt more thickly and intensely, and the future imagined more complexly. The present registers how fast and deeply things are changing, and a way to pause the rapidity of a pressing time seems provident; the future holds a promissory note that is nevertheless precarious. How one imagines that future depends on how Otherness reveals itself in an epiphanic experience of the present as right here now. An immanent experience.

I. Oneness and Otherness in Spinozism

Alterity has to do with an inexplicable excess; a surplus that eviscerates boundaries and centers, ground, and identity in the sublime, or dissolves them as mere barriers to true sight in immanence. Although Otherness

seems opposed to everyday doing—surely one has to travel to Mont Blanc to experience the sublime?—Romantic literature shows how quotidian circumstances can be when alterity strikes. De Quincey's encounter with the Malay traveler at his cottage door is a case in point. Or the circumstances can be extraordinary and world-changing, as in revolution. War can give a particularly visceral encounter with alterity, war's horrifying effects producing either sublime or Gothic experiences: fear of death, loud explosions, bloodshed, and large-scale panic. All of these increase the desire for mastery; the sublime is a mode of alterity that demonstrates absolute mastery and promises a share in that mastery through transcendent experience. But if Romantic fascination with the sublime was at least partially a response to the turmoil of the years most traumatically represented by the Reign of Terror, what did a more colloquial form of Otherly encounter look like to those same Romantics? A sudden illumination among trees or with a starry sky; a dream or nightmare; too much laudanum: all of these produced extraordinary revelations evoked in poetic language. All of them rival accounts of the sublime.

Romantic Immanence singles out this more intimate mode, examining poets and poetic writers whose works express experiences not captured by the cataloging of alterity limited to the sublime, Gothic, religious, or racial Otherness. Immanence was theorized in Greek Stoicism concerning corporeal and incorporeal bodies, and in Spinoza's correspondence between ideas and matter. Spinoza's investment in democracy was worked through the deep interrelation of bodies in his philosophy, making Spinozism politically radical from the beginning. Because Spinoza incorporated Stoic thought, his philosophy alone could provide the Romantics with the implications of immanent life for their own dreams of a democratic futurity. Recuperating Spinozist philosophy from its historical marginalization helped the Romantics think through what revolution might mean, and further, what true democracy might look like. It is alterity as horizontal rather than vertical.

We now have a strong body of work on the importance of Spinoza's philosophy to Enlightenment and Romantic thought; we have less on the importance of early Stoic philosophy, especially its theory of immanence, or of the interrelation of the two for the Romantics, or even on how heavily Spinoza was influenced by Stoic philosophy.⁷ The young Hegel, as well as Schelling and Nietzsche, were students of Spinozist thought, weaving it into their theories of the negative as a site of potentiation. Importantly, Spinoza was considered a dangerously radical thinker from

his own lifetime up through the Romantic period; the charge of Spinozism was the charge of heresy. In *Radical Enlightenment* (2001), Jonathan Israel has mapped out Spinoza's importance to radical thought in the French Enlightenment, a movement that opposed what Israel defines as the "moderate" Enlightenment. Whereas the moderate intellectuals took Cartesianism as their model for how subjects comprehend their world as a mind-world division, radicals such as Diderot were "nouveaux spinozists" who related mind or soul with sensory experience and bodies as what moves, whether human or nonhuman. Levinson explains how threatening Spinoza was to establishment thought in Britain: "Characterized as both materialist and idealist, atheist and pantheist, rationalist and nominalist—branded as scholastic, Epicurean, Stoic, and Kabalistic—Spinoza was until fairly recently the great outlier in the history of philosophy" (Levinson 373). His thought, however, had never gone completely underground, just as the early Stoics' philosophy never fully disappeared. In *The Romantic Imperative*, Frederick Beiser includes Spinoza with the German Romantics in his discussion of them as a whole (Beiser 2–5). French Enlightenment and German Romantic interest in Spinoza reached Britain through the increasing networks for publications and public debate. As Levinson notes, "knowledge of Spinoza and of the political salience of his thought was not only available to but unavoidable" for the Romantics (Levinson 376).

Spinoza's philosophy was also incredibly fruitful for revolutionary thought because it undermines institutional power, which he was determined to work against. His concept of "conatus," an individual's power to persist, is especially revolutionary in that it applies not just to all social classes, but to all being, human and nonhuman, sentient and nonsentient. This revamps the way we understand the necessity of institutional control, revealing the artificial and harmful character of laws and institutions that constrain conatus, the individual's life force. It also points to the way in which bodies, human or not, are inclined toward a celebration of life and away from its stalling or decrease. As such, Spinoza's philosophy points directly to a celebration of immanent life, of the shared substance of all bodies sentient or nonsentient, and away from anything like "mastery."⁸ All bodies incline toward motion, and all bodies affect other bodies they contact: thus we have conatus (persistence as movement) and community. The dynamic flow of life in interrelated connection is exactly what immanent encounter reveals and realizes. This is true of ideas as well as bodies. Like the early Stoics, Spinoza understood incorporeals such as ideas, the

soul, and the mind to be bodies just as corporeal bodies are. Incorporeals, including language, also move and affect other bodies: the soul engages in sensory perception; idea and body are analogs of the same thing and can affect each other. The Romantic breeze can inspire poetry of genius.

So why isn't Spinozist immanence more recognized in Romantic literature? Otherly encounters in Romantic texts that appear different from the sublime and Gothic have largely been either ignored by modern critics or shoehorned into a different recognizable category: for example, the agential aspect of thought and dream in Percy Shelley's political poetry is classified as idealism, and De Quincey's shape-changing hallucinations are interpreted as xenophobic anxiety. *Romantic Immanence* explores what I view as a stronger interpretation of these two examples. Immanence is in and of bodies, but also in and of thought, and in and of the world and universe. It bridges thought and thing, the ideal and the real, in revealing them to be fundamentally of the same substance with the same efficacy. It is present in Shelley's idealism and De Quincey's dreams, radically revisiting what "enlightenment" can mean and do.

All modes of alterity do the same work of exposing human thought as limited by what the mind can conceive and imagine, at the same time opening into truths that shatter egocentric "truths." They all provide an antidote to eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which examines and theorizes the world in terms of a "universal" subject who stands in for a model for understanding the world and experience through what is self-identical and what is "other." However, how modes of alterity are theorized does alter how Otherness is experienced, translated into experience, or into the remembered encounter. In immanence the "subject" is not universal but particular—this self right here, whose ego-boundaries dissolve in the immanent event. Immanence intrigued the Romantics in Britain and Germany because it is the mode of alterity most opposed to Enlightenment reason and science. It is primarily an experience of the nondual: a non-self-identical ontology providing insight into the possibility of an entire epistemology predicated on nondualism. Alterity in general might be best summed up as radical unknowableness: it is unnamable, unscriptable, illegible, and therefore any poetic or visual rendering of an experience of it is necessarily gestural. Immanence insists on not-knowing by integrating the unknowable into the illuming experience: not-knowing is the immanent version of the sublime's transcendent knowledge.

In Germany, Lessing provided a motto, "One and All," from the Greek "*hen kai pan*" for imagining and representing an experiential

encounter with unknowable immanence. The concept allowed artists and intellectuals to experiment with it as a counter to Enlightenment formal and imaginative restraints. The motto is one Lessing derived from the pre-Socratics that was kept alive by the Neoplatonists, but Lessing associated it more with Spinoza, whose philosophy helped advance a speculative-materialist approach that deepens the mind's potential. Although Spinoza distinguished matter and thought as two separate forms of activity, they have a causal connection in terms of substance: they are both God's expression. His philosophy was developed in opposition to Descartes's, his contemporary, whose distinctions between divine and human substance, mind and world substance, are essential for his theory of the cogito.⁹ Spinoza offered the Romantics a revivifying contrast to the Cartesian viewpoint, initiating widespread popular debate about Spinozism in Germany, although Spinozist philosophy there was identified with pantheism. This also caused real antagonism, as the "Pantheism Controversy" between the philosophers Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Henrich Jacobi showed,¹⁰ and Spinoza's presumed atheism is another reason immanence lost its appeal later in the period. Nevertheless, it was this heated struggle over ideas that popularized the "One and All" creed. *Hen kai pan* refers to the concept of there being no singular and stable entity; all beings are part of and participate in the absolute One, yet their diversity and difference are not eliminated by the One. Coleridge famously translates the concept as "multeity in unity"; identity in difference is another formulation. Both express the idea that all manifestations of being are always both particular and participate in the One's radical inclusion. If we think of the atom (a Greek concept), atoms make up our bodies, our possessions, dirt, and insects, yet the very same atoms also transcend history in that they originated in world creation. Human bodies and dust, as the Old Testament writers also knew, are of the same fundamental substance: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (King James, Genesis 3:19). Identity in difference, One and All.

This One is a dynamic cosmic entirety that contains the nonsentient as well as the sentient, and without parameters in terms of time and space. Yet human cognition has difficulty with what German idealism terms the conceptless concept, the absolute or One. The human mind experiences the absolute as a paused or stretched "now" in temporal terms, and spatially as "just here" in this now. The One characterizes the experience of revelation before it can be reduced to one or another theorized mode of alterity: it is the instantaneous experience of the dissolution of self in

the overwhelming awareness of an Otherness that cannot be thought or comprehended but is deeply sensed. One has no choice: revelation is an event that occurs, by which one is involuntarily drawn and thrown as both witness and the affected, altered as the event enfolds and unfolds. It is this experience that, in varying degrees of intensity or trauma, connects all modes of alterity, but immanence differs in making vividly alive things functioning in one great cosmic network of energy. The One and All is a presage of our current understanding of the cosmos as an energy system.

What philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel, and poets like Coleridge and Shelley, saw in Spinoza was a potential for a new direction in art. Immanent revelation is one in which joy or beauty—what Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* associates with “blessedness”—predominates. This is the “All” that both the Stoics and Spinoza showed is both singular and differentiated, both intimate and infinite. It is the empowering affect that Spinoza calls “joy.” Nature is, in this sense, the cosmic entity that is both the living world and the Logos that organizes and informs this world; it is both divine and material, but also both material and immaterial, both bodies and thought inseparably together. Logos is the expression of immanence, the co-identity of idea and thing that Spinoza theorizes. Nature *is* poetry in this sense, for it is poetic, figurative language that best grapples with what cannot be pinned down by rational discourse or mere description.

In the chapters that follow, I unpack the relation of Stoic ethics, particularly its concept of incorporeals as bodies, in combination with Spinoza’s ethics of bodies and ideas to show how everyday life and immanent ontology cohere. Although for Spinoza as well as the Stoics “ethics” refers to how bodies interact, the Romantics understood encounter with alterity to produce enlightenment, facilitating the ethical life in which bodies of all kinds, and their interrelation, are valued. Using significant German interventions in this trajectory, I trace literary engagements with these ideas in Blake, Coleridge, Barbauld, Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Dorothy Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and finally De Quincey. De Quincey’s hallucinations provide a variant form of immanence in that it is both domestically and mentally interior, privileging the immediacy of hallucinations that undo form to reveal that all sentient and non-sentient beings are entangled and enmeshed, participating in each other’s expression. I use De Quincey’s tormented response to bodily immanence as evidence of a failed sublime transcendence in the final chapter as a counter to Blake’s delight in radical immanence in chapter 1. At the core, all

forms of immanence are variants of the cosmic substance, as is the dream itself. How each author expresses immanence differs substantially, but the similarities cannot be denied, nor can they be recategorized. Coleridge's depiction of Spinozist nature in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" cannot be reduced to Christian mysticism, and Dorothy Wordsworth's poetic journal entries are irreducible to the aestheticized mode of "nature writing." For each of the British writers I treat, alterity in the sense of Romantic immanence plays out differently, although always as a revelatory experience in which time and space, ego and selfhood, drop away. Although twentieth- and twenty-first-century interpretations of these works have largely ignored immanent alterity, redirecting how we read these texts opens them up to what may be a more Romantic understanding of them.

II. Immanent Ethics

Another goal of *Romantic Immanence* is to bring Romantic ethical life into play. Romantic poetry typically treats the everyday or local character of immanent encounter as an ethical one. That form and poetic language are primarily used to hold such experience makes sense; both "express" in that one is bodily or real, and one reveals thought or the ideal. The two together produce a harmony and rhythm that, in the case of immanent experience, also expresses a cosmic truth and therefore an ethics. According to Stoic philosophy, human-cosmic harmony occurs through the practice of virtue and the harmony of virtuous ethical life, therefore, resembles lines of iambic verse. According to Cleanthes, one's actions "are like half lines of iambic verse; hence, if they remain incomplete they are base, but if they are completed, they are virtuous."¹¹ This poetic harmony as conceived by the Stoics was not, by the time of the Romantics, understood as something pursued through virtue and reason alone. Several centuries before, Spinoza had already shown that the passions intrude on and interfere with reason's capacity to direct and enforce an ethical life. Affective life must be in harmony with virtues for ethical life to proceed; for the Romantics, this meant expressing one's life as "lines of iambic verse." But where verse and affect come together in a manner that reveals cosmic harmony and the integration of all things is in the experience of immanence. Affect, both in the Spinozist sense of how bodies affect each other through contact and in the sense of emotional vulnerability, is

integral to immanent encounters. The heart and mind are equally affected in immanent revelation.

Immanent encounter, best understood as an event, leads to ethical action. The encounter's incorporeal effect of enmeshed ideas, sensations, emotions, and desire produces a realignment of values through an understanding of diversity and unity as simultaneous and shared. The whole comes into focus, so that the future and past of the immanent event "are evaluated only with respect to this definitive present," as Deleuze explains, "and from the point of view of that which embodies it."¹² Moreover, if the tense is paused or halted in the immanent interval ("now" is all that presents itself), past and future don't drop away so much as become the same as "now," the same as "is." In this way, Shelley's dream of futurity in *The Triumph of Life* is enfolded into the dream of the past and the present, each projecting the other in a kind of metalepsis. The presentness of temporalities, with past and future identical with now, is an inheritance from the pre-Socratics: time is dynamic, circular, or enfolding rather than linear. Therefore the present moment is already enfolded by and enfolds the past and future. The future, then, is immanent. This conception offers the possibility not only of a new direction for art, but of a new art.

In Romantic terms, Hegel's vocabulary of ground and grounded is a useful way to think about ethics in terms of the present moment, and therefore the future.¹³ The One is the ground of the particular forms of thought and object-bodies that participate in our experience with the external world. In normal subjective experience, form covers over ground: we see trees and dogs and people, not a common substance that informs them and all else. But during an immanent encounter, ground and grounded disambiguate, pull apart, and yet hover over each other, as in pulsations, or groundedness falls away completely, leaving only Spinozist substance and an experience of the Stoic One. The One is Romantic Nature or the living, breathing, ensouled world (as in William Wordsworth's "Nutting" and similar poems). But the realization of ground as that which is our true identity is not entirely blissful "truth." The One is all-inclusive and neutral: it contains dark as well as light, for it is the human and not the cosmos that assigns "evil" and "goodness." Light and dark are versions of each other, highly entangled in the sense of Hegel's term "reflection": each is in the other, immanent to it and reflecting the other. Coleridge understands this when the Ancient Mariner realizes the water-snakes are beautiful (the albatross and the water-snakes as coidentified), but also sees

the specter ship of ghastly death figures. As readers we think the Mariner's own death ship and his "punishment" as survivor are the negative lens, with his realization concerning the water-snakes as the positive lens. The specter ship in relation to that realization seems wrong, a Gothically horrific imposition, but the poem is meaningful when we see the pulsation of dark to light to dark as variants of each other, ground and grounded in turn as one and then the other takes form. They are both true to the One, since it holds that all things have recognizable identities apart from that one essential unity without form. The non-separation of light and dark, blessed and spectral is the truth that the Mariner must understand and relay.

Romantic engagement with immanence and its truths is fostered by an ethical pull toward the everyday: the albatross and the wedding, not the specter ship or water-snakes. Each immanent encounter presented in writing holds open the possibility that the inconceivable future is responsive to ethical practice; that individual action matters, not in the heroic sense but in the rhythms and virtues that inhere in all things, from water-snakes and serpents to fallible humans like the Wedding Guest. What the Romantics pondered was how art might intervene in bringing about a future different from the past and present. New kinds of art might also be new ways of approaching what is unknowable, whether this is futurity or alterity itself. Something hovers over immanent encounters that is in excess of that event; this is what poetic language can suggest. Because alterity is irreducible to language, this suggestive capture must rely on rhythm, rhyme, and other bodily responses to that experience: the very matter of poetry and poetic prose. The poetic works focusing each of the following chapters are attempts at just such new kinds of art, each providing a new formal response to an irreducible experience, and each recognizing the harmonic relations between cosmic order and human virtue that both the Stoics and Spinoza saw as inherent in our common materiality. Each argues for a transformation of the present through ethical action in a new way. This is quite distinct from the revelatory outcome of the sublime, a mode of alterity so deeply entrenched in our understanding of Romanticism that its nontranslatability and the inaction it produces has formed our sense of the Romantics as obsessed with what language and the poetic *can't* do, rather than what people and their passions do or fail at doing. But poems of immanent encounters reveal a different story. *Romantic Immanence* traces this story, which includes narratives of failing along with those of doing.

The chapters (detailed descriptions follow below) are organized into the following sections. Chapters 1 and 2 constitute “Corporeals: Embodied Egos.” These chapters are essentially case studies of Romantic versions of immanent encounter. Both deal with the problem of the resistant, self-enclosing ego: the first chapter, which examines Blake’s creation myth in his illuminated books, determines that only by sacrificing the ego can immanent life be realized; the second, taking Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” for its exemplary text, focuses on the necessity of dissolving ego before immanence can be realized. In the next section, “Corporeals: Embodied Difference,” the third chapter functions as a pivot, troubling the versions of ego resistance in Blake’s and Coleridge’s works as “representative” by turning from the male bodies of the first two chapters to female bodily experience. Taking a different tact, this chapter treats four women writers in whose works various degrees of immanent encounter occur to determine whether gender makes a difference in how immanence is experienced or realized. The last two chapters, representing second-generation Romantics, comprise the third section, “Incorporeals: Dream Visions and Nightmares”: chapter 4 studies Percy Shelley’s dream vision in *The Triumph of Life*, and chapter 5 traces the hallucinatory immanence of De Quincy’s opium confessions. The final section, “Corporeal Bias: Bodies as Incorporeals,” contains an epilogue on racial alterity and how this bodily awareness arose parallel to that of immanent alterity.

In chapter 1, “Blake’s Mythical Interval,” I treat Blake’s mythic conception of the four zoas, who represent human attributes and who are controlled by passions and human ego, as Spinozist bodies whose movement, along with that of their incorporeal emotions and thoughts, affects each other as bodies. The space in which their mythic development occurs is the interval, a generative space of struggle between blinding ego and prophetic sight. Developed through his major poems is the realization of the One and All, achieved in his masterpiece *Jerusalem* through Los’s self-sacrifice, which is the sacrifice of his egotism. In losing ego, Los the poet-zoa demonstrates what is necessary to open oneself up to the interval’s illumination of infinite Spinozist substance and its expression.

Chapter 2, “Coleridge’s Wilding,” provides a key text for thinking about Romantic immanence, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” I show how the Mariner’s encounter with the water-snakes is an immanent encounter that leads to his enlightenment, a realization of the need for virtue and an ethical life. It is an experience of the raw power of nature as well as the plenitude of Spinoza’s *Deus sive Natura*. The poetic force of the

“Rime” is its use of repetition rhythmically and semantically; repetition as the “burden” or chorus of a ballad is metaphorically transformed into the Mariner’s insistent repetition of his tale as an ethical act. Significantly, in the post-encounter ethical practice of poetic recitation the Mariner invokes the rhythms of the universe and immanent life.

Chapter 3, “Barbauld’s Sisters: Immanent Bodies,” examines four women writers whose works reflect a concern with the beingness of sentient and nonsentient bodies and the ethical consistency of immanent encounter. The writings of Anna Lætitia Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, Ann Radcliffe, and Dorothy Wordsworth represent immanent experiences and encounters in different ways while revealing a similar attitude toward the beingness of the world and the ethical relation woven deep into its ontological expression. For each writer, the problem becomes how to suggest this expression. After engaging a key text of each writer, I then turn to exploring why and how Dorothy Wordsworth’s engagement with immanence is the most sustained and developed of the four writers. At the same time, I consider whether these writers exhibit an engagement with immanence that reflects a gendered understanding of embodiedness in terms of the One and All.

Chapter 4, “Percy Shelley’s Immanent Language,” demonstrates that *The Triumph of Life* is a formal argument for how the dominant philosophical tradition as it coalesced in the Enlightenment had so distorted human experience that language proves inadequate to its undoing. As a consequence, both reasoned thought and human language are alienated from the bodies they belong to. The poet’s only course of ethical action is to break language in order to free it as a form of speaking the non-dual. The broken-off last lines suggestively point to an immanent future of a democracy yet to be expressed. I argue that it is the impossibility of representing immanent language that causes Shelley to break off composition; the ellipses in the last section of the poem indicate where he was at a loss for words.

In the final chapter, “De Quincey’s Eventful Dreams,” De Quincey’s exploration of opiate hallucination in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and other key texts reveals the capacity for mind-altering substances to restore comprehension of Nature’s Spinozist substance. Furniture, a phantasmatic East, and the dreamer are all one substance. If opium dependence seems to be an abuse of nature, it also stimulates immanent encounter and so also begins the turn toward an ethical life practice that is revealed in De Quincey’s Edenic dream vision ending the