

Introduction

In the British Romantic period, feminist literary writers would often question the meaning of time, rather than directly champion rights for women. Perceiving time to be a system of social control, they pried open its linearity to display what we might think of as a fracture within; they placed themselves, rhetorically speaking, within that fracture as a way of discussing current events. I call this tradition “fracture feminism.” By occupying a fracture in time, these writers could seize the space and authority to assess the immediate political world. The fracture feminists resisted the demands of clock and calendar, the obligatory patriotism that often came along with such demands, and the prevailing narratives of English history. They seemed to have knowledge from the future, or at least a strange disregard for chronology. By keeping a foothold in the future while remaining focused on the present, their writing was incompletely subject to the demands of time.

To give an example: in June of 1809, the fifteen-year-old Felicia Dorothea Browne, later to be known as Felicia Hemans, was writing “her first mature poem,” an ambitious work of over 800 lines, entitled “War and Peace.”¹ The poem would eventually become part of Browne’s third collection, *The Domestic Affections*, which would establish her literary stardom in 1812. Browne was a patriotic child from a military family, and so, perhaps inevitably, she thought of the United Kingdom as a massive war machine. Her country had been at war her entire life, having assembled, through the eighteenth century, its standing army and enormous military apparatus.² The family’s correspondences reveal that Browne thought of the army as an essential attribute of Britishness generally, even as “she was aware that this [interest of hers] was not wholly appropriate for a young woman.”³ Caught between a national war effort with which

she was fascinated and the domestic realm that was supposed to be her station—a tension captured by the poem’s very presence in a volume of that title and theme—Browne appealed to the future as a way to navigate the impasse. The poem begins:

Thou, bright Futurity! whose prospect beams,
 In dawning radiance on our day-light dreams;
 Whose lambent meteors and ethereal forms
 Gild the dark clouds, and glitter thro’ the storms;
 . . .
 Thou bright Futurity! whose morning-star
 Still beams unveil’d, unclouded, from afar;
 Whose lovely vista smiling Hope surveys,
 Thro’ the dim twilight of the silvery haze[.]⁴

Two obvious questions arise from this passage. The first is a question of rhetorical authority: how did a teenager, especially one who felt strictly beholden to normative codes of female behavior and thought, begin to feel emboldened to intervene in matters of foreign policy? Let us keep in mind that Browne was, at this time, aspiring to write “around the pressure and expectations of what a woman poet ‘should’ write” and would go on to become “the central Romantic-era poet of feminine domesticity.”⁵ The second question arises from the *non sequitur* of “bright Futurity”: what does “bright Futurity” have to do with contemporary matters of “War and Peace”? Or, put differently, why would “Futurity” be the proper addressee of a girl’s political commentary, given that the politics in question were playing out here and now? The two questions may seem unrelated, but this book will suggest that they are intertwined in complex ways. Browne, I will suggest, gained authority by drawing upon a specific tradition of feminist writing, one less than twice as old as Browne herself, which used an orientation to the future to make space for political commentary by women. Browne’s appeal to “futurity” was, in this way, a decidedly gendered response to questions of national security.

Early pioneers of that women’s writing tradition included the Della Cruscan poetic circle, Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Helen Maria Williams. They, in turn, would inspire the feminist novels of Mary Hays, the late-career poetry of Charlotte Smith, the post-Waterloo poetry of Charlotte Caroline Richardson, the ambiguously dark lyricism of Felicia Hemans (as Browne would come

to be known), and the science fiction pioneer Mary Shelley, each of whom extended this atemporal mode of cultural critique in new literary directions. Collectively, their work can be said to form what Stephen C. Behrendt would call a “pattern of overt reference” spanning several genres.⁶ The fracture feminists would respond to contemporary politics as if they were visitors from the future, and in this way participated in, and even deconstructed, political discussions that would otherwise have disregarded a woman’s perspective. The “future histories of man” that they were writing—to borrow an oxymoron from Macaulay—exploited a fracture in the dominant political discussions of their era.⁷

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the nation of Great Britain, then becoming the United Kingdom, was broadly instilling a new collective sense of regularized time. Time, and the subjects’ obligations to uphold it, was being used as an ideological cudgel for the purposes of social control. In defiance of that mandate, a host of feminist writers, mostly women, sought ways, in their novels, poetry, and nonfiction, to deactivate both clock and calendar. These were the fracture feminists. The consequences of their efforts were, in a way, negligible, in the sense that speaking from the future seems so unimaginable that it will often resonate silently or meaninglessly. Yet the work was also profound, because a writer who can meddle with the system of time will always be at least partially exempt from the immediate now, which is, in a way, an optimal perspective from which to examine a culture. Their work, seen in this light, amounts to an experimental and even sometimes utopian feminist tradition. The fracture feminists would respond to political events by prematurely historicizing them or expressing nostalgia for the future. By looking at the world from the future, they learned how to affirm womanhood as an asynchronous experience, never contemporary with its own times. The movement was associated with the emergent figure of what was called “the female philosopher,” a term claimed by feminist thinkers like Macaulay, Wollstonecraft, Robinson, and Hays, and that found iteration, with adaptations, through the Regency.⁸ Their work is sometimes hard to recognize as fracture feminism because temporal ruptures can be subtle and ambiguous. Fracture feminism refuses to assert a positive identity, which means it does not always easily register as feminism to us. Instead, it positively asserts the negative space of the fracture itself, and thus establishes many of the protocols of what today we would call psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

There has recently been a tremendous amount of exciting work within British Romantic studies, theorizing time. This makes sense, given how, as

we are better and better appreciating, this was an important period for the development of clock time as a national and global system.⁹ Some scholars have emphasized how women could participate in the Romantic era's culture of prophecy and prediction.¹⁰ Others have highlighted a tendency for Romantic writers to speculate about what the future might be like.¹¹ These phenomena are separate from, though adjacent to, fracture feminism. To make a prediction or to historicize one's own moment does not call chronology into question; rather, it asserts one's mastery of the timeline, while leaving the timeline intact. The fracture feminists were describing the world immediately around them; they were not making predictions, nor trying to be prophets. It was as if they, having by happenstance fallen into a temporal abyss, possessed knowledge from the future that might be relevant to people up above who were still stuck living in the now. In an attempt to convey the paradoxes of the situation, I shall call the time of such writing "the contemporary future," an oxymoron that suggests that these writers imagined the future to be already present. The contemporary future is the peculiar temporality of the fracture.

To write from the contemporary future is different from recognizing that the present will one day be someone else's past; it is to assert that the future is already here, rather than something to be awaited. When Mary Shelley claimed, in her journal of 1822, that "I am future waste paper,"¹² she was not predicting that she or her writings would one day be thrown away; she was declaring herself to be, already, the waste paper of the future. To assert one's existence as waste paper is to identify with deterioration and circumscription; it is to "be" the support and backing of an excess of writing which, if it is to remain waste paper, can never be incinerated.¹³ Waste paper, which, by its very nature, is an archive of that which has been deemed regrettable or unnecessary, here becomes an archive of the future, and Shelley claims to *be* this, emphatically, in the present tense. There was a growing sense, into and across the nineteenth century, that the present was somehow excessive and would, for some time, flummox attempts to write its history.¹⁴ Shelley claimed to be, rather than just to understand, that excess. The integrity of time collapses, I shall argue, when future waste paper offers commentary on something immediate and current.

Today, we are so accustomed to thinking of sex as a positive identity category—something that someone "is"—that it can be hard even to recognize a feminist writing tradition like this one. How can one claim to be a future excess of writing, rather than an author or subject? The

fracture feminists were not, in such moments, fully asserting themselves as contributors to national conversations about politics, and neither were they writing as people excluded from those conversations. They were not developing an alternative woman's viewpoint on the politics of time; rather, they would inhabit contradictions *in* the era's emergent discourses of time, and then document, accentuate, and exploit those contradictions. It is a very different concept-metaphor from being "marginalized"; it was a mode of intimate cultural analysis that today we would call deconstructive. To occupy and embody the fracture was a dangerous rhetorical gambit for a woman writer: on the one hand, the idea of the contemporary future gave feminist writers a foothold into conversations in which they would otherwise have been excluded. In the course of those conversations, they may seek, for instance, to expand parliamentary representation, or protest a war, or challenge patriarchy, or intervene in debates around the rights of women or citizens, or chip away at the cultural prestige of banks, the army, or the empire. Exploiting the fracture in time was a way of dislocating the normative temporalities that were propping up those institutions. Yet, on the other hand, to write from the contemporary future ensured that their views would never fully "count" in an era in which many of the central political questions (including the institution of the national census in 1801) depended on counting, being counted, or being held to account.¹⁵ It was a way of recognizing that, if contemporary political discourse were fractured along gender lines, this fracture was not of women's making, but was rather the symptom of a longstanding problem, namely, patriarchy, which displaced British women from the present through the pressure of the past. To acknowledge the temporal fracture was a way of marking the problem of women's unmaking in the present, much as Wollstonecraft so clearly diagnosed. Women, prevented from inhabiting a viable space in the contemporary moment, and thereby disincentivized from partaking in the many optimisms of the early nineteenth century, developed an alternate mode of futurity that might prove hospitable for justice, taken as an impossible event, even if this mode did not lead the way to reconciliation or belonging.

Jacques Lacan, the twentieth-century psychoanalyst, saw this ontological predicament as particular to women's experience. Women, he controversially asserts, are "pas-tout," which has been variously translated as "not-whole" or "not all."¹⁶ Using Lacan's terminology, one would say that fracture feminists are writers who, despite being "there in full," recognize that "there is something more," a supplement—that is, the contemporary

future—that ensures that they “can but be excluded.”¹⁷ In order to find avenues of resistance to the phallocratic temporalities closing in on them, they refused to register as completely current. There would remain a part of them that would be heterogenous to the contemporary, a part that could negotiate with the controls of time directly. Protesting the normative force of time, the fracture feminists claimed immediate knowledge of the future as a direct contrast to ongoing analyses of the present, which, as we see for instance in the example of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, would often appeal to tradition and history.

Fracture feminism was an early form of what Alenka Zupančič calls “ontologically determinative negativity,” which Zupančič hopes, today, could be the possible basis of an emancipatory politics. Such writing, says Zupančič, exploits a “capacity to inscribe the problem of division and difference into the world,” which is “what makes it political, and politically explosive.”¹⁸ It may seem strange to say that Romantic-era writers were employing poststructuralist, psychoanalytic political strategies a century before Freud, yet British Romanticism was, it would seem, a crucial site for the early development of psychoanalytic thought,¹⁹ much as it was for deconstructive interpretive practices.²⁰ Especially with regard to its sexual culture and its understanding of sexual difference, the Romantic period depended on a cultural logic of new ideas that today we would call “Lacanian”²¹—and the fracture feminists were an important if underappreciated part of this history of ideas. They commit to a sexual nonrelation and to the active maintenance of that nonrelation, as opposed to the simple absence of a relation. Their strategy of inhabiting the fracture, perfectly devised for the phallogentric culture that was then becoming dominant, had powerful political ramifications, many of them temporal. They were, to draw from Jacques Rancière, “putting two worlds in one and the same world,” thus ensuring that the gap they had discovered in contemporary rights discourse could not be ignored.²² The fracture feminists were undoing any attempt to make the political moment coherent or “one” with itself. To acknowledge their strategy for what it is—that is, an early instance of poststructuralist thought—is not an exercise in presentism, but rather a way to see the implications of a temporal fracture that had been pried open during its own literary-historical moment. Yet that very fracture would ensure that the Romantic literary-historical moment could never become completely “its own.”

Literary work is the wellspring of this way of thinking, given its capacity to construct a special kind of history from impossible temporal-

ities. As Cathy Caruth maintains, literature has the power to build such timelines because its stock in trade is “a text that, *itself*, has no single referent, a text that can *figure* what it cannot *think*.”²³ I especially try to highlight the political intervention at work in this atemporal strategy. Here, I am seeking to heed the provocations of Judith Butler, who, some years ago, said that: “One of the points . . . that became most salient for me is the reintroduction of temporality and, indeed, of futurity into the thinking of social formations.”²⁴ My project, following from that inducement, presents futurity as a factor in the politics of British Romanticism—an especially important task given how chronology was then becoming a social formation unto itself.

Time does not always seem especially political—if anything, it can be cruelly inflexible and disinterested. Yet toward the end of the eighteenth century in Britain and into the Regency, the very uniformity of time was being politicized. Our currently prevailing sense of time came into being, scholars say, between approximately 1770 and 1830.²⁵ These were the early years of the Industrial Revolution, in which “time is now currency: it is not passed but spent”—a change, as E.P. Thompson notes, that led to a vast expansion in the sale and ownership of clocks in Britain.²⁶ There were several reasons for this: people were then being forced, by the enclosure of lands and economic necessity, into cities and industrial labor, which would change their relationship to the measured hour; Republican France had decimalized the clock and calendar; aspects of military culture, including its rigid timekeeping, were seeping into civilian life; colonial administrators were developing their own temporal rationale. The fixedness of time was increasingly being treated as a matter of national security, until “time [was] no longer out of joint, but rather articulated within a universalizing temporal and spatial grid.”²⁷

As Reinhard Koselleck explains, Britons were then being encouraged to think of their own moment as potentially historic, and to adopt a “temporal perspective within which . . . time, past and future must be relocated with respect to each other.”²⁸ Koselleck shows how, during these decades, “time altered layer by layer its everyday sense of flowing and the natural circulation within which histories took place. Time itself could now be interpreted as something new, since the future brought with it something else, sooner than had ever before seemed possible.”²⁹ There was, as Christopher M. Bundock submits, a “growing anxiety about the stability of historical life and what it means to be historical.”³⁰ Literary works were now considerably more specific about dates, even while the

timelines they were tracing were, largely as a result of developments in the natural sciences, much broader.³¹ Governments, increasingly biopolitical in orientation, were initiating an “economy of time” characterized by state investments in “the time of life.”³² The experience of time, understood as “modernity,” was now supposed to be a distinctly European affordance.³³ Meanwhile, the era’s sexual culture, newly restrictive, was embracing clock time in the service of a general chrononormativity.³⁴ In all of these ways, “the nineteenth century began to believe that time, itself, brings change and should require political action,” as Mary Mullen’s work shows.³⁵

Clock time was inculcated in the military, imperial administration, factories, parliament, and academe—that is, in areas of culture dominated by men. For women, this meant being excluded from, yet subsumed under, the new national mania for timekeeping and historicization. “It is clear,” says Marcus Tomalin, that, when it came to wearing watches, “the rituals of usage were markedly different for the two sexes,” leading to an eighteenth-century stereotype that “women (specifically) disregarded the practicalities of time telling.”³⁶ Because the regularization of time had been a distinctly gendered experience, the concept of the future was especially central in feminist writings. John Krapp argues that because time was experienced so unequally by women and men during these decades, the period’s literature distinctly highlights “the asynchronous perspectives between male and female romantic poets precisely on the subject of historical time and the human individual’s place in it.”³⁷ Even Jane Austen—a writer arguably obsessed with the scrupulous observance of cultural rules—was, Michael S. Paulson suggests, “examining the ways in which the time of capitalist modernity, in practice, tends to fall profoundly out of joint.”³⁸ What it meant to be contemporary was a highly gendered negotiation.

One cannot not participate in time. When certain well-known Romantic texts, such as William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” fantasize about it, they also lament that it cannot be done. Which is to say that the fracture feminists were effectively achieving the impossible. “Impossible,” as Zupančič stresses, simply means that something cannot subsist *at present*; Derrida goes so far as to say that: “only the impossible *can* arrive,” because that which is not deemed impossible would be, in a sense, already here.³⁹ The fracture feminists, invested in a similar internal outside to time, were not completely contemporary with their own historical moment, and instead interacted directly with the purported controls of the system of time.

It is not exactly clear what ultimately controls the system of time, or where those controls reside. In 1847–1848, needing to coordinate the global efforts of a maritime nation, Britain was the first country to adopt Greenwich mean time as a national standard, placing itself at the center of the timekeeping world. GMT would be assured by lunar measurements and the rotation of the Earth, which are supposed to guarantee time's regularity. Yet if, through "polar fracking" or the like,⁴⁰ the rotation of the planet were to speed up or slow down, we could still measure that change—meaning that there must be an external authority to which the rotation is referred. So too with the Earth's orbit and calendars. When confronted with competing calendar systems (as was happening quite often during these years, given the Revolution in France and the establishment of the opium trade with China), people could make reliable conversions between them, because the relationship between the calendars was fixed and stable. Such stability is possible because, we imagine, time is somewhere regulated in intervals that are archived and indexed. These ultimate if ineffable "controls of the system" would be a good example of what Lacan would call the big Other—that is, an authoritative but make-believe site that we treat as the governor of a symbolic system. Everyone must collectively imagine that a guarantee for time exists, and accept the universal force of that guarantee, for time to have any meaning at all. Everyone must be subject to the same standard; no one gets to renegotiate the standard. The fact that this arbiter does not exist anywhere other than in our desire is the source of its authoritativeness.

The fracture feminists split open the symbolic field of time and rhetorically inhabited it, so as to take up a direct relationship with that big Other. This is the gesture that makes them "fracture" feminists, as I will use the term. It gained them access to a reverse side of public political discourse. Any such feat, Alain Badiou recognizes, would "herald a new time" insofar as it "maintains that a cut in the spatial torsion will dispense with all rules of time"; it would achieve the "undoing" of time where one would normally get "temporalization."⁴¹ The time of such writing is impossible; the fracture feminists' ideas can be "demonstrated" rather than, say, known or not known.⁴² Such writing occurs when signifiers, through their halting and fitful refusal to cohere, impinge upon chronology and crack it open. Badiou calls this process "the undoing of the showing," and suggests that it could happen only in and through acts of writing.⁴³ Writing from within the fracture produces something of a different order than knowledge, yet not something entirely outside of the symbolic order;

it is rather located, as I have suggested, on its other side. That cut or fracture, written yet nonexistent, is the hallmark of this women's writing tradition. The Lacanian theorist Colette Soler advises that "what does not exist can, nevertheless, be spoken of," by which she means written; she calls that form of writing, "woman."⁴⁴

The fracture feminists work in just such a way, exempting themselves, at strategic moments, from the dictates of chronology, to suggest that they are living in the future already. The ideological power of time, as a system, rested on its coherence—an attribute of thought that women were seldom acknowledged to share. When feminist writing was able to flip those associations on their head, it was uniquely poised to challenge those powerful institutions, just by scrambling the logics of clock and calendar. These writers do not imagine the future as something yet to come. The future is internal to their present moment, something they are already experiencing. These are writers not contemporary with their own times; they are not really writers "of" the Romantic period. Nor would I say that they were ahead of or behind the times: rather, they selectively dispensed with the whole notion of a timeline by accepting its authority only incompletely and negotiating a different relationship to the meaning of the future. For these writers and in these texts, to speak of the future was not a prediction; they were speaking from the future now.

To understand the significance of this, we can return to the example of Browne's "War and Peace." Let us note that the poem apostrophizes "futurity," rather than "the future," and seems to make an implicit distinction between the two. "The future," as Browne describes it, would seem to be an indistinct, imaginary construct, through which we might imagine something yet to come as an elaboration of our present moment. The future would be the domain of prophecy, wishes, or predictions. "Futurity" for Browne is something else, somewhat accessible, and embedded within the present. Futurity, in "War and Peace," is an *arrivant* already here, glittering and beaming through the clouds of war.⁴⁵ The speaker calls it her muse and addresses it as such. It is something with which the speaker is already working, not something that she awaits: futurity is happening "Now, while the sounds of martial wrath assail, / While the red banner floats upon the gale."⁴⁶ Futurity has been happening "while" war has been happening; it "still beams unveild" today. Browne, then, is not predicting anything. Rather, she seizes hold of an alternate temporality that is breaking through the regular time of the present. The "years" are "unmeasur'd."⁴⁷ Hope, in Browne's poem, surveys futurity to make a map

of it: futurity is, then, a place rather than a time, and its place is here. Behind the clouds, it is radiating; it radiates.

Thus Browne maintains an impossible political perspective lodged between temporality and spatiality, which Derrida might call “world-wide-izing.”⁴⁸ The title “War and Peace” is not, it turns out, specifying a set of alternatives (e.g., peace here but war there, or war now but peace later); nor is war, for Browne, the continuation of peace by other means.⁴⁹ Peace, in “War and Peace,” is not the alternative to war or the cessation of it, nor a miracle, nor a brute form of politics; rather, it is a property of a future that is already here, with which Browne is well familiar, and that can be claimed already, as a supplement to the nation’s seemingly righteous bellicosity. The “age of bliss” to be awaited comes in “our day,” like dawn, “*éer*,” all of the time and already.⁵⁰ Yet it is a politics that can be realized only at the level of literary language, through ornate metaphors of stars and dawn, and through the assurances of regular, predictable rhyme. These are couplets, not the austere blank verse of the national record.

Although I have described futurity as an *arrivant*, we are not exactly in the realm of deconstruction here. Or rather, the concept of the contemporary future activates an unfamiliar form of deconstruction, one just as close to psychoanalysis. It is certainly a form of what Derrida calls “contretemporality,” a simultaneity of two separate times through which “time exits from time.”⁵¹ Yet Derrida distinguishes between the future called *avenir* and the future called *futur*, privileging the former: “I prefer saying this with the to-come of the *avenir* rather than the *future* so as to point toward the coming of an event rather than toward some future present,” he indicates.⁵² For Derrida, “the messianic future is not a future-present,” as John D. Caputo explains, but rather a recognition that the present cannot be delimited.⁵³ By contrast, for Browne and her fracture-seeking Romantic ilk, the future is indeed a future present. Browne, like Derrida, eschews prediction, but enacts precisely a present future in “War and Peace”—and this is the element that Derrida avoids privileging. Her *arrivant* is already here, apparent to her, and accessible in language. To claim it, though, she must disappear into a fracture in the national political discourse. To address “futurity” directly is immediately to intervene, on the one hand, in the politics of the nation, but, on the other, to reserve a line of direct access to a higher authority. Browne, still a teenager, is imagining politics in the mode of the “not-whole,” from the side of the “not being there”—a Lacanian formulation to which we will return shortly.⁵⁴ I have coined the deliberately silly term “contretempopia” to indicate the utopian thinking

that may arise from such arrangements, meaning utopia imagined as a time rather than a place in a future happening now.

Derrida takes care to distinguish the present tense from the future perfect, favoring the latter. Such a distinction occludes the possibility of a third perspective: the present future. The present future, I would suggest, is precisely the wellspring of Browne's appeal to futurity and this Romantic women's discourse more broadly. It is not a future that may one day arrive, or that we should await, or that we will have made possible, but a future that is currently happening, here and now. Its politics exist in and through the national political discourse without interrupting that discourse; it is a crack in the present moment. To speak from within this fracture would mean not to register as inside or outside the contemporary moment. In this sense, the "woman writer" of this literary tradition does not exist, even as her provocations cannot stop being written. Browne, as a "contemporary" writer, becomes the aporia of her own poetic discourse. It is Browne's own vantage point that must be awaited. Even her eventual death would be mourned as "an event which has cast a shadow of gloom through the sunshiny fields of contemporary literature"—that is, as a negative presence interrupting the contemporariness of her "field," having been the consequence of the very "sunshine" that was making the contemporary contemporary.⁵⁵ Thus Browne herself, rather than peace or justice, as Derrida would have it, becomes the impossible, inaccessible thing crucial for, but unthinkable within, the political order. That is why, despite Browne's deconstructive tendencies, her vision of peace is no "democracy to come." The deconstructionist thinkers we know best, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Jacques Derrida, can tend to sanctify the future perfect tense, fixating on events that *will have happened*. To speak of the contemporary future is sort of the opposite approach: its interest is more in what *was will happening* in the aftermath of the French Revolution and its long Napoleonic wake. The grammatical awkwardness of that phrase indicates the impossibility of the fracture feminist's voice. It is a form of expression slightly different from, though clearly related to, the phenomenon tracked by Emily Rohrbach in *Modernity's Mist*, according to which Romantic writers, radically uncertain of the future, engage with "what *might will have been*."⁵⁶ The fracture feminists, unlike their more misty contemporaries, were not trying to factor in the uncertainty of a number of unknowable futures into their engagement with the present. For them, the future part is the more stable and certain aspect of temporality, while the contemporary is what gets dislocated through a fracture in its

symbolic field. It is effectively the same disarming experience of time as Rohrbach describes, but viewed from the reverse side. That minimal shift in perspective, though, is substantial, because it is what enables the fracture feminists to intervene in the immediate political arena, rather than to speculate about how the future may be written. Fracture feminism is, in effect, the intimate deconstruction of a “poetics of anticipation,” arising from within that discourse, pursuing what Derrida would call an “abyssal divergence of the truth” under the banner “woman.”⁵⁷ It is in this sense that the fracture feminists were writing as women, for women.

Anne C. McCarthy has recently attempted a critical “experiment in a discontinuous historicism,” as a way to think about poems that “generate their own, often non-linear, temporalities” through the “lyric suspension of narrative time.”⁵⁸ I would like to think about my project as continuing her particular mode of historicism, pushing it across a range of genres and into more openly feminist contexts. The field of British Romantic studies continues to be dominated by historicist approaches, of the un-discontinuous sort. It is an approach that has particularly enabled the recovery of women’s writing from the period, which was once, decades ago, a subordinate part of the field. Yet let us keep in mind Edward W. Said’s reminder, that “what today we call historicism is an eighteenth-century idea,” and a politically motivated one at that.⁵⁹ A historicist approach to fracture feminist writing, I would suggest, is not necessarily counter-ideological, and may necessarily end up being normative and masculinist, albeit unintentionally, because the fracture feminists were specifically seeking to deconstruct the founding assumptions of historicism. I am not trying to imply that every text should be read in its own preferred way. Rather, I would suggest that a gesture of humility in the face of complex texts may serve us well for material that is purposefully paradoxical and vexing, lest we reclaim texts into a canon or context by learning not to see how they counteract that very gesture. My point is that the shift toward inclusion is not enough, because some texts cannot simply be welcomed into a list of prevailing texts. The very aspiration of these feminist works is to destroy the idea of being “fully part” of their literary-political moment, so to deny them this capacity, merely in the name of austere opposition to Romantic ideology, may inadvertently exert a kind of gender surveillance.

As an alternative methodology, intensive close-reading techniques are at the heart of this work. Part of my rationale for proceeding this way is because, as feminist scholarship has shown, women’s writing during the period tended to work through an accumulation of details instead of sum-

mary and overview.⁶⁰ Such texts respond especially well to deconstructive and psychoanalytic reading practices, which exert pressure on seemingly ancillary particulars. The temporal aporias I am tracking occur in seemingly mistaken or throwaway sentences or in acts of figuration that, in unexpected ways, deliberately miss their mark. I am interested especially in questions of desire as they begin to shape feminist responses to clock time and analyses of the immediate political moment. I scrutinize terms like “hope,” “fancy,” “to come,” and “echo,” which, within this tradition, come to indicate the fracture in chronology. I pay particular attention to sentences and passages where chronology seems to fold in upon itself, either in narratological terms, through figural language, or through verb tenses. The close readings, taken as a whole, draw attention to the futurity organizing these texts, and to the paradoxical ways that the future was finding its place within the Romantic era.

Sigmund Freud, in the wildly experimental phase that concluded his career, distinguished between “historical truth” and “material truth.” Material truth fills in the gaps in knowledge, while historical truth reveals only the cancellation of the subject, bringing to light a perspectival disjointedness rather than more knowledge.⁶¹ This is the sort of epistemology that is claimed in Browne’s poem, and in the writings of the fracture feminists more broadly. Psychoanalysis has long recognized the feminist potential of such a capacity. Freud once claimed, strangely and gallingly, that although a woman is certainly a sexual being, she may be human in other respects, too!⁶² That is obviously a deeply creepy thing to say, and yet it captures the truth of the situation for Romantic-era feminist writers who enacted a certain temporal resistance to national hegemony in their work: the woman, as such, does not exist except partially and conditionally; yet her writing inscribes a *jouissance*, playing out throughout the very pathways of literary figuration, that can access something altogether Other. Freud refuses to elaborate on this, saying, in effect, *don’t ask me, I’m just a psychoanalyst!* If you want to learn more about women’s knowledge, he advises, we must: “enquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information.”⁶³ For Freud, as with Browne’s “War and Peace,” the category of “woman” is the aporia that cannot exist in the here and now; “woman” is the name of an episteme belonging either to poetry or the future. When occasional (and thus present-oriented) poetry adopts the perspective of the future, it voices the Freudian aporia that is “woman.” Which is also to say that poetry is the repository of women’s knowledge already here

from the future, a mode of knowledge that can hollow out contemporary “experiences of life,” and so forfeits any claim to the contemporary. Woman, in this way of thinking, is the name for “futurity” writing itself excessively, beyond the limits of signification or the boundaries of political possibility, in the present, as future waste paper.

This is not to say that women writers were alone in embracing futurity: Jerome Christensen finds that Romanticism in general had a special relationship to anachronism,⁶⁴ and Bundock that ideas about the future began to seem “completely unlike . . . the futures of the past” in this period.⁶⁵ One especially thinks of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s aspiration that poetry serve as “the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present,” presenting a kind of temporal verso to the development, by Walter Scott and others, of the historical novel during these years.⁶⁶ Yet women were experimenting with literary futurity especially often, and were finding a very specific way to do so: by inhabiting the fracture in time. They wrote about the future as if they were already experiencing it, and their literary efforts are the subject of this book.

Behrendt’s research helps us to understand the immediate political context for this tradition of writing. In the 1790s, public political commentary became more difficult for women in Britain, as the cultural establishment “began to erect new barriers to prevent women from contributing to the public discourse and to resuscitate some of the old ones.”⁶⁷ Women, who were neither permitted to participate in nor ignore masculinist discussions of public policy, had to adapt those rhetorics if they wished their writing to register publicly.⁶⁸ They could do this most effectively in the genres of poetry and fiction, because women still had relatively easy access to publication in those genres and they were genres with adequate public cachet.⁶⁹ Consequently, the writing of the contemporary future employs rhetorical strategies that today we associate with deconstruction: the work is highly playful, extremely precise in its diction, self-consciously literary; it tends toward matters of justice as an experience of the impossible; it gets there by speaking from within, rather than directly challenging, the discourses of powerful men. (This is, in a perhaps unnecessarily generous reading, what Freud may have implied when he said that women have “little sense of justice” *of their own*.)⁷⁰ It is negotiation, in the deconstructive sense, as a “technique of liberation.”⁷¹ As Helen Maria Williams translates an influential novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, she pulls apart the timelines that support patriarchal concepts like “tradition,” “nature,” “science,” “citizenship,” “labour,” “sonnet,” and “love”; Hays,

too, rewrites Bernardin, mashing up *Paul et Virginie* with the horrific fictional patri-opticon of Richardson's *Clarissa*. Hemans and Shelley, in "A Spirit's Return" and *The Last Man*, each commandeer the legacy of Lord Byron as a way of thinking about posthumous existence. Fracture feminism, then, is not separate or separable from masculinist writing during the period; it often duplicates hegemonic discourse so faithfully that it exposes the internal contradictions of patriarchal politics. And of course, there is nothing biological about this gender division: there were male writers and publishers, such as Robert Merry, John Bell, Bernardin, and John Souter, who participated in this tradition and helped to build its publication networks. Yet the networks they were building aspired to promote women's writing specifically, and, even in their own work, they remained positively committed to a sexual nonrelation. Whereas most writers of the era (of both sexes) thought of themselves as part of their current moment (as one generally does), the fracture feminists (of both sexes) would "not allow for any universality," as Lacan would say, and so their writing, awaited but already here, "will be a not-whole, insofar as it has the choice of positing itself . . . [on the side of] not being there."⁷² It is, then, an experiment in occluded *Dasein*. Speaking of and through the institutions that were regularizing time, the fracture feminists reserved a channel of direct access to its Other. It is in that sense that the fracture feminists are, symbolically speaking, "women writers."⁷³

Lacan would have called such writing "a camber . . . which produces the break or a discontinuity" in temporal discourse.⁷⁴ Academic historians, Lacan alleges in *Seminar X*, naively imagine that events have "causes," and thus can only see events at the symbolic level, settling for the ability to trace a signifying chain without seeing its relations to the imaginary and real.⁷⁵ Just as the object *a*, for Lacan, becomes the "cause of desire" for a subject, so too does it become, when considered as a historiographic factor, "the meaning of history," its "primordial cause" and "the substance of this function of cause." Thus, instead of historians, he urges, we should seek writers of the *après-coup* who can teach us how not to fill in "the gap between cause and effect."⁷⁶ This is exactly the blankness and atemporality that characterizes the work of the fracture feminists. They were cultivating a very specific form of relation to temporality and the future, which would serve as, as Krapp suggests, "a structural form of intervention into the sphere of political commentary dominated by men."⁷⁷ Central among their concerns was what it meant to live, or not live, in one's own times. Fracture feminists were deeply concerned with the political events of their

respective present moments, from the Siege of Gibraltar to the French Revolution to the Napoleonic Wars and the victory at Waterloo; plantation slavery and the monarchy; women's rights and the push for parliamentary reform. Yet instead of commenting on these matters directly, these feminist writers were responding *as historians* to the contemporary moment, as if they themselves were not fully subject to the demands of chronology.

The temporal aporia may be glimpsed from either a psychoanalytic or deconstructive point of view—indeed, it is the duration-without-duration that the two discourses, despite their constant squabbling, share. Karen Hadley stresses that “time is, and should be acknowledged as, a key factor in understanding the deconstructive conception of text, because the rupturing of time is what prevents concepts from closing in on themselves, from totalizing.”⁷⁸ In studying fracture feminism, then, we find ourselves in the zone held in common between psychoanalysis and deconstruction—two ways of close reading that, despite their intimacy, have often mistrusted one another.

Derrida worried that history, as an epistemology and discipline, had yet to accommodate the temporal and technological paradoxes of psychoanalysis.⁷⁹ And psychoanalysis, for its part, understands history to be an impossible field of knowledge, insofar as “each event seems to be overdetermined.”⁸⁰ Following these prompts, *Fracture Feminism* attempts to think about feminist literary history as a psychoanalytic intervention into the very concept of history, through the collective project of disaffiliating history from chronology. We are within the intellectual wheelhouse of what Derrida calls “a psychoanalyst historian” (as opposed to “an ordinary historian”),⁸¹ whose temporality would be “Freuderridian time.”⁸² To proceed by such a method, Hélène Cixous suggests, would be to raise such questions as: To whom does time belong? Who “has” time? What and whose time can be said to be “ours”?⁸³ In the Romantic period, it was the feminist poets and novelists who were asking these questions. Cixous suspects that one can respond to such questions only by developing a mode of psychoanalysis infused with deconstructive impulses, beyond Freudian dictates. “One must imagine, then, another analysis,” she says, one that she calls, addressing the late Derrida, “your philanalysis.”⁸⁴ She predicts the rise of “your philanalysis” as a quasi-Derridean methodology and field of theoretical study: “One day people will study Derridanalysis.”⁸⁵ The fracture feminists were not only “female philosophers” but female philanalysts. Yet the texts discussed here, I suggest, generally eschew a Cixousian language of prediction and move directly into performing

the awaited Derridanalysis. They explore the intellectual space between deconstruction and psychoanalysis as a collective strategy for upending the hegemonies of clock and calendar, as well as the hegemonies sustained by clock and calendar.

To write in such a register depends upon maintaining the gap between “time” and “temporality,” as we saw Browne doing in “War and Peace.” Time, as I suggested above, is a system of measure that depends on everyone’s collective acceptance of it. It must appear to be something objective to have any meaning. Temporality, meanwhile, might refer to a person’s sense of time passing, or their experience of time. One term is meant to be objective, the other subjective. Romanticism often deals with the gap between these registers: famous examples might include Wordsworth’s immortality ode and Austen’s *Persuasion*, both of which dwell on a person’s peculiar affective relation to the standardized ticking of the clock, figuratively speaking. Such a gap, this study will suggest, could be exploited rhetorically as a form of literary activism. In psychoanalysis, this predicament of being caught between objective and subjective chronologies is known as “logical time,” after an essay by Lacan in which the solution to a puzzle has to be explained twice, once each in subjective and objective registers, in order to make sense.⁸⁶ Women writers of the Romantic period would likewise emphasize the disjuncture between time and temporality, in an attempt to hold open the gap between objective and subjective chronologies and thus deconstruct the era’s prevailing political discourses. Their philanalysis announced an ex-sistence that was sustainable, if still conceptually impossible, for feminist writing. It was not an opposing discourse to mainstream political-temporal sensibilities, in the sense that it could not be totalized into a system of its own; rather, it highlighted the contradictions in hegemonic discourses and asserted itself within those contradictions in a way that could never become participation. Hence, from the perspective of the culture at large, their work described the impossible, that is, something that could not happen in that time or place, and yet was ambiguously *there*.

Chapter 1, “The Uses of History in Wollstonecraft’s Afterlives,” establishes Wollstonecraft’s centrality to fracture feminism, and suggests how certain later texts, written in the wake of her death, pushed that fracture in new directions. The later texts are “Ithuriel,” a short story recently discovered in an archive, which inducts the recently deceased Wollstonecraft into a cosmic feminist hall of fame that interrupts an all-male assembly of speakers; *A Letter to the Women of England*, by Mary Robinson (writing

under the pseudonym Mary Anne Randall), which institutionalizes Wollstonecraft's call for improved female education with the proposal for an all-female university to be established now, but in the future; and finally Anna Letitia Barbauld's essay "On the Uses of History," which I read in concert with her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and Mary Shelley's "Valerius, or the Reanimated Roman." These texts, taken together, suggest that the fracture that Wollstonecraft had impossibly ventriloquized could, if approached strategically, become the basis for a worldwide-ized feminist historiography. These writers saw Wollstonecraft as someone "whose death has not been sufficiently lamented, but to whose genius posterity will render justice."⁸⁷

Chapter 2, "Adoptive Siblings across Oceans of Futurity," brings together a pair of feminist novels: *Paul and Virginia* as translated by Helen Maria Williams, and *The Victim of Prejudice* by Mary Hays. Both use sexual relations between adoptive siblings as a way to discuss the contemporary future and the rights of woman in a worldwide-ized context. In my analysis of *Paul and Virginia*, I show how Bernardin's French colonialist fantasy was adapted, through an elaborate system of narrative frames, for an ambivalent negotiation of chattel slavery rooted in a creolizing politics of the contemporary future. I then turn to *The Victim of Prejudice*, a novel inspired both by Wollstonecraft's thought and Williams's translation of Bernardin, which presents women's rights as exclusively a matter for the future. Hays's protagonist learns to claim rights only through their perpetual deferment, in a form of justice only ever to come yet available already to be written. She achieves this less exploitative future through an elaborate and highly idealized depiction of father-daughter incest, which in *The Victim of Prejudice* offers an alternative to the tragic pastoral bliss of *Paul and Virginia*-style yearnings. In so doing, Hays vindicates the right of the Oedipus complex in ways that psychoanalytic theory is still catching up to, today, in the recently published texts of Lacan.

Chapter 3, "Della Cruscan Time," discusses poems by Robinson, Robert Merry, and Hannah Cowley—playful poets who, in the 1780s and '90s, were publishing ornate erotic verse in the newspaper. Their poetry would overload its diction with sexual enjoyment beyond the usual capacity of language, to create a fracture in time. They used that temporal fracture to upend norms of monogamy, which in turn enabled them to develop atemporal responses to major international political events, such as the French Revolution and the Siege of Gibraltar. I focus especially on Robinson's tribute to Merry in *Ainsi va le Monde*, which becomes a

detailed commentary on the fractured queer temporality of the French Revolution; on Merry's "Ode to Folly," which attaches geological timeframes to the Siege of Gibraltar as a way of counteracting British nationalism and militarism; on the lush prosody of Merry's "The Adieu and Recall to Love," which opens up a proto-Wollstonecraftian *jouissance* of the future; and on a couple of Cowley's poems dedicated to Della Crusca, which use expressions of jealousy to expose the Della Cruscan poetic exchange to further temporal disruption.

Chapter 4, "Future Poetry," considers poems by Anna Letitia Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Charlotte Caroline Richardson, and Felicia Hemans in the context of Wollstonecraft's remarks about poetry. In a pair of poems by Barbauld, time gets either allegorized as a military incursion or reconstituted as a memory from the future. Smith's *Beachy Head* reckons with the figural power of "Hope" and "Fancy's hand" as it deconstructs the timelines of triumphal nationalism through the figure of a hermit. Richardson's post-Waterloo poem of jubilee, *Harvest: A Poem*, upends national celebrations of victory through an ethos of hospitality and a healthy dose of Oedipal preoccupation. Hemans's experiments with time, ghosts, and the future in "A Spirit's Return" establish the contemporary future as a possible conduit for desire. Hemans would continue this line of thought in "An Evening Prayer at a Girls' School," in which the reader, psychotically prevented from having any separation from the subjects of the poem, is asked to experience the future already. Taken together, these poetic experiments in *contretemporality* develop utopias of lack but not limitation; they show us (as Wollstonecraft had) that utopia can be a time rather than a place—an impossible future that had already arrived. This is what I am calling "*contretempopia*," the utopia of the contemporary future.

Chapter 5, "*Gulzara* and *The Last Man*: The Worldwide-ization of the *Roman à Clef*," brings together two *romans à clef* that refuse to be fully *romans à clef* by virtue of their orientation toward the contemporary future. Both novels acknowledge the future as an aspect of the present by insistently crossing narrative frames and switching genres midstream. Both novels reckon with what it would mean to "count" oneself in a culture where one must remain forever, like Echo of ancient Roman myth, not-whole.

In the book's Conclusion, I consider the question of whether "fracture feminism," which seems to depend on the idea of setting oneself apart from others, would have political purchase in a world in which political movements tend to be associated with collectives. I take up questions posed by the philosophers Giorgio Agamben, who asks "of whom and of