Introduction

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EARLY IN MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT’s unfinished text, *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798), the heroine gives up writing lyrical effusions to begin a narrative of her life, which is circulated, also in unfinished form, among various readers inside the text. Her choice raises several issues about the relative value of literary modes. In *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel* Ian Duncan, using Sir Walter Scott as his centerpiece, argues that by the early nineteenth century the (masculine) novel had absorbed a (feminine) romance, thus gendering narrative for generations thereafter.¹ Yet Wollstonecraft sees narrative as a means to authority and contestation, even as she struggles with the plots into which Maria is written by both romance and realism. *Wrongs* does not, however, support the argument that the Romantic novel was a marginalized female form—on and increasingly by women—while men claimed the higher status of “poetry.”² For it is poetry that is conventionalized as feminine, while narrative initiates Maria’s growth as a political and individual subject. Indeed, as Mary Favret notes, writing on the fetishized use of poetic inserts in novels by Charlotte Smith and Anne Radcliffe, these inserts, which are “separable, artificial, and disposable,” “correct, contain, and hypostatize the feminine in the novel,”³ instituting poetry itself as feminine. At the same time, Maria does not actually dismiss poetry, but only a specific form of poetry: what she calls “rhapsodies descriptive of the state of [her] mind.”⁴ Nor is it clear that she writes a novel in Duncan’s sense, unless we take “novel” nongenerically, as the literary vehicle of the “new(s)” or in Mikhail Bakhtin’s sense of the novel as marking a new sense of time oriented to the future rather than the past and resulting in the “novelization” of adjacent genres.⁵

Starting from the unwritten theory in Wollstonecraft’s text, this book
has three general aims. First, it offers a theory of narrative or, rather, of a “narrativity” opposed to the disciplinary apparatus of the Novel, where the word *Novel*, with a capital N, signifies a sociopolitical institution that developed through the nineteenth century and on whose normalizing role in the public sphere critics from Jürgen Habermas to Clifford Siskin have written. Second, in focusing on this narrativity, this study questions the association of narrative with what Peter Brooks calls “reading for plot,” which derives from a unigeneric reduction of narrative to the (Victorian) Novel. And finally, it reflects on what the category of Romantic narrative can tell us about disciplinary issues raised by historical study that are of particular urgency at this point. These include the role of poetry versus prose as epistemic practices in an emergent modernity and the place of Romanticism itself within a reorganization of knowledge that has subsumed it into a “nineteenth century,” the understanding of which is informed by the late-twentieth-century’s shift from literature to culture.

The idea for this book began several years ago with two articles, “Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness” and “The Web of Human Things: Lyric and Narrative in Shelley’s *Alastor*” (an earlier and quite different version of chapter 1 of the present book). These articles argued against a synecdoche that had identified Romanticism with lyric, based on the assumption that the Romantics definitively replaced the triad epic/tragedy/comedy with that of epic/drama/lyric. For a long time lyric was thus cast as the dominant mode—if not genre—of a Romanticism that internalized the quest romance (in John Keats’ *Endymion* and Percy Shelley’s *Alastor*) or lyricized an array of forms including the ballad, the epic (in William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*), and drama (in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*). In a tropology that persists from the New Criticism’s penchant for analyzing even narrative poetry in short (lyric) segments, to the New Historicism’s critique of a Romanticism metonymically identified with Wordsworth, *lyricization* had signified internalization, a retreat into a transcendental identity, and a certain idealism and resistance to materiality. On the other hand, if one argues that the Romantics questioned an identity transcendentally sealed by the abstraction of poetry into lyric, narrative too had not been formulated in the reigning metaphorics of form as a category receptive to “*différance*” (either linguistic or ideological). It was portrayed as linear and logocentric: whether
sympathetically, in Paul Ricoeur’s argument for a “configurative meaning,” which puts together the fragments of our lives; ambivalently, in Hayden White’s discussion of the “value” of such myths of integration; or critically, in Teresa de Lauretis’s claim that the very deployment of characters in a plot (modeled on the subject/verb/object structure of the sentence) is embedded in a patriarchal syntax. D. A. Miller’s interest in the “discontents” of narrative was more a concessive clause than a new proposition about narrative, since he continued to make narrative the cause rather than the expression of these discontents. An exception was J. Hillis Miller’s Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines, which used the figure of the labyrinth to characterize narratological components such as plot and character as lines that split and disseminate, thus extending Yale deconstruction from poetry to the novel and providing a valuable poststructuralist sequel to structuralist narratology. But since dissemination for Hillis Miller characterizes all language, his analysis robbed narrative of any specificity as a mode different from others: a specificity registered, for example, in Maria’s turn from rhapsody to narrative in The Wrongs of Woman.

At the time, then, the work I saw performed by a study focused on narrative for the mapping of Romanticism within a broader ideological field was to argue against the growing critique of the period in terms of what Jerome McGann famously called “the Romantic Ideology.” Originally I had meant to focus equally on this narrativity in both prose and poetry. But while I by no means see narrative as limited to the novel (with a small n), demographic and curricular changes in the profession over the past two decades have resulted in a shift of attention from poetry to prose, to which this book now responds by focusing primarily on a poetics of narrative as it emerges in Romantic prose fiction. Prose fiction, for its part, is a broader category than the Novel, including texts such as Percy Shelley’s Gothic novels (juvenilia, which I treat, on the model of closet drama, as “closet novels”); Mary Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney (which I discuss as an “autonarration,” which at points thematizes the Novel and takes issue with it but which is somewhere between autobiography and fiction); and Wollstonecraft’s Wrongs (which comes to us as an unfinished part-narrative-cum-manifesto with autonarrational elements and which William Godwin published in a state that was deliberately not ready for the publicness of the Novel).

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The work of this prose fiction, I suggest, is fundamentally different from that of the Novel as it began to emerge in the nineteenth century and in the Regency period in the work of Scott and Jane Austen. Using this pair of figures to represent Romantic fiction, current criticism and curricular practice has absorbed “Romanticism” into a Victorianized “nineteenth century,” which divides the cultural field of the novel between the nation-building of Scott’s historical novels and a domestic sphere disciplined by the Austenian novel of manners.\(^{14}\) The novel of manners, in turn, is a form in which private feelings exist only insofar as private individuals come together as a public, to evoke Habermas’s definition of the public sphere, of which the private is merely an epiphenomenon.\(^{15}\) Accompanying this reduction of Romanticism’s contribution to the now-privileged genre of prose is a tendency to identify the period with “poetry,” thus diminishing the place of Romanticism within the disciplinary field of the “nineteenth century.” For “nineteenth century” is by no means a neutral chronological term; it signals an epistemic redescription analogous to the one that occurred when the Renaissance was renamed “early modern.” This latter term had allowed us to study late Medieval and Renaissance culture in terms of the emergence of issues central to our own modernity: gender, new economic formations, travel, and the beginnings of colonialism. In a similar way, the term “nineteenth century” results in a retrodetermination of Romanticism by what the late twentieth century sees as the Victorians’ concern with nationalism, imperialism, commodification, and the strictly contained resistance to these forces in various forms of identity and sexual politics. Both redactions—early modern and nineteenth century—are part of our own paradigm shift towards an almost exclusive concern with literature’s relation to civil society: its contribution to what Kant termed “pragmatic anthropology,” which, as Gianni Vattimo argues, is a positivist discipline focused on what “man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting” and enlightened being, “a citizen of the world.”\(^ {16}\)

Within this reorganization of knowledge, which has also entailed a shift from “theory” to “cultural studies” (in the loosely thematic sense in which that term is used to protect most work done in English departments under the more rigorous umbrella of thinkers such as Friedrich Kittler), the turn to prose metonymizes a turn to culture and responsibility. The result has been a redistribution of power among the historical
fields that has seen the Victorian Novel assume the preeminence once accorded to Romantic “poetry” during the heyday of deconstruction.\textsuperscript{17} But arguably this reduction of Romanticism to poetry, as opposed to prose, objectivity, and criticism, had already begun with Victorians such as Robert Browning, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold and before that with Thomas Love Peacock’s \textit{Four Ages of Poetry}. And this in turn has allowed poetry to be disciplined within the development from Romantic prematurity to Victorian sobriety in what Andrew Elfenbein identifies as one of the nineteenth century’s “master-narrative[s] of transition.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Novel is the very crystallization of this master-narrative, given its association with \textit{Bildung} as what Marc Redfield calls aesthetic ideology. This \textit{Bildung} may be figurally concentrated in the maturation of the protagonist, but just as often, given that the \textit{Bildungsroman} is a “semimythical genre,”\textsuperscript{19} it consists in an education of the reader within the field of shared judgments—what Immanuel Kant calls the \textit{sensus communis}—for which the Novel functions as an invisible substrate. If only implicitly, the historical role of the Novel in an emergent “contest of faculties”—to quote Kant again—has been well covered. Thus this study tries to make a theoretical as well as a historical contribution. Within the spectrum of existing narrative and narratological theory, it argues for a poetics of narrative that unbinds the closure of plot and thus the ideologemes that plot as mimesis naturalizes. This poetics, I suggest, is the legacy of the Romantic texts discussed here (as well as others) to a theory of narrative as well as an age of prose. I therefore take up an undeveloped comment by Teresa de Lauretis in “Desire in Narrative,” where she suggests that we replace “structural analyses” of narrative (Propp, Greimas, etc.) with a “dynamic, processual view of signification as a work(ing) of the codes,” which focuses on “narrativity” or the “structuring and destructuring . . . processes at work in textual” production.\textsuperscript{20} Narratology, or the \textit{structuralist} theory of narrative, is particularly useful as an object of critique because it conceals ideology within the claim of a pure formalism. At the same time this very formalism lets us see the arbitrary nature of the codes thus inscribed, in contrast to theories oriented to content, which naturalize ideology. As against narrative theory’s consent to ideology (whether formal or mimetic), the “work on form, or the deformation of form,” as David Carroll calls it in \textit{Paraesthetics},\textsuperscript{21} is at the heart of the narrativity I explore in Romantic prose fiction through, for example, Shelley’s attempt in \textit{Alastor} to
write a poem that takes form neither as lyric nor story; the distorted forms of his Gothic novels; or Godwin’s decision to present *The Wrongs of Woman* in an unfinalized state so as to make us focus on the process of its shaping.

In speaking of a *poetics* of narrative in Romantic prose fiction or in suggesting that “poetry is the idea of prose” (to quote Giorgio Agamben), I use the word “poetry” as Shelley uses it in *The Defence of Poetry*, to connote a faculty or mode of thinking rather than a genre. For it is poetry, or *poiesis*, which, as it “dissolves, diffuses and dissipates” forms in order to “re-create” them, gives us access to the structuring and deconstructing processes at work in textual production. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s famous definition is usually seen as crediting the secondary imagination with synthesizing powers, but it is significant that the “struggle to idealize and unify” is underwritten and made possible by a more radically deconstructive activity, a *poiesis* or semiosis.22 As Joel Faflak argues, drawing on Ross Woodman’s work on sanity, madness, and transformation, we “forget this ‘poetry’ at [our] peril,” since it is poetry, or more accurately, *poiesis*, that “returns the public sphere to its creative functioning” by disclosing the “radically chaotic moment” of the “articulation” of a culture’s discourses as “fantasy,” which Coleridge himself disavows in abstracting imagination from fancy.23 As this formulation also intimates, poetry is part of the work of the negative; it is not an essence or a positivity. Instead, because poetry in Shelley’s words “create[s] afresh . . . associations” that have become “disorganized,”24 a poetics of narrative allows for an ongoing process of unmaking the codes reified by a culture buried in its institutions so that we can reimagine those institutions. It is in this sense that Shelley can provocatively describe Plato and Francis Bacon as poets (*DP*, 514–15).

This study, in short, takes up the functioning of narrativity in the context of the epistemologies at stake in poetry and prose from Shelley and Peacock to our own Victorianism. At the early end of this history it is worth mentioning Friedrich Schlegel, who thinks of the novel outside the genre distinction between poetry and prose and thus thinks of it as *poiesis* in Coleridge’s and Shelley’s sense. As Rudolph Haym says, the “genuine novel” for Schlegel is “a *summa* of all that is poetic, and he consistently designates this poetic ideal with the name ‘romantic’ poetry.” Or as Schlegel himself says in his “Letter on the Novel,” which is part of his *Dialogue*
on Poetry: “Ein Roman ist ein romantisches Buch.” To be sure, Schlegel’s “poetry” is a plenitude that does not quite take account of the work of the negative explored in this study. Focusing on this work, which includes the deformation of form as a crucial part of the work on form, I begin with two complementary propositions. In The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism, Walter Benjamin suggests that “the Idea of poetry is prose,” where prose means criticism and reflection, sobriety rather than enthusiasm or “mania.” Against Benjamin’s insistence that poetry increasingly turns towards its “prosaic kernel,” Agamben sees prose itself as having to take up a “poetic inheritance with which thought must come to terms.” While sharing Benjamin’s view that prose and poetry are not distinct genres but exist in relation to each other, Agamben insists that poetry is “the Idea of prose,” poetry being a form of negative capability that is crystallized (in the actual genre of poetry) in an irresolution between “syntax” and “rhythm,” the larger logic of the poem and the unformulated drives—what Julia Kristeva calls the “semiotic”—for which rhythm itself is no more than a figure. In our own context, and in a debate that goes back to the nineteenth century, prose has come to signify social engagement and has become cathected with a certain social positivism and resistance to Theory, which I take up in chapter 5 and throughout the book in an implicit homology between poetry and Theory as forms of “difficult thought.” Narrative as outlined here is at once poetry made responsible to its prosaic kernel and prose cognizant of its poietic inheritance.

Within this framing set of issues, Romantic Narrative consists of six intersecting chapters, which explore different ways in which the processes of narrative are thematized and operate in texts by Percy Shelley, Mary Hays, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The first chapter sets the agenda for the book by discussing Shelley’s Alastor as engaged in an unfinished dialogue with itself about the nature of poetry on the threshold of a world of prose and (Arnoldian) criticism evoked in the poem’s Preface. Shelley had to confront prose as the genre of an emergent modernity in Peacock’s Four Ages of Poetry, which provides a Scottish Enlightenment history of the progressive outmoding of poetry in commercial society. He further had to confront it through the work of his wife, Mary Shelley, whose turn to prose and conflicted relation to poetry as “the Idea of prose” I also discuss in chapter 1. This chapter, “The Trauma of Lyric:
Shelley’s Missed Encounter with Poetry in *Alastor,*” therefore reads *Alastor* alongside Mary Shelley’s novels, Wordsworth’s *The Ruined Cottage* and Keats’ *The Fall of Hyperion,* and through Browning’s distinction between subjective and objective poetry in his essay on Percy Shelley, as well as through the latter’s own distinction between “poem” and “story” in *The Defence.*

My discussion of *Alastor* begins with the aporia of a Narrator writing a poem about a lyric “Poet” that withdraws from gathering itself together as either lyric or narrative. Lacking characters and events, the poem’s structure is consumed by its texture, to borrow John Crowe Ransom’s terms in his defense of poetry against an Aristotelian Chicago School, which constitutes literature around plot and argument. Or, in Allen Tate’s terms, the poem’s “ex-tension” keeps collapsing into an “intension,” which deconstructs any clarity of plot and argument, yet also frustrates the simplicity, concentration, and closure of lyric idealization. Shelley’s resistance to shaping the Poet’s life into a plot that reduces texture to structure has to do with the poetry omitted by what he calls “the story of particular facts” (*DP,* 515). Hence his Narrator hangs on to a lyricism that does not describe the genre of the poem but subsists in its affect and in buried references to Wordsworth. But what the Narrator protects by restricting poetry to the ineffability of lyric is not really lyric, but a trauma cathected with lyric: the trauma of the foreclosure of poetry. For the Poet of *Alastor* is not Browning’s subjective poet, as I suggest by reading him through work by Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy on literature and death. In this sense, we can see Shelley’s Poet as a precursor of later poets such as Hölderlin, Nerval, and Rilke. Of this literature as the underside of modernity Michel Foucault writes that it “breaks with the whole definition of genres as forms adapted to an order of representations” and “encloses itself within a radical intransitivity.” Interestingly, Foucault sees the emergence of literature as linked to that of philology, the subject of this book’s last chapter: “At the beginning of the nineteenth century,” he writes, “at a time when language was burying itself within its own density as an object . . . it was also reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin.” But writing a half century before the literature Foucault describes here, the Narrator of *Alastor* misrecognizes as lyric a poetry of involution, self-reflection, and negativity that is profoundly at
odds with lyric ideality purely as a resistance to narrative. At the same time, *Alastor* is impelled by an insistent narrativity. The Narrator, that is, needs to tell the Poet’s story and to pass on the poem’s missed encounter with itself, as the problem of thinking the work of this more modern “poetry” in culture: a problem more thoroughly engaged in poems such as *The Fall of Hyperion* or *The Triumph of Life* or in the prose fiction taken up in this book. At the end of the text, then, it is not so much that the Poet dies as that the Poet as “phantasm” and “image” is returned to a cultural archive—what Yeats calls “the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart”\(^3\)—so that the High Romantic poetry unworked in *Alastor* can be thought anew.

Chapter 2 begins from the curious fact that Shelley had actually written two novels before turning to serious poetry, implicitly recognizing that poetry as the vehicle of the “Romantic Ideology” always exists in the shadow of its novelization. Indeed, it is not just that these prose fictions trouble what will become the Victorian identification of Shelley with a pure poetry. Anticipating his debate with Peacock’s essay on the demise of poetry by writing his own *Nightmare Abbey* ten years earlier, Shelley also crosses the boundary between high and low culture upon which more conservative concepts of Romantic “poetry” are constituted. Thus the second chapter, “Shelley’s Promethean Narratives: Gothic Anamorphoses in *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*, and *Prometheus Unbound*,” therefore reads Shelley’s novels *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne* (1811) in conjunction with *Prometheus Unbound* and, intermittently, with other cannibalized bits of his past and future poetry (*Alastor, The Triumph of Life*). It explores two contrary movements: the narrativity underlying the seemingly High Romantic closure of Shelley’s lyrical drama, and the poetry that Shelley wants to restore to the work performed by narrative in the (de)construction of his culture’s fantasies. Drawing on G. W. F. Hegel’s theorization of the Symbolic and Romantic as modes in which the “Idea” does not find an adequate embodiment in material forms, and taking up Julia Kristeva’s notion of the “adolescent novel,” I discuss Shelley’s juvenilia as what I call closet novels: texts whose ideas are not ready to be performed and which are thus composed of semiautonomous parts, which foreground a disconnection between acts, agents, and ideas. The novels are a pastiche, and in styling them as such Shelley deconstructs them into the “phrase regimes”—in Jean-François Lyotard’s term—from which the

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Promethean ideology they project is compounded. He thus dissolves and recycles these phrases and ideas so as to make them available for further thought. Anticipating Shelley’s similar composition of *Prometheus Unbound*, the novels allow us to read the latter as well against the grain of a critical unification imposed on it by theories of organic form, not to mention that they explore the darker underside of Promethean transgression, thus disclosing the prosaic kernel of Shelley’s poetry.

As texts almost entirely reducible to their form—their malconstruction and the stereotyped plot and character positions they explode—the Gothic novels can also be seen as containing an embedded narratology. In other words, they are parodies of a narratology whose structural mechanisms they defamiliarize, so as to unbind the *narrativity* that exists within the novels and between the novels and Shelley’s poetry. Turning to a more obviously “realistic” text, chapter 3, “Unbinding the Personal: Autonarration, Epistolarity, and Genotext in Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*,” looks at Hays’s unworking of the structural discipline of the Novel through what I call “autonarration.” *Memoirs* is infamously based on Hays’s failed relationship with the Cambridge radical William Frend, which she uses in conjunction with her letters to Godwin as a theater for negotiating political justice, by exploring the psychodynamics of desires and drives that cannot be expressed within the social scripts available to her. Indeed, the very syntagm of romantic love as defining women’s desire is one such script that Hays projects and negates. Far from being a narcissistic transfer of life into text, autonarration (a term I extend to other Romantic writers, such as Mary Shelley) involves a double textualization of both life and fiction. It does not unfold at the level of either life or text, but through the differences between the novel and the “events” or facts that it symbolically transforms or anamorphically deforms. These differences, rather than the ideologically reified (counter) positions of things as they are or their romantic, feminist subversion, constitute the work of the negative that the narrativity of this text (which is often misunderstood as fetishizing desire) seeks to set in motion.

One such difference between Hays’s “life” and her text is the sordid, secret marriage of the novel’s hero, Augustus Harley, which unbinds us from a plot of romantic failure that would dismiss Emma/Hays’s desire, yet without positing marriage as the goal of this desire. Such differences make narrative a zone of possibilities wherein we can recover what Ger-
ald Prince calls “the disnarrated,” what has not been but could yet be said. Focusing on such differences, chapter 3 tries to access an underlying poiesis that makes autonarration the site where a culture’s narratives can be dissolved and dissipated in order to be reimagined. In order to theorize this poiesis, I expand the concept of the archive introduced in both previous chapters and drawn from Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Over the course of his work Foucault uses the term “archive” in quite contrary senses. In “Fantasia of the Library” (1967), the archive is the amorphous mass of everything that has been or could be said, like the world underneath the grave described by Shelley in Prometheus Unbound, which contains the phantasms of “of all forms that think and live” as well as “Dreams and the light imaginings of men” (1.1.198–200). But in The Archeology of Knowledge (1969), this amorphous mass is renamed the “corpus,” while the archive is limited to the “law of what can be said,” the “langue that defines the system of constructing” sentences and events within accepted phrase regimes. The narrativity released in Romantic texts, I suggest, constantly opposes the systems of archiving experience within predictable plots to a corpus that unbinds the phrases and syntagms of narrative from their ideological closure. The deconstruction of these systems requires what Derrida calls an archiviolithic process, a kind of death drive that ex-terminates existing terms and syntagms. Thus chapter 3 also draws on D. W. Winnicott’s analysis of playing to develop a psychopathology of narrative as a “potential space” in which the author plays with the social text by projecting, abjecting, and ex-terminating characters and plot positions. In so doing, to evoke Shelley, narrative “create[s] afresh” the “associations” that have become “disorganized” in the process of what Godwin calls “institution” as the reification of ideology.

Taking up this notion of institution, by which Godwin means not only political and social institutions but also anything that has been discursively instituted, chapter 4 turns to Godwin himself and asks how narrative can help us think before the universality of institution. In other words, it asks how narrative can help us think anarchically, in the root sense of an-arche: before arche, or foundation, or before the aesthetic and juridical practices that a culture develops to archive experience. Such practices include character, which Godwin calls into question when Caleb says: “I have now no character”; and they include “story” or “tale,” words Godwin uses to suggest a sequencing or reduction of the explosive particulars
of the event within the (ideo)logic of plot. Focusing on Caleb Williams and more briefly on Fleetwood and Mandeville, this chapter, “The Scene of Justice: Trial and Confession in Godwin’s Caleb Williams and Other Fiction,” extends the poetics of narrative into an ethics of narrativity as the perpetual unsettling of the stories we tell about ourselves and others. It thus develops further a concept of pathological reading introduced in chapter 3 with reference to Emma Courtney, by describing the anarchic effects of our “perverse identification” as part-subjects with parts of characters such as Caleb, Falkland, and Fleetwood—these particulars being the unstable ground for a reimagining of culture.

More specifically, chapter 4 is concerned with how the texture of narrative—its “minute shades [of] character” and minute particulars—raises the issue of judgment, which is thematized by the novel’s juridical framework as a metaphor for the disciplinary apparatus of the Novel. For judgment is at the heart of the Novel as socialization and normalization, and it is inscribed in its very terminology, where “deciding” the plot connotes a legal-moral decision that Godwin unsettles by writing an ending for his first novel that he immediately crosses out. In taking up judgment in a philosophical, ethical, and juridical sense, I read Godwin alongside his contemporary Kant, who distinguishes between reflective and determinant judgment in the third Critique, so as to make Godwinian narrative part of a radical Enlightenment, which calls into question the Novel as an institution of the public sphere. I also read Godwin through Lyotard (to whom Kant was important) and suggest that narrative is a mode uniquely suited to doing justice to the other as opposed to passing judgment, since it is through the particulars of narrative that we access the “differends,” which cannot be captured in a judgment. For Lyotard the differend is the resistant kernel of difference that eludes capture in a litigation (or argument), which requires judgments to be made in the terms of one or the other party. Paradoxically, it is the very realism of the novel that discloses these differends by eliciting a poietic practice of close reading focused on the novel’s in-tension rather than its plot and extension. Realism here converges with Idealism. For, as I argue elsewhere, there is a unique symbiosis between empiricism and Idealism in Romantic thought that is also a differend between Godwin and Kant. In other words, far from being reducible to John Locke’s tabula rasa (as opposed to Kant’s prestructuring of experience by existing concepts), empiricism entails a
sensitivity towards the minute particulars that disrupt our concepts: particulars that must be developed towards their “ideality” (in Hegel’s words) if we are to grasp their larger significance for these concepts.  

Departing from previous chapters (as the novel itself differs in style from others discussed here), chapter 5, on Godwin’s St. Leon, takes up Romantic narrative, not in terms of the deconstructive texture of narrativity, but in terms of the disciplinarity of the Novel on the cusp of the nineteenth century and the disciplinary discourse network in which the privileging of the Novel participates at the turn of our own century. Novels began to be taught in Scottish universities as part of a “wholesale restructuring of the public sphere,” in which literature, as the discipline of rhetoric and belles-lettres, was being configured under the umbrella of political economy. This reorganization of knowledge was part of the emergence of “civil or commercial society,” and it is still with us in more populist form, in a cultural studies that adds ever new subjects and objects to the corpus (from Indians to parrots), according to a liberal principle of representative democracy and wealth creation. Insofar as rhetoric and belles-lettres were part of civil society’s discourse of improvement, “the roots of the modern university disciplines of anthropology and of English Literature,” as Robert Crawford points out, “are mutually entwined,” and “both are linked to the development of modern economics.” The Novel was uniquely homologous with the rise of anthropology, which is still a key discipline in the academic postmodern, as David Simpson argues: differently, to be sure, and yet not so differently, since we remain the inheritors of a discourse of improvement that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have critiqued as “enlightenment.” For Adam Smith, who planned “a grand synthesis of the human sciences . . . across the civic and pedagogic domain of the university curriculum,” saw the supersession of romance by the Novel as part of the “improvement” at the heart of anthropology: a narrative of transition that is taken over in Peacock’s “four ages” of poetry. It is no accident that Smith, who played a key role in the modern disciplining of literature as techne, what Redfield calls aesthetic ideology, was also the father of modern economics. Nor is it surprising that the principle of economy is throughout the coded individualism of the Novel, as well as the more apparently eccentric individualism of cultural studies, as a consent to seeing man as an epiphenomenon of the economic and a constraint to contribute to the general “good.”
Reading against the grain of the Novel as economy, the fifth chapter, “Gambling, Alchemy, Speculation: Godwin’s Critique of Pure Reason in *St. Leon,*” focuses on Godwin’s second novel, which is about a sixteenth-century aristocrat and gambler who acquires the philosopher’s stone. It takes up the two operational metaphors of the text, gambling and alchemy, as figures through which Godwin speculates on what is and is not sayable within the discourse of the Novel and the increasingly middle-class, anti-Romantic ideology of his time. The chapter continues the previous chapter’s reading of Godwin alongside Kant, some of whose work, including his utopian political essays, was translated in the 1790s. In reading Godwin with Kant I raise two larger issues: that of the place of Romanticism in a culture increasingly hostile to (German) speculative philosophy and thus, as David Simpson has shown, resistant to what was then called “Theory”; and that of the place of theoretical and philosophical approaches in our own culture, which is to say, the issue of what Derrida calls the “philosophical continents” that divide our own culture. Speculation in Godwin’s novel functions as a hinge for the debate he sets up around his central character, whose use of the confessional form requires that we perversely identify with his choice of experiment over thrift and family values. “Speculation” here encompasses intellectual speculation, economic speculation, or gambling, and the gamble that is alchemy as a metaphor for perfectibility. Because of the incredible situation of a character who lives forever, the novel unfolds as a potential space in which St. Leon can be dismissed and brought back, and in which ideologemes such as family and nation can be ex-terminated without consequence. Within this narrativity, chapter 5 continues to explore the issue of judgment (and specifically how we judge St. Leon) as a process of reflecting on judgment itself. This process in turn stages a differend between speculative Idealism and Common Sense, the antieconomy of romance and the epistemé of the Novel as a form increasingly committed to the family as the sentimental, private manifestation of governmentality.

Finally, chapter 6 returns to the figure of the archive by way of Godwin’s (literally) archival work on Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman.* For the text we have was compiled by Godwin from two manuscript states and published not as what we now call an eclectic text but as a text in which he carefully marks lacunae, points of (in)decision, and his own editorial insertions. This chapter, “Whose Text? Godwin’s Editing of
Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Woman,* therefore tries to imagine Wollstonecraft’s novel apart from her husband’s editing of it. In particular I focus on what it might mean to read the text as ending with the trial scene in its last complete chapter and without the fragments in “The Conclusion, By the Editor,” which may well not have been the last fragments Wollstonecraft wrote (as Godwin mournfully implies). Taking up court procedures and divorce and separation laws at the time, I suggest that Godwin’s narrativizing of the text through the addition of the Conclusion is different from the alternately polemical, sentimental, and enthusiastic narratives that Wollstonecraft herself (de)constructs. But the point of discerning two (or more) voices in the text is not to restore a supposed “original” text. It is rather to disclose the part-narratives embedded in Godwin’s editing and the other narratives they occlude as part of a general narrativity released by the publication of the text as a draft, an edited text. More specifically, by drawing attention to his own editorial activity, Godwin (to evoke Lyotard, on whom I draw throughout this book) decomposes the text into the phrases from which it is assembled. He halts any premature narrativizing of its episodes and affects within a genre such as sentimental romance or feminist communal narrative, and instead asks us to focus on the very process of phrasing and on the structuring and destructuring processes at work in textuality. Wollstonecraft’s “text,” Godwin’s editing, and others’ readings of the text over time all form part of an archive that includes both her writing and the thinking that has been and still can be done around her work. This is to say that by phrasing the text in the philological genre, which demands a careful attention to texture, Godwin restores a certain “poetry” both to prose and its reading.
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