

They cleave to one thing or idea in order to be saved from a still deeper sense of separation. It does not matter whether a child is deprived of its tattered cloak or a woman of child and lover—the wound that opens is always the same, and even when the loss is ordinary, the passion is extraordinary, and points to so deep and personal a sorrow that we call it natural only to dignify human nature.  
 —*Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (Yale U. Press, 1964), 143

WORDSWORD'S *POETRY, 1787–1914* opens its account of the *Lyrical Ballads* by turning to “Wordsworth’s sufferers.” While the “men and women in this poetry” were bracketed by received readings of Wordsworth that instead contemplated the broader canvas of its landscapes or the egotistic sublimity that projects them, Hartman resolutely puts them in focus (*WP*, 143). Yet no sooner do they materialize than they are afflicted by the threat of erasure. There is, first of all, the uncomfortable polysemy of the word “cleave,” which shadows the hope of stability and stickiness with the doom of separation; there is, next, the strange slippage between “thing or idea,” which cannot but remind us that, trivially, ideas are not things, and juxtaposing them intimates that cleaving to the latter may be nearly as precarious as clinging to the former; there is, also, the less-than-confident attribution of agency in the phrase “in order to be saved,” in which the initial suggestion of purposive action is dissolved in a passive tense that dislocates hope from Wordsworth’s cleavers to an unnamed elsewhere; these sufferers, so much (but not much more) is clear, cannot save themselves. Alliteration connects this question of salvation to what Wordsworth’s sufferers cleave to get away from: “a still deeper sense of separation.” As this sense of separation rests beneath the anxious and frantic clinging of Wordsworth’s sufferers, “still” here acquires its adjectival meanings: what they want to be saved from is an unmoving, silent groundlessness. Nor should the elision of psychology and ontology in the phrase “sense of separation” be read as a Heideggerian *Stimmung* that somehow attunes Wordsworth’s sufferers to Being: the sense of separation is still, it does not call the call of Being.

How do we understand this cleaving that nervously wards off a fatal discontinuity? I have tried to show that Hartman’s sentence both states and performs this cleaving, at a time—he finished *Wordsworth’s Poetry* in November 1963—in critical history when such coincidence of content and form almost no longer promised New Critical reconciliation but was beginning to spell deconstructive disintegration. The sufferers’ apprehensive clinging recalls what Hartman, in 1977, analyzed as Wordsworth’s “touching compulsion.” As a boy, Wordsworth writes, he “was often unable to think of external things as having external existence”; “Many times while going to school,” he notes, he had “grasped a wall or tree to recall

[him]self from the abyss of idealism to the reality” (quoted in *UnW*, 20). In Hartman’s account in 1977, which was part of a project he then called “psychoesthetics,” the boy’s compulsive touching constituted a form of “reality testing”—a way of recalling the substantiality of a world fatally derealized by the death of the young Wordsworth’s mother (*UnW*, 22). Hartman’s properly psychoesthetic point will be that poetry, for the mature poet, will count as a finer form of such reality testing—as a medium that assures even as it performs the connection between mind and a reality external to it. For Hartman, Wordsworth’s condition and self-cure resonate with his memory of the motherless years he himself spent in England during the war: “I distinctly recall brooding on continuity. What held matter together? Why didn’t the table before me disintegrate?” (*LS*, 17). For the young Hartman, Wordsworth’s poetry offered a reprieve from such fears—as it earlier did, so Hartman, for the young Wordsworth himself.

So let’s return from this (auto)biographical excursion to the sentence we started with: “the one thing or idea” that could save Wordsworth’s sufferers from a fateful discontinuity is poetry—a phenomenon that makes the most of being neither purely thing nor idea, and a medium that articulates the particulars of nature into a significant whole. *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, we recall, tells the story of how the human mind graduates from its cleaving against despair to its loving adoption by an ambient nature that both permeates and transcends the natural particulars it liberates from human dependence. Poetry, in this scenario, points the human mind beyond its obsession with “singles and fixities” to its absorption of a more generous phenomenal realm (*WP*, 137). It is the one privileged phenomenon that preserves the mind’s continuity with phenomenality as such. In Hartman’s first book, *The Unmediated Vision* from 1954, the tenuous connection between self and world and the need for mediation was not yet an issue, as Hartman celebrated the modern poet’s readiness to go “against the monster with naked eye” and render “experience in its immediacy” (*UV*, 156, 164). This program of heroic disintermediation is dismissed, at the time of *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, as an apocalyptic tendency—“an inner necessity to cast out nature, to extirpate everything apparently external to salvation” (*WP*, 49). It is this relentless pursuit of salvation that the human mind needs to be saved from—by a poetry that binds it to the world.

Hartman’s literary criticism, since *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, has been animated by a tension between two not necessarily reconcilable commitments: to an encompassing sense of phenomenal reality, from which no obsession with or anxious cleaving to “one thing or idea” is supposed to distract us, and to the privilege of poetry, which is called upon to assure the traffic

between mind and world. The strain is obvious: while poetry's radical privilege threatens to undermine the principled comprehensiveness of Hartman's Wordsworth's counterapocalypse, its successful promotion of such inclusiveness risks reducing it to just one particular among others—which would, in its turn, cancel the distinction on which the success of this levelling depends. And when this levelling is cancelled, and the singularity of poetry reaffirmed, we go back to where we started, in a vicious loop that constantly risks to derail the give-and-take between poetry and world. Hartman's commitment to poetry in the name of phenomenality, I am suggesting, is complicated by an oscillation between poetry's proudly professed privilege and its feared indifferenciation—its collapse into indistinct phenomenality.

Returning to our original passage, we can see that this fear of indifferenciation also afflicts Wordsworth's sufferers: "It does not matter" who is suffering what, whether "a child ... deprived of its tattered cloak" or a woman deprived "of child and lover"—indeed, it does not even matter whether the child appears as subject or object of the deprivation; all distinctions threaten to be overridden by a general condition that they indifferently exemplify: "the wound that opens is always the same."

How do we read this statement of the dangers of indifferent accumulation? I want to suggest three readings. First, and like all Hartman's returns to Wordsworth, *Wordsworth's Poetry* is silently informed by the poet's role in the young Hartman's own private avoidance of apocalypse; as such, this expressed fear of the habituation of deprivation invites to be read as a particular psychology of loss, in which the accumulation of trauma leads to a psychic numbing that ends up leaving the affected mind indifferent—an affective ecology that will be more explicitly elaborated in the second half of Hartman's career. Second, we can recall that the writing of *Wordsworth's Poetry* was also motivated by a desire to facilitate the uptake of Wordsworth on the European continent as a major poet of modernity—a desire that, we know, remains unfulfilled. Read as part of an effort to promote Wordsworth's project as a decisive intervention in modernity, this accumulation that fails to matter also figures the destructive logic of commodity consumption—the psychology of which is here imagined as a cleaving to objects. The passion for property, Hartman writes on the same page, "is a spiritual passion . . . property is a need of the soul" (*WP*, 143). If property cannot satisfy the needs it creates, Hartman credits Wordsworth's poetry with the power to administer a more lasting satisfaction.

The tension between multiplicity and singular significance allows for a third reading. A mere two years after *Wordsworth's Poetry* confirmed his

authority as a major critic of Romanticism, Hartman launched a first spate of major theoretical interventions—essays such as “Beyond Formalism,” “Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure,” and “Ghostlier Demarcations,” all first published in 1966—which would establish him as a major theorist by the beginning of the decade when theorists mattered. Already in the period leading up to *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, Hartman’s concern with the ontology and fate of literature is never buried far below the surface of his texts. Erich Auerbach, Hartman’s teacher at Yale, was a crucial and continuous point of reference. Here is Auerbach, at the end of *Mimesis*, remarking on the danger that a liberated multiplicity may flip over into dreary uniformity: as literary modernism indulges “the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment” to which it surrenders, the “more numerous, varied, and simple the people are who appear as subjects of such random moments, the more effectively must what they have in common shine forth.” Auerbach’s adumbration of “a common life of mankind on earth” still upholds, at least, a form of humanism; Hartman, for his part, will read the collapse of distinction in a more somber tonality closer to *Mimesis*’s very last words: as “the first forewarnings of the approaching unification and simplification” (Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* [Princeton U. Press, 2003], 552–53).

A psychology of loss, a theory of capitalist modernity, and an engagement with the fate of literature: I have been suggesting that Hartman’s stated concern with the threat of a looming indifferenciation operates on all three of these levels. Of course, it remains, before anything else, an account of Wordsworth’s poetry—of the poet who, in the face of uncontained multitudes, asserted the need for cleaving to one thing or idea: “who is there that has not felt that the mind can have no rest among a multitude of objects ... ? After a certain time we must select one image or object, which must put the rest out of view wholly, or must subordinate them to itself while it stands forth as a Head” (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1806–1820, Part I, 1806–1811*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969], 148). For Hartman, Wordsworth’s poetry itself furnishes this head, even if he has this head speak the promise of a world without such hierarchies. Yet he does not have this head behead itself, and tries to trust it can keep its promise without such wasteful sacrifice. It is a testimony to the seriousness of Hartman’s commitment to both poetry’s extraordinary passion and the world’s ordinary losses that he has never resolved the tension between them, and instead allowed his criticism to be animated by that tension. For this reader at least, his criticism still dramatizes the discontents facing us in our contemporary attention economy, in

which experience threatens to be absorbed by the multiple virtualities it affords, as well as in our intensified disciplinary crisis, in which literature's compulsive orientation to the world at times seems to hasten its subtraction from that world. Hartman's intuition, in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, that the world will not survive that subtraction for very long seems more true than ever, if not for the reasons he then imagined.

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The *still* with which the first *Hyperion* opens is not devoid of a threshold sense of possible profanation, and when, in the *Fall of Hyperion*, the *still* becomes a movie that will not move on, it exposes the poet-souffleur who has played god, or concealed his own image. Keats is now forced into the light; obliged to recognize his presence in a moment that is so searingly self-conscious that instead of humanizing him it suggests the impossibility of bringing the human into so strong a light, of placing it under so heavy a burden. The poet here fails to move his images; or simply to move—animate—them . . . these figures will never be fully humanized. Indeed, they begin to vamp him. Instead of the *myth* becoming more human, the *poet* becomes less human: “ever day by day methought I grew / More gaunt and ghostly” (*Fall of Hyperion* I.395–390). —“Spectral Symbolism and Authorial Self in Keats's ‘Hyperion,’” *The Fate of Reading* (U. of Chicago Press, 1975), 66

THE PASSAGE COMMENTS ON CANTO I, lines 384–403 of Keats's *Fall of Hyperion*, the elongated moment in which the poet stands fixated on the scene that Moneta has revealed: the fallen Saturn with Thea by his side. The scene is frozen: no one moves or speaks, until, “gasping with despair,” the poet curses himself and prays that “Death would take me from the Vale / and all its burthens” (I.398–99). Divine vision thus saps him of the epic strength it seemed to promise. Myth here depends upon the poet's power to “see as a God sees” and “[bear] / the load of this eternal quietude” (I.204, 389–90), and yet he is somehow, for that very reason, its victim.

Reflecting on the poet's quest for epic originality, Hartman suggests a peculiar zone of indeterminacy between mediation and immediacy, but the argument hinges upon a chiasmus that hovers on the edge of asymmetrical collapse. Myth is set in opposition to the poet rather than to poetry—a more grammatically intuitive contrary—and the exchange that takes place between the two is subtly unbalanced. While myth becomes more human, the poet does not become more myth- (or god-) like. He simply becomes “less human”; he wastes away. Even *that* may be no more than the poet's depressive gothic fantasy: “methought I grew / More gaunt and ghostly” (I.395–96).

Citing Wallace Stevens, Hartman describes the episode as an entry into parental space: the mythological machinery cannot be disentangled from a psychological one and, though he does not say so, perhaps not even from a biological one. Moneta's promise is maternal "as near as an immortal's words / Could to a mother's soften . . ." (I.249–50), and the poet tells how he "ached to see what things [her] hollow brain / behind enwombed . . ." (I.277). In giving birth to her vision, Moneta gives birth to Keats-the-poet, but his ache suggests that the pains of labor may also be his pains—that he, too, must give birth to the gods that only appear to precede him: "the poet 'bears' the gods like the consciousness of the Greeks which Hegel describes as 'the womb that conceived the gods . . .'" (68). At the close of "Spectral Symbolism," Hartman suggests that, as a maternal figure, Moneta may be connected to the poet's "mother tongue" (I.15) and so to the possibility of an authentically *English* epic. That possibility preoccupied Keats to the point of abandoning his poem when he could not loose the hold of a Miltonic-Latinate diction. Within the fragment, the very richness of life that the poet elicits from Moneta's brain already exposes the deadly hollowness of his achievement. He cannot find a way to make myth modern, to make it part of what he calls "the grand march of intellect." (The phrase occurs in Keats's May 3, 1818, letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, and Hartman alludes to it when discussing "the vexing question of a modern . . . equivalent to Greek objectivity" [FR, 58].)

The poem does resume: Saturn speaks, and the titans' revanchist war (almost) gets under way. Nonetheless the initial paralysis remains a crux for Hartman, and his reading of it crystallizes impasses that recur throughout his oeuvre: the inhuman costs of humanization and demythologization as the most recalcitrant of myths. Gothic ruination of the Grecian morphs into modernity's uncertain quest to redeem *itself* along with the poet's "searingly self-conscious" awareness that no self is up to the task. A self-conscious assumption of historical burdens thus threatens to bring the "grand march of intellect" to a halt. Yet the argument proceeds by puns that introduce a tone of levity to the whole proceeding just when the stakes seem most serious. Language itself *vamps* Hartman. In this respect he is not unlike the pun-loving Keats who renamed the Mnemosyne of the first *Hyperion* fragment Moneta—making her the goddess of money as well as memory.

In Hartman's punning formulations, the poet's inability to animate the scene on which the first version of *Hyperion* opens ("Still as the silence . . ." *Hyperion* I.5) produces a freeze-frame epic. The scene is like a movie "still"—that is, a single frame taken out of sequence or a publicity photo