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Homeward Bound: Wordsworth, Shelley, and the Nostalgic Search for Home

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Romanticism is, perhaps, one of the movements in literary history most closely identified with itinerancy, and one of the first to bear the mark of a cosmopolitan, trans-national attitude that eschewed the confining nature of borders. Of the Big Six, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron are best known for their travels, but Coleridge and Keats also moved around quite frequently, even if they remained largely within the confines of England. But all across the nation, the Romantic age was dominated first by the Revolutionary Wars, then by the Napoleonic Wars, which eventually escalated to the dimensions of a world war (Curran 637). Because of this upheaval, Stuart Curran argues, “displacement as abiding notion” became “the norm rather than the anomaly for this period” (637). Romanticism thus “created an entire literature of displacement,” its figures “unconnected, atomized, aim-less: placeless” (638, 644). Nostalgia became a common pattern in Romantic literature as a result; indeed, although the word “nostalgia” was not widely used until the twentieth century, it actually first appeared in England in 1787, in medical reports about a Welsh soldier suffering from homesickness (Austin 75). This nostalgia, however, had a slightly different meaning at the end of the eighteenth century than it does today. It was a medical phenomenon, a “disease of displacement” defined by Erasmus Darwin as “an unconquerable desire of returning to one’s native country, frequent in long voyages” (Goodman, “Romantic Poetry” 200-201). Wordsworth is the poet most closely associated with this kind of nostalgic homesickness, from his depictions of children in poems such as “We are Seven” and “Lucy Gray” (Austin), to his “closeted clinical nostalgics,” such as the protagonists of “The Brothers” and the narrator of “The Thorn,” developed throughout the

Lyrical Ballads (Goodman, “Romantic Poetry”). Yet nostalgia quickly developed from a medical condition to a “cultural aesthetic,” a “way of producing and consuming the past” that has become “irrevocably associated with sentimentality” (Goodman, “Uncertain Diseases” 201).¹ This sentimentality is still often associated with ideas of home and homesickness, but issues of home and belonging have heretofore been pushed aside by the scholarship, even though the word “nostalgia” comes from the Greek words *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain).

Certainly, this yearning for something lost, something that lies largely in the past is characteristic of much of the Romantics’ works. The mire of war, displacement, and clinical nostalgia raises questions about the role of home in the poetry itself. Wordsworth and Shelley, in particular, invite comparison, both as key members of each Romantic generation and as the authors of “Tintern Abbey” and “Mont Blanc,” two poems that are touchstones of Romantic poetry, and which are widely regarded as being in conversation with one another.² Both of these poems establish a speaker who seeks a kind of community to which he can belong. However, whereas Wordsworth has his sister Dorothy, who is physically with him, Shelley’s rhetorical situation is much more isolated. Both poets long to reach a home that is more mental than physical; both desire a connection to some *thing*, some entity other than the self, whether that be the “presence” of “Tintern Abbey” or the “everlasting universe of things” in “Mont Blanc.” Yet, in each poem that home is somewhat inaccessible, albeit in different ways. The movement towards *nostos* is thus complicated by the *algos*, or *algia*, of nostalgia.

These ideas of home, belonging, community, and nostalgia are not central to much of the

¹ For more on this, see Kevis Goodman, “Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, edited by James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 195-216; Goodman, “‘Uncertain Disease’: Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2010, pp. 197-227; Linda M. Austin, “Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2003, pp. 75-98; and Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

² For example, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Duncan Wu introduces “Mont Blanc” as a response to “Tintern Abbey” (Wu 1104).

extensive scholarship surrounding these two poems. The criticism has been dominated by a focus on the historical and political contexts of the poems, on the way Wordsworth's radical years in France influenced the "language, mood, [and] philosophical bias" of "Tintern Abbey," (Roe 641), or the way Shelley's own vehement personal politics infuse so much of his work. The criticism has also been heavily influenced by poststructuralist critics, especially in Shelley's case, given his fascination with "the mind's powers and limitations" (Keach 671). These critics have been interested in ideas of historical ideology, epistemology, ontology, ethical philosophies, and language's ability to imitate experience, among other matters.³ Questions of home and belonging, which may be less readily associated with a poem like "Mont Blanc" than one like "Tintern Abbey," seem to have been pushed aside by critics because these questions are more concerned with the thematic rather than the historical-political, which is what so many of the poststructuralist schools of criticism were based on. Only recently has the focus shifted to an emphasis on the relationships among form, aesthetics, and feeling, rather than how the poem may look under various political lenses.

Similarly, the concept of the "egotistical sublime" has consistently framed the way critics have conceptualized not only Wordsworth, but the rest of the great Romantic poets, too. Ideas of community gave way to the "myth of the isolated artist" that came about during the Romantic period (Hay xvii). This is largely due to the poets themselves; Wordsworth, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, famously described poetry as "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and Shelley, in his "Defence of Poetry," suggested that "the power" of poetry "arises from

³ Examples of this type of criticism include Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, University of Chicago Press, 1983; Marjorie Levinson, "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey'," *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Kenneth R. Johnston, "The Politics of 'Tintern Abbey'," *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 14, 1983, pp. 6-14; Richard Gravil, "Tintern Abbey and the System of Nature," *Romanticism*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2000, pp. 35-54; William Keach, *Shelley's Style*, Methuen, 1984; Frances Ferguson, "Shelley's *Mont Blanc*: What the Mountain Said," *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed, Cornell University Press, 1984; John B. Pierce, "'Mont Blanc' and *Prometheus Unbound*: Shelley's Use of the Rhetoric of Silence," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 38, 1989, pp. 103-126.

within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it develops” (“Preface” 79; “Defence” 531). Such statements, Daisy Hay has argued, “transformed the way we think about creativity and genius. Creativity was repositioned as something internal and personal, and poetry – despite its political significance – as the product of an individual’s communion with his own mind. The artist became “an isolated figure, striving alone to create works of genius” (Hay xviii). Work such as Hay’s has attempted to widen this spotlight to treat these poets more like contemporaries, rather than isolated geniuses. Hay focuses on constructing a counterargument to this myth, demonstrating mainly through biography the “tangled lives” her title mentions; similarly, Seth Reno and Heidi Thomson have begun shifting the spotlight in Wordsworth’s poetry away from the solitary figure of the poet himself to a “theory of love” that reaffirms “the indispensable need for a familiar community,” focusing mainly on the role his sister Dorothy plays in his poetry (Reno 178; Thomson 535). I want to build upon this restructuring of how we look at the Romantic poets, looking closely at “Tintern Abbey” and “Mont Blanc” to see how these issues of home, community, and belonging figure into the poetry, how Wordsworth and Shelley confront the issues of *nostos* and *algos* as they appear during the poets’ search for home.

But before taking a look at the poems, I would like to take a moment to carefully define the concepts I will be discussing. First, by “home,” I mean where one feels a sense of belonging, of familiarity, or community, or where one is meant to be. This can be a physical place, but it can also be a state of being that transcends the physical. Thus, “home” is not necessarily tied to the geographical; rather, the feeling of “home” can arise amongst the right group of people, or in the right moment, in which one feels a sense of unity with his or her surroundings. “Home” is not necessarily tied firmly to the presence of other people, either; “home” and solitude are not mutually exclusive. Second, by “community,” I mean the sense of a group of people living in the same place, or having a particular characteristic in common, as well as a feeling of fellowship

with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. Finally, I mean “communion” in the sense of the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on the mental, emotional, or spiritual level, a kind of affinity, harmony, or connection that goes beyond the physical. The latter two terms intersect at the idea of fellowship, which can be defined as a friendly association between people, especially people who share one another’s interests. I would like to expand this definition to include a more spiritual presence, in addition to people, in order to accommodate the way in which Shelley speaks to abstract concepts in his poetry.

Certainly, ideas of community are a central concern to these poets as they continually search for that which might feel like “home.” In “Tintern Abbey,” for example, Wordsworth finds in nature what William Hazlitt called in *The Spirit of the Age* “a kind of home”:

Mr. Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing, or in daily converse with the face of nature. ... He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. (Hazlitt 113)

The key word here is “dwelt,” which indicates a kind of residence within nature. Although Hazlitt refers to Wordsworth’s home in the Lake District, thus referring to a specific geographic location, there is still the implication that Wordsworth would feel at home within any natural landscape, so long as he can commune with his surroundings “till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings.” And, in fact, this is how Wordsworth responds to the landscape of the Wye Valley upon returning after five years. At the poem’s very beginning, there is a sense of *nostos* achieved:

... *Once again*

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

Which on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 The day is come when I *again* repose
 Here, under this dark sycamore ...

... *Once again* I see

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
 Of sportive wood run wild ... (4-17, emphasis added)

The emphasis Wordsworth places on the fact that he is seeing the valley “once again” is especially important here, as it conveys the impatience the speaker appears to have had to return. The language of return is also infused with joy as the speaker takes in the landscape around him; he is overjoyed to be back after “five summers, with the length of five long winters” (1-2). There is language of connection, as well, with “the landscape” merging “with the quiet of the sky,” creating a sense of coming together, of finally fitting a puzzle piece into its proper spot. The speaker is at one with his environment, and, furthermore, his ability to connect with the landscape indicates that he truly belongs in such a setting, rather than a more urban area.

Alongside this sense of present homecoming is a sense of past homesickness. Here, we see the *algos* of Wordsworth’s experience that comes before the *nostos*, the feeling that, in those intervening years, the speaker yearned to return to this beautiful valley:

Though absent long,
 These forms of beauty have not been to me,
 As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
 Of towns and cities I have owed to them,

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
 And passing even into my purer mind
 With tranquil restoration ... (23-31)

This passage is often used to illustrate “the nurturing function of nature,” (McFarland 62), or the way that, “for Wordsworth, time provides a kind of continuum, a calm medium facilitating easy movement between then and now” (Endo 286). But it also illustrates the longing the speaker has felt for this landscape, and the sense that this natural environment is, really, where he belongs. He remembers the landscape “in lonely rooms,” painting the urban experience as one that is isolating, and further establishing the idea that, at that time, he was away from a place that actually felt more like a home to him. “Home” is thus not a physical space demarcated by something like walls; rather, for Wordsworth, it is the memories of the landscape, those “sensations sweet” that are “felt along the heart;” it is emotional, and more contingent on circumstance, rather than place. Wordsworth notes later “how oft, in spirit, I have turned to thee / O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, / How often has my spirit turned to thee!” (56-58). These memories are also currently being stored as “life and food for future years” (29, 65-66). Memory is thus embodied in a way that illustrates how viscerally Wordsworth carries it, and how poignantly he experiences the pain of separation. Indeed, this emotional attachment is not unlike the “unconquerable desire of returning to one’s native country” posited by Erasmus Darwin.

This theme of nature-as-home continues throughout the poem, becoming manifest in one of the great pantheistic passages of the poem:

... And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. (94-103)

A form of the word “dwell” makes another appearance here, this time from Wordsworth’s own pen. And while this “presence” dwells amongst everything, from the “living air” to the “mind of man,” its use evokes a sense of home, a sense that it lives everywhere, and in everyone -- even in Wordsworth himself. The “presence” also lives “in the mind of man,” blurring the boundaries of where home begins and ends. It creates the sensation of everything feeling “far more deeply interfused” as the presence “rolls through all things.” This experience is not unlike the “aspect more sublime” Wordsworth brings up earlier in the poem, “that blessed mood ... / In which the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lighten’d,” thus allowing us to “see into the life of things” (38-50). Even as these passages carry a remarkably religious reverence for the experience of communion with nature, there is also a feeling of nature as a spiritual safe harbor, which comes up when Wordsworth calls nature “the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being” (110-112).

Through this language of connection on the level of the heart and the soul, the speaker thus forms a community with nature. This community is one formed on a basis of love, and such a connection, or feeling of kinship leads up to the address to Dorothy, who ultimately becomes the true audience of these expressions of love and belonging.

The address to Dorothy has provided ample fodder for critics since the poem's initial publication. Some consider it a power move on Wordsworth's part, a desire to silence the female voice in favor of male authority; others read it as an instance of Wordsworth's egotism, turning Dorothy's first visit to the valley into a story that focuses on himself; still others see it as a consolatory attempt to reconstruct his initial experiences in the Wye valley, which are irrevocably lost (Reno 193). Heidi Thomson has suggested that Dorothy's part in the poem "is not to serve as the speaker's nursery training wheels *en route* to individual selfhood," but rather to serve as an assertion for "the necessity of a shared experience with a beloved person," and "the indispensable need for a familiar community" (533; 535). Seth Reno has further argued that "it is not so much that Dorothy represents the younger Wordsworth than that Wordsworth expresses a newfound connection between himself and his sister. As he moves from earthly affection to cosmic love earlier in the poem, so he moves from cosmic love to an intimate human relationship at the end" (194). Both of these arguments privilege the human over the natural, suggesting that Wordsworth turns away from nature to the humanity of his sister; however, what Wordsworth actually does is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, he pulls Dorothy into the community he has already created with nature, initiating her into his natural society; on the other, he turns Dorothy into another home for himself, forming a community of human connection and affection that, while not completely unrelated, is certainly distinct from his community with nature.

Dorothy is both included and appropriated by Wordsworth, who introduces her "here, upon the banks / Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend, / My dear, dear Friend" (115-117). She is his companion, and together they share a close bond that remains all but unbreakable throughout their lives, but, as he continues to address her, he establishes Dorothy both as a member of his family with nature, and as another anchor, or home, for his soul:

... And this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her...
 ... let the moon
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
 And let the misty mountain winds be free
 To blow against thee: and in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies... (122-124; 135-143)

The imagery here presents nature interacting with Dorothy in a rather affectionate way.

Wordsworth prays that nature will treat Dorothy as a friend, and that she, too, will be able to experience the “sensations sweet / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart” when she is also away from the natural landscape (27-28). With this prayer, Dorothy becomes initiated into Wordsworth’s community with nature, and there is a feeling of elation on Wordsworth’s part that his “dear, dear Sister” is also able, now, to become “deeply interfused” with the natural world. Yet he also imagines her mind as “a mansion for all lovely forms,” her memory into “a dwelling place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies.” Just as Wordsworth stores his own memories of this valley as “life and food / For future years,” so too does he expect Dorothy to interact with the landscape in a similar way (65-66). However, the use of “dwell” again here recalls the imagery of the pantheistic passage, thus turning Dorothy into a “dwelling” for his own spirit, his own memory. This address is “is invested with a degree of proximity ... and an intimacy which

turns us as readers almost into voyeurs” (Thomson 539), but it also turns Wordsworth and Dorothy into inhabitants of the same spiritual space, the same spiritual way of being. “Home” thus becomes a concept that is less physical, and certainly not geographical; rather, for Wordsworth, it has become a notion of contingency: wherever Dorothy is, with her stores of memories of their shared experience in the Wye Valley, is where Wordsworth locates “home.”

Whereas “Tintern Abbey” “settles down to a broad and deep current of Wordsworthian certainty,” Shelley, in “Mont Blanc,” “deprives his setting of Wordsworth’s consoling ‘sense sublime’ ... undermin[ing] the secure relationship between subject and nature so crucial to Wordsworth’s poem” (McFarland 62; Endo 286). Even so, there are still hints in “Mont Blanc” of a search for that same sense of community through communion with nature, although Shelley also seems to expand Wordsworth’s desire to connect with nature to a new desire to connect with a more abstract, neo-Platonic entity. This altered view of “home” that Shelley develops is in line with G. Kim Blank’s assertion that, throughout his poetry, Shelley is in “competition with those very writers who would have influenced him,” and that this competition becomes a source of inspiration (Blank 12). “Tintern Abbey” is an “antecedent” of “Mont Blanc,” and, as Paul Endo, Blank, and others have argued, Shelley works to correct Wordsworth in his poem, “attempting to delineate how in fact *he* sees” and making a point about “limitations and origins: we really cannot tell where the outside world ends and where the inside world begins” (Blank 175). “Tintern Abbey,” then, is a model for Shelley’s poem, though, Blank qualifies, it acts “as both model and anti-model” (172). “Mont Blanc” thus becomes an “anti-Wordsworthian” poem, in which the poet “contemplates a mountain, now the archetypal Wordsworthian subject, but finds there deist or atheistic truths” rather than “the evidence of a benign Deity mindful of human affairs” (Butler 141). “Mont Blanc” is “a revision of Wordsworth’s ‘gleams of half-extinguished thought’” (Brinkley 56); Shelley takes Wordsworth’s nostalgic reverence for his home in nature

and turns it into longing for a home in another world. Wordsworth's home is material, present and accessible in our own world, but Shelley's is abstract, and even potentially unattainable.

Shelley, in "Mont Blanc," emphasizes the *algos* over the *nostos*, thus overturning Wordsworth's idea of home.

Upon visiting Mont Blanc, Shelley experienced a "madness" that "stemmed not from his sense of dislocation with the world, but with the realization that his existence and the mountain's were one in his mind," making him long "to be united ... with the vast mind of which he was a part" (Wroe 155-156). Already, we see the concept of unity with a spiritual presence in the natural world that is also seen in "Tintern Abbey." Just as Wordsworth's presence "rolls through all things," Shelley describes a similar experience in the first lines of his poem:

The everlasting universe of things
 Flows *through the mind*, and *rolls* its rapid waves,
 Now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom –
 Now lending splendor, where from secret springs
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters ... (1-6, emphasis added)

Shelley, like Wordsworth, experiences a communion with nature that takes him beyond his present location, to a kind of spiritual unity that is essentially transcendental. However, unlike Wordsworth, nature does not become the safe harbor, or "anchor," that it is in "Tintern Abbey"; rather, Shelley's nature is a little wilder, a little murkier with uncertainty: "now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom – / Now lending splendor." These lines are distracted, held together by dashes, as if the speaker cannot make sense of that which he is experiencing. Such doubt is characteristic of Shelley, and it undermines the "Wordsworthian certainty" that is so

closely associated with “Tintern Abbey” (McFarland 62). Already, Shelley is working to “correct” Wordsworth’s philosophy, to use the language of *clinamen* and *tessera* adopted from Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*:

Shelley swerves towards and away from Wordsworth, attempting to delineate how in fact *he* sees, what part of his perception originates from the subject, and what part from the manifold objects, the universe. ... So although the poem is ‘corrective’ of Wordsworth ... *Mont Blanc*’s relationship to its precursor poem *Tintern Abbey* also seems to correspond with Bloom’s second revisionary ratio of *tessera*, where completion and antithesis are the dominating characteristics. ... Both Shelley and Wordsworth were inspired by Nature, but whereas for Wordsworth Nature mitigates, comforts and consoles, for Shelley it agitates, challenges and intimidates. (Blank 175; 180-181)

Just as Shelley “corrects” Wordsworth’s conception of nature, so too does he change Wordsworth’s emphasis on the *nostos* of his return to the *algos* of separation, of looking for his home without the certainty of knowing whether or not he will find such a home. Whereas Wordsworth reaches a grand moment of sublime understanding in “Tintern Abbey,” Shelley approaches Mont Blanc with more hesitancy, although the desire to make a similar connection with nature is still present. He later notes how “my own, my human mind” holds “an unremitting interchange / With the clear universe of things around,” revisiting the idea that he is engaging with the greater whole of the universe (37-39). Furthermore, the “source of human thought” that flows “from secret springs” evokes the idea of a place of origin – indeed, something like a home. However, it only reveals itself to Shelley as “gleams of a remoter world” that “visit the soul in sleep” (49-50). It is more ephemeral, and harder to grasp than the Nature that anchors Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey”.

This search continues throughout the poem, as Shelley attempts to understand the

workings of the mind in relation to the larger, material world around him. He describes his mind as a “legion of wild thoughts,”

... whose wandering wings
 Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
 Where that or thou art no unbidden guest
 In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
 Seeking among the shadows that pass by
 Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
 Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
 From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (35-48)

The pronouns in this passage may refer to the Ravine of Arve, to which Shelley appears to address the poem’s second verse paragraph. However, what is key in this passage is the “wandering wings” of his thoughts, which settle down as “no unbidden guest” in Poesy’s cave, which indicates a kind of residence, rudimentary as it may be. These lines flirt with the *nostos* Wordsworth experiences at the beginning of “Tintern Abbey,” yet it fails to achieve the same level of intimacy, of innate understanding between poet and nature. Even so, there is a gesture towards this kind of intimacy in the recognition of “the breast / From which they fled,” which “recalls them.” A settling takes place here, albeit one amongst ghosts, shades, phantoms, and faint images. Even so, there is a “resemblance between the human and the natural worlds” here, and Shelley seems to indicate a desire to suggest that reconciliation between the two may be possible (Ferguson 212). However, he cannot go as far as Wordsworth to argue that the two *can* be reconciled. The doubt seen in the poem’s opening lines still remains in this second verse paragraph, though that does not mitigate the speaker’s desire for a *nostos* like Wordsworth’s.

This desire for a kind of home also appears in the domestic imagery that Shelley uses to describe the natural landscape. The Arve, which is, initially, “Power” that “comes down / From the ice gulphs,” has its “giant brood of pines around thee clinging,” those “children of elder time” (16-17, 20-21). He attempts to imagine Mont Blanc as a barren desert, yet it is “peopled by the storms,” and he even begins to build a domestic scene, asking, “Is this the scene / Where the old Earthquake-dæmon taught her young / Ruin? Were these [rocks] their toys?” (67, 71-73). Frances Ferguson has argued that this is one aspect of “the poet’s effort to convert epistemological language into love language. For although *Mont Blanc* is a sublime poem upon a sublime subject, it projects an air of sociability” (Ferguson 208). This language of love and companionship thus “begins to treat the mountain landscape as *someone* to be understood ... through an understanding that operates to complete and magnify its object through an aggrandizement Shelley calls love” (211). But this love is not the same “cosmic, ideal conception of love [that] remains rooted in earthly affection and personal relationships” that functions in “Tintern Abbey” (Reno 184). While it is, indeed, a kind of “all-pervading spirit that links all things in the universe,” it is not “anchored in subjective and material experiences” (179). Shelley argues in “Mont Blanc” for a kind of love that is antithetical to the material; it is “unearthly,” mysterious “voices” that are revealed only as “gleams” that “visit the soul in sleep,” “secret chasms” “like smoke before the tempest’s stream” (“Mont Blanc” 62, 28, 49-50, 122, 119). Yet even as Shelley describes the peak of Mont Blanc as “rude, bare, and high, / Ghastly, and scarred, and riven,” the moments of domesticity discussed above do tame the wild mountain, and they evoke a kind of hominess, as if Shelley – unconsciously or not – wants to establish a place on the unreachable peak that he may inhabit someday (70-71). There is a desire for *nostos*, but the *algos* seems to interfere much more than it does in “Tintern Abbey.”

However, there *are* moments where the *nostos* seems closer than Shelley may want to

admit. Throughout the poem, he continues to construct a kind of habitation, indicating a desire to belong amongst the ranks of the natural world. In the fourth verse paragraph, he speaks of “the fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams, / Ocean, and all living things that dwell / Within the dædal earth,” using that word, “dwell,” that is so significant to Hazlitt and Wordsworth, who use it to describe the poet’s relationship to nature (84-86). There is a universality of things that recalls the great pantheism of Wordsworth’s poem, a unity of life and nature that includes the poet as a full-time resident. Even as Shelley establishes Mont Blanc as a distant entity that “gleams on high,” he still insists that “the power is there,” and “its home / The voiceless lightning in these solitudes keeps innocently” (127, 136-138). John B. Pierce has argued that Shelley reacts “against the nihilist implications of the absolute materialism affirmed” by the silences of the poem, asserting that Shelley actually “implies hope for a greater significance in the natural world than is objectively perceived” (Pierce 107; 113). This hope appears in these instances in which Shelley uses the language of home. The “secret strength of things / Which governs thought ... / ... inhabits” the mountain, and even as Shelley ends the poem with a question about “vacancy,” there remains a suggestion that something *is* there, whether it be accessible or not (“Mont Blanc” 139-141, 144).

Thus, the search for “home” never seems to end; the *algos* is never fully exorcised from the *nostos*. Even Wordsworth continues to be infected by this “disease of displacement,” as he cannot remain in the natural landscape forever. If these understandings of “home” remain rather ambiguous, that is because they are. Wordsworth and Shelley share a deep desire to find a place to call their home, and they also share the pain of homesickness that, much like the concept of nostalgia itself, goes from a mental medical condition to an aesthetic of sentimentality. Home seems to be continually out of reach, leaving the two poets perpetually homeward bound.

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