This brilliantly conceived, exhilarating, and wide-ranging collection of essays is essential reading for all those interested in taking the long view of the historical, literary, and philosophical times of British Romanticism.

Pamela Clemitt, Queen Mary, University of London

Romanticism and Time is a remarkable affirmation of border-crossings and international exchanges in many ways. This major collection of essays represents the work of eminent scholars from France, Germany, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as they in turn represent the Romanticisms that emerged not only from the "four nations" of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland but also from Continental Europe and America. With their commitment to diversity, to change, and to exchange, and because of their awareness of the romanticism of periodization itself, the authors in this volume produce, as Wordsworth might say, a "timely utterance."

Kevis Goodman, University of California, Berkeley

This volume considers Romantic poetry as embedded in and reflecting on the march of time, regarding it not merely as a reaction to the course of events between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, but also as a form of creative engagement with history in the making. Revising current thinking about periodisation, these essays survey the Romantic canon's evolution over time and approach Romanticism as a phenomenon unfolding across national borders.

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2. Anthropocene Temporalities and British Romantic Poetry

Evan Gottlieb

As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the dawning of the Anthropocene has created not only tangible environmental and political effects, but also has threatened to alter our traditionally anthropocentric sense of time, which (following Quentin Meillassoux) I dub “correlationist time.” Although these alterations feel novel, however, evidence of temporality’s malleability can be traced back at least to the British Romantics, who like us were navigating uncharted waters, politically as well as ecologically. After outlining the modern Western consolidation of “correlationist time” and locating its representational epitome in some early poetry of William Wordsworth, I sketch four alternatives to “correlationist time” limned by other British Romantics poets: deep time (Charlotte Smith, Percy Shelley); slow time (Keats), revolutionary time (Shelley again), and hyper-Chaotic time (Byron).

According to Reinhart Koselleck’s influential formulation, the defining experience of modernity has been acceleration. Combined with what he calls a new sense of an ‘open future’, Koselleck argues that this privileging of progress and novelty has been the reigning temporality since the late eighteenth century.¹ Although this thesis clearly takes its cues from the Industrial Revolution’s speeding up of socio-political and economic processes, it neglects to consider the environmental impacts that have today become (nearly) impossible to ignore.² This oversight

² I say ‘(nearly) impossible to ignore’ because some governments, political parties, industries, corporations, and other entities remain all too eager to deny, downplay,
is symptomatic not just of Koselleck’s scholarly milieu but also of the fact that the transition from older (feudal) modes of historical thinking to newer, modern ones nevertheless retained a basic assumption: that human temporalities are largely divorced from planetary ones.\(^3\) Indeed, the carry-over from earlier eras, which generally held nature to be at best a passive backdrop for human activity, and at worst a stubborn obstacle to be overcome by human ingenuity and industry, arguably lies behind capitalist modernity’s penchant for treating the natural world primarily as a resource to be exploited.

But in the time of the Anthropocene, this pretence is now untenable, at least for those of us who, following Bruno Latour, are ready to admit that ‘we [have] shifted from a mere ecological crisis into what should instead be called *a profound mutation in our relation to the world*.\(^4\) This mutation takes many forms, to be sure, and Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies its temporal dimension in his formative 2009 article, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, where he observes that ‘anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history […]. A fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought has come undone in this crisis’.\(^5\) The assumption to which Chakrabarty alludes, moreover, is as basic as it is increasingly uncertain: ‘that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience’.\(^6\) Such continuity seemed to be guaranteed both by the supposed distinction (retained by Koselleck’s accelerated modernity) between human and planetary history, and modernity’s imagined triumph of the former over the latter: precisely the two postulates that the Anthropocene threatens to disprove with increasing violence, as Chakrabarty demonstrated more than a decade ago.

\(^3\) This is not to deny that strands of philosophical thinking have long proposed various connections between our sense of time and our geophysical situatedness as upright bipedals; for a fascinating meditation on such theories, see Thomas Moynihan, *Spinal Catastrophism: A Secret History* (Windsor Quarry, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2019).


\(^5\) Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009), 197–222 (pp. 201, 207), https://doi.org/10.1086/596640

\(^6\) Ibid.
Chakrabarty posits this development as new because, like many historians, he largely sees the Anthropocene itself as a relatively new affair. But there are good reasons to recognise anthropocenic effects beginning much earlier than ‘the Great Acceleration’ of the post-World-War-II period or even the Industrial Revolution; humans have been systematically altering our environments, after all, since the dawn of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent some 10,000 years ago. Moreover—and more to the point in this chapter, which will argue for William Wordsworth’s poetry as the norm of Romantic-era constructions of anthropocentric temporality, before outlining a number of his contemporaries’ alternatives—the idea of the earth as primarily dead or at least inert matter (and thus merely waiting to be exploited by us) was already being challenged in the later nineteenth century, not least by the *naturphilosophie* of Friedrich Schelling. As Iain Hamilton Grant, Ben Woodard, and others have demonstrated, for Schelling (in his early works at least) nature must be understood in its properly active modality, not just as ‘the ground’ (both literal and metaphorical) of all human thought and being, but as an active force in its own right, replete with a ‘fundamental productivity’ that takes place on timescales far in excess of the human. Schelling’s *naturphilosophie*, moreover, was in line with roughly contemporary work in the budding discipline of geology, or ‘natural philosophy’ as it was still known, which was challenging Biblical accounts of the Earth’s formation and history with evidence drawn first from the fossil record and then, more compellingly, from contemporary lithic evidence. In France, the Comte de Buffon and his rival Georges Cuvier had already put forth competing theories of geological change; in Britain, James Hutton was observing Scottish rock formations, concluding that their visible strata represented successive cycles of lithic uplift and erosion that could only be accounted for via an ‘abyss of time’ that makes ‘the mind see[m] to grow giddy’, in the words of his friend and populariser James Playfair. As Jeffrey J. Cohen

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remarks, by recognizing that the igneous expanses of Edinburgh’s Arthur’s Seat—the remains of a once-active volcano—had thrust through younger sedimentary stone, Hutton essentially ‘discerned the opening of deep time, [of] the earth’s slow liveliness’. Despite the ever-increasing evidence of the planet’s titanic age and inhuman productivity, however, the existence of God could still guarantee that the natural world was—and by implication would remain—conducive to human flourishing. Charles Lyell makes this plain in the final chapter of his Principles of Geology (1830–33), which first states that geologists can safely conclude ‘it is not only the present condition of the globe that has been suited to the accommodation of myriads of living creatures, but that many former states also have been equally adapted to the organization and habits of prior races of beings’, before reiterating the need for ‘a just estimate of the relations which subsist between the finite powers of man and the attributes of an Infinite and Eternal Being’. Although the immediate context of Lyell’s final call for scientific humility is the admission that scientists may never attain a complete understanding of planetary history, the implication is that the mismatch between human and divine temporalities need not trouble us so long as our faith in the benevolence of God and His creation—the Earth itself—remains unshaken.

As Noah Heringman and others have persuasively argued, these developments in geology did not go unnoticed by the Romantic poets of the day. In this vein, a sense of human flourishing as both predicated on and guaranteed by the natural world’s durability is perhaps best expressed by William Wordsworth’s well-known lines: ‘My heart leaps up when I behold/A Rainbow in the sky:/So was it when my life began;/So is it now I am a Man;/So be it when I shall grow old,/Or let me die!’ Although God is nowhere mentioned here, Wordsworth’s choice of a rainbow as his central image seems overdetermined by its symbolic status in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where it appears most

prominently in Genesis as a sign of God’s ‘postdiluvian covenant with all living creatures not to destroy the earth [again]’.\textsuperscript{13} Wordsworth’s shrewd incorporation of the rainbow into his poem, then, subtly reminds readers that, whatever geology might be discovering about the earth’s unpredictable productivity, its ultimate stability could still be counted on as the basis of human life and, by extension, morality. Just as ‘[t]he Child is Father of the Man’, Wordsworth reassures us that, come what may, our environment will sustain us, spiritually as well as physically, just as the speaker’s days, ideally, will be ‘Bound each to each by natural piety’.\textsuperscript{14}

To be sure, many of Wordsworth’s other poems are populated with more uncanny earthly phenomena: the ‘sounding cataract’ that ‘haunt[s]’ the ‘boyish’ Wordsworth ‘like a passion’ in ‘Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey’ (74–78), for example, or the inexplicable, isolated ‘huge Stone’ that serves as an extended simile in ‘Resolution and Independence’ (399).\textsuperscript{15} Even in these examples, however, what remains certain is Wordsworth’s conviction that the natural world fundamentally exists in harmony with the human one, if only we can learn to see it rightly. Elsewhere, I have written about this ‘tendency [of Wordsworth] to correlate things to their human significances’, drawing on Quentin Meillassoux’s influential diagnosis of ‘correlationism’ as the mode of modern thought, inherited most directly from Immanuel Kant, which claims we can never perceive, know, or even think about the world on its own terms, but rather only in terms of its relation to us (and vice versa).\textsuperscript{16} Hence we have access only to what ‘correlates’ between us and ‘the great outdoors’, as Meillassoux terms it. Understood in this light, it makes perfect sense that ‘My heart leaps up’ should appear in the ‘Moods of my Own Mind’ section of Wordsworth’s Poems, in Two Volumes. Indeed, the apparent redundancy in that title—\textit{my own mind}—emphasises precisely Wordsworth’s commitment to correlationism:

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 417, n1.
\textsuperscript{14} Wordsworth, ‘My heart leaps up’, lines 7–9.
\textsuperscript{15} For more on the appearance of these and similar natural objects in Wordsworth and certain of his inheritors, see, e.g. Mary Jacobus, Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
the world is knowable, not to mention meaningful, only insofar as it correlates to Wordsworth’s mental experience of it.

We can see such correlationism everywhere in Wordsworth, but for reasons of space, another poem published in the same 1807 volume will have to suffice as our lone second example. Here are the opening stanzas and closing stanzas of ‘To the Daisy’:

In youth from rock to rock I went,
From hill to hill, in discontent,
Of pleasure high and turbulent.

Most pleas’d when most uneasy:
But now my own delights I make
My thirst at every rill can slake,
And gladly Nature’s love partake,

Of thee, sweet Daisy!

When soothed a while by milder airs,
Thee Winter in the garland wears,
That thinly shades his few grey hairs;

Spring cannot shun thee;
Whole summer fields are thine by right;
And Autumn, melancholy Wight!
Doth in thy crimson head delight,

When rains are on thee.

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And all day long I number yet,
All seasons through, another debt,
Which I wherever thou art met,

To thee am owing;
An instinct call it, a blind sense;
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how nor whence,
Nor whither going.

Child of the Year! That round dost run
Thy course, bold lover of the sun,
And cheerful when the day’s begun
As morning Leveret,
Thou long the Poet’s praise shall gain;
Thou wilt be more belov’d by men
In times to come; thou not in vain
Art Nature’s Favorite.17

Notwithstanding Wordsworth’s apparently high estimation of this poem—he placed it at the opening of the first book of Poems, in Two Volumes—it’s jaunty meter and repeating octaves deny it the high seriousness of much of Wordsworth’s better-known early verse. Nevertheless, its opening contrast between the speaker’s supposed prior heedlessness and his current, hard-earned maturity shares the narrative DNA of many of Wordsworth’s more acclaimed poems, especially ‘Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey’. Like that poem, too, ‘To the Daisy’ credits nature’s benevolent influence with the speaker’s transformation from febrile boy to cool-headed man. Unlike ‘Tintern Abbey’ and the later The Prelude, however, here that sense of psychological and philosophical progress is uncomplicated by any narrative recursion or fascination with semi-traumatic ‘spots of time’. Instead, the speaker establishes his mature sense of self by aligning it with the various but predictable appearances of the titular flower, which in turn reflect the regular cycles of the seasons in the first stanza and the solar year in the final stanza. This calibration of human and planetary

rhythms thus provides the ‘genial influence’ whose appearance and destination Wordsworth rather disingenuously claims not to know in lines 70–71. His penultimate declaration that the daisy ‘wilt be more belov’d by men/In times to come’, however, is clearly beholden to precisely this certainty, since Wordsworth’s confident prediction of human continuity and even improvement (‘more belov’d’; my italics) is implicitly underwritten by the poem’s preceding delineations of a regular, predictable, earthly temporality—‘all day long [...] all seasons through’—which governs all.

Following Meillassoux, I propose to call the temporality Wordsworth limns here as ‘correlationist time’. By this I don’t mean a radically subjective sense of time, but rather one that connects natural history to human history in a reassuringly correlationist manner, such that the expectation of human continuity is underwritten by an ultimately anthropocentric faith in humanity’s connection with a natural world perceived by us as metastable and enduring. Although the once-common assumption that, after the Flood, the Earth existed in a homeostatic, generally unchanging state had been thrown into doubt by the new earth sciences, Wordsworth’s poetry helps (re-)establish the basic coordinates of a correlationist time in which human history and natural history are gently ‘bound each to each’. Chakrabarty’s thesis that human history and natural history were perceived as divergent by modernity prior to the Anthropocene thus needs amending in light of Wordsworth’s influential promotion of correlationist time as an antidote to modern malaise. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that correlationist time, in its quiet support of a ‘world for us’ mindset, ironically chimes with extractive capitalism’s treatment of the natural world as a resource to be exploited and a dumping-ground for ‘external costs’ like waste water.

Yet even as this Wordsworthian attitude toward both nature (as what sustains humanity) and history (as progress toward a more-or-less predictable future) became more widespread, a number of alternatives to the paradigm of correlationist time began to appear in other British Romantic poetry. For reasons of space, I can only gesture here toward some of the social, political, and economic factors that may have contributed to this fracturing: the massive political upheavals set off by the French Revolution and then partially globalised by the Napoleonic Wars; the subsequent rehabilitation of much of Europe’s
old order following the Congress of Vienna; and the dramatic, post-1815 downturn in the British economy, which in turn was worsened by a variety of factors including the heavy national debt incurred during wartime; the repatriation of thousands of British troops; a devastating series of bad harvests; and an increasingly displaced agricultural workforce.\footnote{‘History of the British national debt’, \textit{Wikipedia}. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_national_debt} Parliamentary reform, long promised, still seemed a distant dream—one that was literally trampled on by the infamous Peterloo Massacre of August 1819. This is not an exhaustive list by any means, and as we will see below, alternatives to correlationist time were beginning to appear prior to at least some these events. Nevertheless, when considered alongside many younger Romantics’ disillusionment with Wordsworth’s increasing conservatism—exemplified in Percy Shelley’s sonnet ‘To Wordsworth’ and Mary Shelley’s scathing judgment after hearing parts of Wordsworth’s \textit{Excursion}: ‘He is a slave’\footnote{The dismissal is from Mary Shelley’s journal entry of September 14, 1814, \textit{Shelley’s Poetry and Prose}, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, p. 92, n1.}—it becomes clear that the break between so-called first- and second-generation Romantics remains pertinent to any consideration of poetic as well as political transformation during the era. At the risk of schematism, then, I propose we can see in the work of Wordsworth’s peers and inheritors at least four alternatives to correlationist time, which I will briefly outline and exemplify in what follows.

\textbf{1. Deep Time}

As discussed above, the burgeoning discipline of geology made it increasingly evident that planetary history demands to be understood on timescales that dwarf not only individual human lives but also humanity as a whole. As Heringman puts it, even when Hutton, Lyell and others made incorrect or vague conjectures about the origins and processes that created the rock formations they observed, their accounts cumulatively painted a picture of a ‘geological past [...] so remote that its vestiges can be read only as signs of obscure, titanic processes’.\footnote{Heringman, \textit{Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology}, p. 4.} These processes clearly preceded human life and presumably would...
continue without it; barring the insertion of an all-seeing and benevolent God into the picture, the clear implication was that ‘correlationist time’ simply cannot account for the majority of Earth’s history. As it happens, this insight forms the basis of Quentin Meillassoux’s opening gambit in his book After Finitude, whose first chapters outline the problems caused for correlationists by the existence of what Meillassoux calls the ‘arche-fossil’: artefactual evidence of material existence that clearly preceded conscious life, or indeed any life at all.21 Not coincidentally, such fossils find their way into much Romantic poetry, where they likewise frequently serve as reminders of the incommensurability of ‘deep time’ with an anthropocentric or correlationist view of the world. Charlotte Smith’s ‘Beachy Head’ (1807), although written too early to be considered a ‘true’ second-generation Romantic poem, has recently returned to the forefront of the Romantic poetic canon in no small part because of its attention to the fossilised shells whose presence stirs Smith’s curiosity as she walks at some distance inland from the Sussex coastline:

Ah hills! so early loved! in fancy still
I breathe your pure keen airs; and still behold
Those widely spreading views, mocking alike
The Poet and the Painter’s utmost art.
And still, observing objects more minute,
Wondering remark the strange and foreign forms
Of sea shells; with the pale calcareous soil
Mingled, and seeming of resembling substance.
Tho’ surely the blue Ocean (from the heights
Where the downs westward trend, but dimly seen)
Here never roll’d its surge. Does Nature then
Mimic, in wanton mood, fantastic shapes

Of bivalves, and inwreathed volutes, that cling
To the dark sea-rock of the wat’ry world?
Or did this range of chalky mountains, once
Form a vast basin, where the Ocean waves
Swell’d fathomless? What time these fossil shells,
Buoy’d on their native element, were thrown
Among the imbedding calx: when the huge hill
Its giant bulk heaved, and in strange ferment
Grew up a guardian barrier, ’twixt the sea
And the green level of the sylvan weald.22

As Kevis Goodman notes, in this passage Smith takes readers through a quick tour of the various geological theories of her day, including the idea that such apparent abnormalities as inland ocean fossils might represent nothing more than ‘lusus naturae (sports or tricks of nature)’.23 Given that Smith spends much more time considering more scientific possibilities, however, Goodman plausibly concludes that ‘for Smith, meditating on the fossil shells far from the sea, spatial displacement encodes historical difference’. In Beachy Head, human history is thoroughly mixed up with the vestiges of a primordially productive earth; but the presence of fossilised shells far from the sea also highlights the disjunction between human history and the deep, planetary time that Smith can only guess and wonder at in these lines. Certainly, Smith’s verse suggests that, contra Wordsworth, human and planetary temporalities cannot be unproblematically aligned.

This suggestion is taken up even more emphatically in Percy Shelley’s alpine meditation, ‘Mont Blanc’ (1817). When Mary and Percy toured the Chamonix Valley in the summer of 1816 and gazed up at the

22 Charlotte Smith, Beachy Head, in Charlotte Smith: Major Poetic Works, ed. by Claire Knowles and Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2017), lines 368–89.
cloud-obscured peaks of Mont Blanc from a bridge over the Arve river, they were hardly the first British tourists to do so; indeed, although ‘Mont Blanc’ has long been interpreted as Shelley’s philosophical riposte to Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’, it more directly responds to S.T. Coleridge’s explicitly theocratic ‘Hymn before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni’ (1802). ‘Mont Blanc’ has recently become a touchstone poem for literary critics, including me, interested in applying Speculative Realist principles to Romantic poetry (and vice versa). Here, then, it will be enough to note how the poem is filled with allusions to the literally inhuman spans of time over which, Shelley correctly assumes, the mountain and its surrounding vales were formed. One passage, drawn from the fourth section, can stand for the whole in this regard:

All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquility
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
And this, the naked countenance of earth,
On which I gaze, even these primaeval mountains
Teach the adverting mind.

The contrast between the temporality of a human life-cycle—or, for that matter, the life-cycle of any living thing—and that of the monumental lithic formation with which Shelley is confronted, could not be clearer; Wordsworth’s daisy wilts by comparison. Even as Shelley’s imagination is drawn to the mountain’s peak—his mind ‘advert[s]’ to it, implying

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an involuntary absorption or fascination—the disparity between mind and matter makes clear that they may inhabit the same space, the same ‘universe of things’ (to quote the poem’s opening line), but not the same temporality. In this light, Shelley’s famous final question to the mountain—‘And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,/If to the human mind’s imaginings/Silence and solitude were vacancy?’—is anything but rhetorical; whatever else we might make of it, the deep time of Mont Blanc precedes, exceeds, and recedes from us.

2. Slow Time

In *The Poetics of Decline in British Romanticism*, Jonathan Sachs makes a compelling case for ‘slow time’ as an alternative temporality of the Romantic era, one that is ‘not simply a reaction to [the] acceleration’ of modern commercial life, but also ‘reveals the development of new kinds of literary experience’. While Sachs’ interest is largely in slow time as an experiential category, I think it also appears as an alternative Romantic temporality in a more objective sense. I am primarily thinking here, of course, of John Keats’s use of this phrase in his opening address to the object of antiquity he calls a Grecian Urn: ‘Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness,/Thou foster-child of silence and slow time [...].’ As a product of human labour, the artefact in question obviously differs in kind from the geological features that populate the previous section’s deep time. The questions that the urn raises for Keats, however, in some respects differ only in degree from those that the fossils raise for Smith, or that Mont Blanc raises for Shelley. What is the meaning of this non-human thing, of indeterminate age, that confronts humans with evidence of our own relative insignificance in the historical record prior to the Anthropocene? Is it desirable—or even possible—to strike up an imaginative relation with it, or is that simply an act of hubris, at best a compensatory cognitive movement designed to forestall recognition of our historical ephemerality? The fact that Keats’ poem, like Shelley’s,

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26 Ibid., lines 141–43.
ends on a famously ambiguous note—are we really supposed to believe that the neo-classical platitude, ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’, provides genuine salvation for suffering, mortal humans?—seems far from coincidental when seen in this light; these are not questions we will answer in our lifetime, or any lifetime.

Yet thanks precisely to its clearly human origins, the urn offers something that neither fossils nor mountains can: evidence of the potential endurance of material artefacts far beyond the original intentions, lifespans, and even civilizational contexts of their makers. The urn that Keats likely saw in the British Museum was probably not originally designed merely to be displayed and admired, but rather to be used—quite possibly as a funereal vessel. Notably, however, Keats shows no interest whatsoever in the urn’s original usage, nor in the manner in which it eventually arrived at the British Museum for exhibition; instead, he remains almost entirely focused on its exterior scenes. Keats’ silence on these questions, then, implies his intuitive recognition that the urn’s history, first as a useful implement and later as a token of Britain’s increasing dominance on the world stage, is literally neither here nor there; rather, the urn’s spatial presence in front of Keats (and its virtual presence in front of us, Keats’ readers) stands in contrast to its temporal dislocation as an object ‘out of time’, existing neither in its original context nor unproblematically in the present moment (whether representational or experiential). The urn thus materially embodies Ian Hodder’s anthropological observation that ‘things and humans live in different temporalities’, despite their inevitable entanglement.

Not all things exist in the ‘slow time’ of Keats’ urn, of course—many things, by contrast, exist at temporalities so minuscule (from a human perspective, at least) that we are hardly aware of them. But as a survivor of an ancient civilization brought into Keats’ modern world of 1817, the urn’s existence in a ‘slow time’ continuum exemplifies Hodder’s thesis that ‘There is more to history than a linear account of sequences of events; there is also the material history, the heritage of

29 Ibid., p. 234, line 49.
30 On Keats’ relation to museum culture see, e.g., Christopher Rovee, ‘Trashing Keats’, ELH, 75.4 (Winter 2008), 993–1022, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.0.0022
past acts, the detritus of past millennia that bumps up against us in a non-linear way'.\textsuperscript{32} This insight, in turn, lends further piquancy to Keats’ half-playful admonishment of the urn: ‘Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity. Cold Pastoral!’ (44–45).

3. Revolutionary Time

Among the canonical Romantic poets, Percy Shelley kept the fires of revolutionary hope burning most strongly in the poetry of the post-Waterloo era. Shelley, then, becomes the primary keeper of what, again following Sachs, we can call ‘revolutionary time’: ‘the possibility of change [that] is both instantaneous and radically transformative because it produces a rupture between past and present’.\textsuperscript{33} Although such thinking might seem born of desperation, there was natural philosophical precedent for it in geological theories of ‘catastrophism’, which hypothesised that the earth’s history was generally homeostatic except for moments of major (usually disastrous) alteration that could not be predicted. (The Biblical Flood was the first and ultimate precedent here.) Thanks to newer work by the likes of Hutton and Lyell, catastrophism was less in favour by the turn of the nineteenth century than the gradualist theories of slow, accretional change that correspond to the temporalities already discussed; sudden catastrophes like the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, however, provided vivid evidence of the potential for massive, unheralded alterations in the social fabric. In the political realm, moreover, the original French revolutionaries remained a major inspiration for British radicals, not only because they represented (again, in Sachs’ words) ‘a rupture, a break in secular time and a separation from the past’, but also because they self-consciously tried to re-start the political clock, for example by instituting the first day of ‘Year One’ immediately after their monarchy’s abolition.\textsuperscript{34}

Revolutionary time thus offered a stark and, for Shelley and his peers, attractive alternative not just to correlationist time but also to the ‘deep’ and ‘slow’ temporalities outlined above. For any given moment to become visible or at least thinkable as containing the potential

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 101.
\textsuperscript{33} Jonathan Sachs, \textit{The Poetics of Decline in British Romanticism}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 147.
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for a sudden, even unforeseen transformation, the present must be apprehended in both its historical and synchronic dimensions—an apprehension that writing is especially well positioned to accomplish, as (to revert to Derridean terms) the play of signification is always a matter of spacing as well as timing. This is precisely the burden of Shelley’s sonnet ‘England in 1819’, which was far too radical to be publishable in Shelley’s lifetime:

    An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
    Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
    Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
    Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
    But leechlike to their fainting country cling
    Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
    A people starved and stabbed in th’ untilled field;
    An army, whom liberticide and prey
    Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
    Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
    Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
    A senate, Time’s worst statute, unrepealed—
    Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
    Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

Notably, the entire sonnet is composed of two sentences, each of which piles sub-clause on sub-clause until, like Walter Benjamin’s remediation of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, it seems that all we can do is bear witness to the disastrous reign of George III, the depredations of his minions, and the suffering of the British people. But as James Chandler observes in his still-unparalleled reading of this poem,

    the terms of the times in Shelley’s catalogue—the conditions of his tempestuous day—are not simple evils and are not simply overcome by the arrival of an enlightening “deus ex machina”. Rather […] the
conditions of his day become the occasion for the kind of illumination that the final couplet anticipates.\(^{35}\)

Translated into revolutionary temporality, in other words, Shelley uses the resources of the sonnet to spread out and display conditions that, experienced in ‘normal’ time, are a welter of simultaneous confusion—and it is this arrangement, in turn, that allows the illumination and saturation of the revolutionary spirit.

Significantly, like deep and slow time, and unlike correlationist time, revolutionary time is at least theoretically divorced from human action or even intention. Although Shelley became a hero to the nineteenth-century Chartists thanks to lyrics like ‘Men of England’ (‘Men of England, wherefore plough/For the lords who lay ye low?/Wherefore weave with toil and care/The rich robes your tyrants wear?’), which celebrate the power of the combined masses, many of his most striking depictions of actual revolutionary moments do not involve human actors. Instead, like the Phantom that bursts from the graves of the dead at the end of ‘England in 1819’, or like the figure of Hope in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ (also unpublishable in Shelley’s lifetime due to its radicalism), Shelley’s revolutionary moment—the instant when past and present coincide, temporality is converted to spatiality, and new arrangements of both time and space can therefore be imagined—frequently invoke abstractions or personifications as their prime movers. Regardless of whether this testifies to Shelley’s idealism or desperation, it strongly suggests that Romantic revolutionary time, in its contingency and unpredictability, has more in common with what Alain Badiou calls ‘an event’—which, in lieu of a full explanation here, we can simply define via Christopher Norris’ helpful gloss as ‘that which occurs unpredictably, has the potential to effect a momentous change in some given situation, state of knowledge, or state of affairs, and—above all—has consequences such as require an unswerving fidelity or a fixed resolve to carry them through’\(^{36}\)—than with what Chandler, writing in


the late 1990s, interprets as evidence of a still vaguely humanist new historicism.\footnote{I borrow the outlines of this argument from Austin Webster, ‘An Evental Romanticism’ (MA thesis, Oregon State University, May 2019).}

4. Hyper-Chaotic Time

Questions of contingency and unpredictability lead to my final proposed alternative Romantic temporality: the time of hyper-chaos. I borrow this term, like correlationism itself, from Meillassoux. In After Finitude, Meillassoux deploys the principle of non-contradiction, the mathematical non-totalisability of reality, and correlationism’s own insistence that we can give no account of the world-without-us (only the world \textit{for} us), to establish that there is only one metaphysical necessity: ‘only the contingency of what is, is not itself contingent’.\footnote{Meillassoux, After Finitude, p. 80.} (Hence the book’s full title: After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency).

In Meillassoux’s rigorous (although by no means uncontroversial) account, the fact that reality appears to be governed be a stable set of ‘natural laws’, for example, is literally merely a fact—a temporary state of affairs, theoretically subject to change at any moment, whose stability and permanence only appear as such to us because of the foreshortened timescales (and logical shortcuts) by which we tend to think about such things. To think the universe as it truly is, says Meillassoux, is to recognise that the only absolute we can truly think ‘is nothing other an extreme form of chaos, a \textit{hyper-Chaos}, for which nothing is or would seem to be impossible, not even the unthinkable’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 64.}

For Meillassoux, the temporality of hyper-Chaos—what he calls, elsewhere, ‘Time without Becoming’—is not a bad thing despite its formidable name; on the contrary, in his account, it offers philosophy a route out of the Kantian cul-de-sac and back to ‘the great outdoors’ where it belongs. More, it allows Meillassoux to conceive of the coming of a new ‘World of justice’; this is the frame in which, in Romantic Realities, I use Meillassoux’s most ambitious ideas regarding apocalyptic revelations to read Shelley’s \textit{Prometheus Unbound}, which likewise imagines the possibilities for earthly renewal when the seeming
predictability of what happens to exist gives way to the ‘reality’ of pure contingency—a process in which we may find ourselves in an altogether different temporality, as Chris Washington observes in his neo-post-apocalyptic reading of *Prometheus Unbound*.40

If we turn away from this quasi-messianic face of hyper-Chaos, however, we can see its more nihilistic side playing out in Byron’s nightmarish poem, ‘Darkness’, whose 82 lines of hard-nosed blank verse set out an unstinting picture of utter destruction.41 Here are some ‘highlights’ of Byron’s vision:

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish’d, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air; [...]
A fearful hope was all the world contain’d;
Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour
They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks
Extinguish’d with a crash—and all was black. [...]

The world was void,
The populous and the powerful—was a lump,
Seasonless, herless, treeless, manless, lifeless—
A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay. [...] 
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
The moon, their mistress, had expir’d before;
The winds were wither’d in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perish’d; Darkness had no need

Of aid from them—She was the universe. (1–5, 18–21, 69–72, 78–82)

The poem is not entirely free from melodrama and sentimentality, to be sure, but it almost entirely lacks Byron’s well-known fondness for self-pity, the absence of which makes the cosmic impersonality of ‘Darkness’ all the more formidable. Its immediate context was the ‘Year without a Summer’ of 1816, in which unusually cloudy conditions and frigid temperatures persisted through the summer months in Europe. Around the world, harvests failed, famines claimed millions of lives, and outbreaks of cholera and other deadly diseases took many more; in Britain, the already unsettled conditions of post-Waterloo society deteriorated further, leading more-or-less directly to the Peterloo Massacre. We know now what caused the 1810s to be the coldest decade on record: a series of volcanic explosions that spewed millions of tons of ash into the atmosphere, culminating in the massive eruption of Indonesia’s Mount Tambora in April of 1815, with a magnitude roughly double that of the much more celebrated Krakatau eruption of 1883.42 But of course Britons, on the other side of the world, had no knowledge of this event—only of the permanently overcast skies, failing harvests, and unseasonable temperatures from which there would be little relief until 1819 (celebrated in Keats’ ‘To Autumn’ of that year, with its ‘mellow fruitfulness’).43 It is no coincidence, then, that Byron’s poem begins with a flat description of an apocalyptic event—‘The bright sun was extinguish’d’ (2)—shorn of either prelude or causation; in line with Meillassoux’s assertion that ‘there is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is’,44 the world-for-us in Byron’s poem simply and suddenly ends, succeeded by a world-in-itself hostile to all life. The frailty of human civilization, whose collapse Byron mercilessly describes over the course of the poem, is such that it leaves behind not even a trace of itself.

Byron’s vision of hyper-Chaotic time may be extreme and, in its melodramatic touches, inherently anthropocentric. More, its nightmarish

44 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 60.
vision of a world extinguished by frozen temperatures would, in the main, appear at odds with our present, greenhouse-oriented future. But in its depiction of an unprecedented environmental disaster that renders the planet inhospitable, it returns us to the timeliness of the Romantics’ navigation of such questions in the context of our own precarious eco-situation. The subversion of the Wordsworthian certainty regarding the beneficent relationship between humanity and the natural world—a subversion whose initial expression I have traced in this chapter, primarily via the explosion of alternatives to standard ‘correlationist temporality’—now seems more pressing than ever, as the Anthropocene simultaneously forces human and planetary timescales together and undoes our longstanding belief in the priority of the former over the latter. In this light, British Romanticism’s deep time, slow time, revolutionary time, and even hyper-Chaotic time may retroactively appear as harbingers of the ‘deep contradiction and confusion’ (to quote Chakrabarty again) that the Anthropocene has introduced into our contemporary historical situation. Whether they afford us enough insight and imagination to respond decisively, creatively, and humanely to the challenges that confront us remains unknown. As what Percy Shelley famously called ‘the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present’, however, we can at least say that the Romantic poets have given us the opportunity to reflect critically on their imaginative responses to the changing world they encountered. Whether we manage to translate those reflections into productive and collective action with regard to the accelerated environmental changes that increasingly define our Anthropocene era, of course, remains to be seen—as does the question (not necessarily the most important one, to be clear) of whether there will be anyone left to reflect on our reflections.

47 I wish to express my appreciation to Ridvan Askin for inviting me to present an early version of this chapter to the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Basel.
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