Introduction
Feeling Romanticism

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I. Once more with feeling

Recently, economic theory has had to deal with the growing recognition that rational choice theory is impotent because, as it turns out, investors make choices based on emotion. The results are no surprise, although an increasingly interconnected, global economy makes us feel the effects in unanticipated ways. The decisions of a stockbroker battling depression, having fought with his kids while dropping them off to school en route to his downtown office to advise clients on billion-dollar transactions, can trickle down onto markets and populations around the world. Sadly, sometimes a hunch is just a hunch, and, like it or not, emotions are an essential part of human experience: difficult to manage, impossible to ignore. Once a toxic chemical, emotion now fuels the affective turn in humanities and social science research, propelled by a return to the body in feminist and queer theory and the transformation of emotion into a scientific object. From historians like Ute Frevert on the gendered history of emotion and Barbara Rosenwein on the relation between emotion and community; to political theorist Michael Hardt on affective labor; to philosopher and cultural theorist Brian Massumi on affect's virtual environment; to the discovery of mirror neurons in humans as a potential basis for empathy – a renewed interest in the emotions is transforming how we view history, culture, and science. This shift is especially powerful for how it re-thinks the transfer between mind and body in ways that are transforming how we view the "ontology of the human," even at times rendering the "human" suspect. This causality allows us to "illuminate . . . both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers."[1]

Severally global, emotion is the matrix through which the world is brought to our sensoria; it registers our response to this world; it worlds our world and thus makes sense of sense, but *as sense* (as opposed to

intellect, to reason, to "common sense") it impresses upon this world a passionate attachment that can be at once compassionate and violent, creative and destructive, energizing and enervating, utopian and dystopian. At its most magical and disturbing, emotion is profoundly anticipatory and prehensive, materializing worlds before we know or even desire their being. To ask how we feel about the world or how it or others feel about us is to register at once the most human and inhuman of responses – care, *ressentiment*, disregard. To feel is also to mark the autonomy of an existence beyond regard. Like Heidegger's *Stimmung* or Schopenhauer's *Wille*, emotion is, one might say, the air we breathe: our very mode of ontological sustenance, but for this reason completely beyond our sight or comprehension except via witnessing and, ironically, *feeling* its effects. It is a knowing beyond thought that requires no knowing, but that makes all knowledge possible. Or to tread into psychoanalytical waters, it is like the unconscious in which we swim: empty the ocean and we're nothing. To put a specifically Lacanian spin on this Jungian formulation: emotions are the not-being-said within the said of human experience.

Perhaps our current fascination with emotion, then, is *because* of its unavoidably paradoxical nature. As one of the most ambient ways of gauging and understanding human sentience, it is at once vital or fundamental and primordial or inchoate, mind and body, material and virtual. But ours is not the first era to have its attention grabbed by emotion. Rousseau's, Byron's, or Hazlitt's erotic confessions; Blake's or Hölderlin's tears; Smith's dark ruminations on historical decline, Hemans's fervent patriotism, More's ardent evangelicism; Goethe's "sorrows," Coleridge's dejection; the passionately melancholic yearnings of Austen's, Wollstonecraft's, Mary Shelley's, Mary Robinson's, or Hays's feminist protagonists; Clare's or Burns's or Wordsworth's pastoral enthusiasms; Baillie's or Beddoes's passionate dramatic forms; Equiano's pleas against the barbarisms of slavery; the Della Cruscans' rhetorical excesses; gothic (in)sensation – all speak to an age compelled by affect's intimate and extimate (re)cognition. Most essays herein take up Romantic literature as the most powerful register of the period's gravitational pull toward feeling. In his 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth calls poetry a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling."[2] Blunted by reiteration, the statement now asks us to resist its earnest effusion. As a sentient gauge of (its) time and place, however, it still has affective immediacy as one of the epochal and epoch-making statements about feeling's nature and status. Calling for poetry's rule-bound idiom to be more, well, idiomatic, Wordsworth marks the reciprocity between aesthetic pursuit and affective reality, but also

something out of joint within this transport. Invoking Aristotle's *katharsis ton pathematon*, he speaks of "emotion recollected in tranquility,"[3] which by summoning memory to regulate impulse exposes within the purgation of emotion a temporal delay. The poetry of common life yields to an unmediated force (not yet expression) of human experience that evades our grasp even or precisely as it is tried upon the pulses. This feeling (for there seems no more choate way of saying what "it" is) marks how bodies mark and leave their mark within environments, not just with the body in mind, but as part of a whole sensorium attuned to the transports and shocks of lived experience. It is to this thrown nature of Romantic emotion, to emotional nature itself, that the chapters in this book address themselves.

Not so long ago this issue was dead, or worse, a critical liability. How else to explain why, even after Adela Pinch's *Strange Fits of Passion* or Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility*, both from 1996, this volume is the first collection of essays on Romantic emotion?[4] To generalize, early on Romanticism was pegged in two ways: a secular religion of elevated, imaginative (masculine) passion; or a (feminine, often racially other) excess that enervated the pulse[5] of everyday life. Even the period saw itself as a stereotype (think of Austen's *Northanger Abbey* or Coleridge's *Christabel*). Arnold's "premature" view of Romantic creativity, Browning's wish for Shelley's Christianity, George Eliot's imprudent Romantic radicals, or Carlyle's call to forego Byron for Goethe all seem anxious that Romantic feeling passive-aggressively forebodes anarchy. Robert Buchanan disparaged the "fleshly" pre-Raphaelites, whose morbid model was Tennyson's *Maud* (1855), itself symptomatic of Romantic dis-ease (though reviews of Tennyson's 1830 *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* praised its tempered emotion), or Browning's corpus for devolving from classic Wordsworth reflectiveness to grotesque Keatsianism. All sense, no common sense; all body, no brain; a recessive, effete beauty – the threat of degenerate, animalistic sensation plagued Romanticism's unfit survival, its maladaptiveness, into the twentieth century. Like Freud dealing with "woman," liberal humanism – Eliot's or Leavis's (great) tradition – didn't know what to do with Romanticism's split religion (Hulme) or multiple personality (Lovejoy). To paraphrase Mary Favret, subsequent criticism followed Wimsatt and Beardsley's 1949 attack on affective criticism as sheer (Romantic) subjectivism.[6] Not until feminist theory urged us to reclaim writing minoritized as the "woman's work" of "mere" feeling, especially in a period when women as well as men were taking up the profession of author, was it OK to consider feelings betrayed by an earlier critical "objectivity."[7] Isobel Armstrong has even chided critics for notions of close reading that pay no attention to

the affective elements of a text.[8] The traditional, simple view of Romanticism as a hyper-affective reaction against Enlightenment rationalism did not survive attempts by M. H. Abrams, Thomas McFarland, and James Engell to stress both the philosophical robustness of Romanticism and its intellectual debts to the Enlightenment.

We might say that emotion's current notice is the recurrence of a Romantic passion for and curiosity about understanding, testing, and acclimatizing to the very pulses of life – a Romantic response to a modern problem. For Patricia Clough, the return to "bodily matter" in critical theory and cultural criticism in order to move past the "constructionisms under the influence of post-structuralism and deconstruction" marks "a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally – matter's capacity for self-organization in being informational."[9] But this concern with the "biomediated body" of our "postbiological" age as a "historically specific mode of organization of material forces" overlooks how Romantic emotion got there first, exploring itself as (post)human cognition and experience. *This* return, more than mere historical precedent, foregrounds Romanticism's contribution to our growing awareness of the centrality of the emotions by deploying recent critical work on the history of emotions to reassess Romanticism's ongoing role in writing this history. The essays in this volume confront us with Romanticism's still unexpected affective resonance. Julie Carlson on Shelley's similes as political affect, David Collings or Jacques Khalip on Wordsworth's un-passionate attachment to being, Richard Sha on Romantic emotion as physiochemical force, Joel Faflak on the price of happiness, Rei Terada on De Quincey's impassioned life of ruin – all make us feel Romanticism's profound difference. To wit, this collection offers fresh directions for the study of Romantic emotion, including some focus on emotions yet to receive their due, like happiness, humiliation, and various states of peaceful apatheia or affectlessness. Yet it also includes a return to old standards like trauma and melancholy – but in ways that subtly re-think or reconfigure these categories along the trajectory between the pleasure principle and its beyond, known as trauma.

Never idle dabbling nor airy idealism, Romantic experiments with emotion form the laboratory for current research on the interconnections between emotion and cognition, as Sha's or Favret's essays remind us. Recently Antonio Damasio argued that without the emotions moving the subject out of homeostasis to provide the content of consciousness, there would be nothing to think about – there would be no thought.[10] Against Damasio's universalizing of emotion as the constitutive form of consciousness, Daniel Gross implicates emotions within social circumstances,

insisting upon their rhetoricity.[11] This struggle between emotional content and form, between bodily consciousness and (its) history, reminds us that emotions have a temporality as well as ontology, a non-linear, non-causal but also *intentional* and contingent relationality. Mapping this emotional terrain without origin reflects a Romantic idealism that is also Romanticism's crucible, as it has become ours. The currents and undercurrents between and among individuals, groups, and their environments are calling us to account with some urgency. If, as Adorno and Horkheimer say, the human ascendancy of enlightenment "radiates disaster triumphant,"[12] it seems clear we have moved past the religious question "What do we believe?" to the scientific question "What do we think or know?" to ask what might be the vital question of our time: "What and how do we feel?" In a world too much with and upon us, the Romantic desire to distill essence from accumulation calls for us to respond with measured urgency to the shock and awe of a history in flux. Romanticism confronts historical experience *as* flux, a traumatic and traumatizing sense of history that locates affect beyond the pleasure principle. In short, if feeling is the barometer of Romanticism's temperament, Romantic writers in turn asked not only why it was a time *of* feeling but also whose feelings and which feelings counted. The danger of rendering history as trauma is the trivialization of both.

Begging the question stymies solutions but offers possibilities. What often troubles the affective turn in Romantic studies, Favret suggests, is the attempt to categorize what by definition at once sustains and eludes both thought and language. Favret cites Brian Massumi, for whom affect is a "system" of "autonomic responses" that the cognition of emotions "may seize upon . . . [in order to] . . . 'qualify' or name them, but in doing so it 'dampens' their force or 'resonance.'" Massumi distinguishes affect from emotion, which "is too easily named; it is affect 'owned and recognized'; it translates affect into 'conventional, consensual' form, where it can be given 'function and meaning.'"[13] Terada elaborates further:

> *Emotion* is a psychologically, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is *affect*. *Feeling* is a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions). Although philosophers reserve "feeling" for bodily conditions, I use it when it seems fruitful to emphasize the common ground of the physiological and the psychological. *Passion* highlights an interesting phenomenon, the difficulty of classifying emotion as passive or active . . . Of course passion's very force makes it seem compulsive. Thus passion drives intentional subjectivity to its self-undoing in senseless vigor – an undoing that does

> not have to be figured as decadent excess, but can be conceived as an interior limit of volition. Passion, therefore, characterizes the nonsubjectivity within the very concept of the subject. Finally, *pathos* conveys the explicitly representational, vicarious, and supplementary dimensions of emotion. Scenes are not played for passion, but for pathos; debates about pathos come to be about the relation between representation and intensity.[14]

Keep such designations in mind when reading through the following essays, but bear in mind their contemporary heuristic. Clough tracks emotion's affective valence as what Massumi, addressing the affect of threat, calls a "zone of indistinction," which reminds us how thinking the transfer between affect and emotion – at once constitutive, irreducible, and incompossible – forms the ground zero of affect theory both current and Romantic.[15] This paradoxical transfer informs Terada's sense of passion's "undoing" of "intentional subjectivity" to register the "nonsubjectivity within the very concept of the subject," the non-human within the human. And we can see how *pathos*, indicating emotion's historical or sociopolitical dimension, at once performs and encrypts within itself a kind of primordial condition of theater to which the emotions give dramaturgical shape, a Dionysian energy within their Apollonian form that indicates affect's drive toward emotional effect – the affective resonance or feeling *of* emotion.

Put another way, in Romantic feeling experience and the aesthetic become intimately, irrevocably, unassimilably imbricated. Nietzsche reminds us that, as form's expression of an ineffable content, the aesthetic works by a profound forgetting of its primordial being in sense. To (re) capture this (in)tangible source is to mark the political and ethical dimension of language's mediation *as*, as well as *of*, life. This means that emotion bears the force of tropes and is in fact, as Pinch and Terada remind us, constituted by them. Emotion tropes experience, just as language turns, directs, alters emotion, a transfer that is transferential. In her essay for this volume, Julie Carlson explores Percy Shelley's use of simile as the embodied affect of thought and its "capacity for alterity." Simile registers language's affective pull as the feeling relationality among selves as others. Rather than subordinate or dominate the reality they speak (as in metaphor), similes entrench, temporalize, and defer to the difference they mark from reality. Enacting this difference *of* language as their very constitutive possibility, similes offer a non-defensive, non-coercive relationship to the very antagonisms they stage in turn – simile as a kind of poetic UN, albeit a perhaps more effective political and ethical instrument. Carlson's account of Shelley's language shows how Romantic statements *of* feeling,

blunted by reiteration and overdetermined by aesthetic, social, political, and economic forces, arrest and detain us precisely by their continued *in*ability to ring true or clearly.

This volume thus addresses within Romantic thought and writing on emotion a complex range of issues: the relation of affect to figuration and knowing (associationism, empirical psychology, the psychosomatic, imagination, the aesthetic, idealism); emotions and the discipline of knowledge (natural philosophy, moral philosophy, political economy, ideology, science, psychiatry, philosophy); the motivational powers of emotion (volition and the will, the existence of the soul); emotions as a shared ground of meaning (community, nationalism, radicalism, reformation, religion); and the problems of historicizing emotion (gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity). Imbricated within a broader matrix of scientific, medical, political, and philosophical explorations of connections between minds and bodies, Romantic writing evolved a robust lexicon for thinking about emotion: feeling(s), passion(s), sentiment, sensibility, sympathy, vitality, volition, fascination, curiosity, magnetism, mesmerism, galvanism, nerves, nervousness, the reflex arc, excitability, irritability. Both consciously and unconsciously this rubric shaped subsequent cognitive discourse – neuroscientists are fond of quoting Adam Smith – and reflects the historical, critical, and theoretical implications of a concern with the emotions in recent humanities and social science research. This affective turn is forging among these fields an interdisciplinarity directly traceable to Romantic thought and speculation on the emotions; which is also to say this new venture continues a Romantic history of the emotions we are only beginning to understand. And yet as trace, Romantic emotions acquire the scars of writing, a fact that Romantic writers could not evade even as they turn to the emotions as a kind of compensatory phenomenality. It is our collective view that the current affective and emotional turn would profit from a Romantic skepticism about the relations between language, emotion, and agency.[16] However much Romantic writers might have wanted to believe that emotions are, in the current evolutionary idiom, actions in the rough, or even to think that it is possible to get in touch with one's emotions, they also insistently registered, as the following essays show, their awareness of the gaps between desire, subject, and action.

II. More than a feeling

Wordsworthian "overflow" signals affect's automatic political, ecological, and ethical power to galvanize others, the ineluctable if overwhelming

transfer between bodies and the body politic. Touting the language of common man, Wordsworth distinguishes poetry from prosaic expressions of historical experience and from the deadening scientific or pragmatic impulse to make rational or mundane sense of things as they are, or the vulgarizing impulse of an increasingly mediated society prone to spectacle and sensation, degraded and entropied by its own unrestrained nature. Wordsworth sought what Jeremy Bentham called the "springs of human action." With managerial precision, Bentham groups affects and motives according to two main springs, pain and pleasure, thus forming a delicate balance in which the former, like Brunonian excitability, agitates the latter into action, a "felicific calculus" designed to maximize pleasure for the greater good.[17] Here "spring" suggests at once "source," "agency," "mechanism," or "vehicle" – energy and volition as well as the individual hardwire and social relay by which they are conducted, delivered, disseminated, act and are acted upon in turn. Yet Bentham's efficiency belies what was for most Romantic writers a rather more heterogeneous, complex, and often bewildering experiential range. This may have been Bentham's spur: the impulse to enlighten what resisted scientific or philosophical perception, or to curb social and political menace. At first the impulse is aspiring and inspiring. Wordsworth galvanizes for future audiences the renovating and ameliorative emotional afflatus of what in 1820 William Hazlitt calls the spirit of the age. As Shelley wrote the next year, "the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen as it were from a new birth."[18] Thomas De Quincey later elevates the literature of power above the literature of knowledge that is, like Coleridge's fancy, the mere reproduction of data.

Yet various fears trouble these statements: a blunted and entropied inspiration and discernment; emotions outside of discipline; stupefaction by the welter of a burgeoning information age; literature's inability to arrest and galvanize public attention in order to inform, enlighten, and ennoble public taste. All speak to a deeper anxiety about the "springs" of bodily affect. Just as sensation fiction was to remind the realist novel about its autonomous psychosomatic body, Wordsworth saw in gothic writing an affect that can't be controlled, obviated, put to rest. As Joanna Baillie suggests in her 1798 "Introductory Discourse," the dramatization of passion stages its properly social deployment, discharge, and communication. The times became increasingly proto-Victorian (Bentham gives utilitarianism to the Romantics first), calling for the moral hygiene of a body capable of restraining and disciplining its impulses toward the greater

good of an industrial, civil, and civilized sphere bent on global advance and moral edification. Romantic surfeits of feeling could be happily spontaneous and potently transformational, but also seemed recklessly progressive, demanding Burkean restraint (or worse) to curb their dangerous enthusiasm. For the Romantics, memory's contemplative authority rallies a restricted economy that processes – "qualifies" or "dampens" – the general economy of affect's powerfully inchoate surplus. Feeling should be reflective as well as expressive. Yet memory also collapses an aesthetic or scientific distance haunted by a virtual affect that elides and confuses epistemological, ontological, and ethical categories, making it hard to tell where subjects and their meanings reside. The hubris behind Bentham's project of emotional calculation should perhaps serve as a shot across the bow of evolutionary theorists of emotion, bent on reducing the emotions to predispositions to action and accomplishing such reduction in large part by labeling emotions that do not lead to action as forms of maladaptiveness that are the deadly exception to evolution's rule.[19] Emotion has become scientific at the expense of what Claudia Johnson called its "egregious affectivity."[20] How much Romantic literature, we wonder, would evolution thereby consign to the dustbin of history? How many Romantic writers would thereby become the evolutionary equivalent of lunch?

The question "What or how do I feel?" invokes the genesis of eighteenth-century discourses on the passions, sentiment, or sympathy in slightly earlier natural rights and social contract theories. More selfless than self-ish, refined attention to one's environment epitomized personal sovereignty as the linchpin of civil society: sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and self-cultivation, the capacity to think and feel about others and thus assume the duty and responsibility of citizen. Yet the excessive qualities of sentiment or later sensibility were also symptomatic of narcissism, introversion, nervousness, doubt, ambition, and a host of enlightenment deadly sins – a sovereignty vexed by its own autonomous functioning. Events before and after 1798 materialized this radical (in)operativeness, despite Hume's contention that reason was inert and only the passions had the power to motivate us. We might say, to paraphrase Chantal Mouffe's point in *The Democratic Paradox*, that feeling signals the failure of democracy's concern for collective sovereignty in favor of liberalism's fetishization of individual rights.[21] Contributor Thomas Pfau argues this shift differently. For Pfau, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), whose model of sympathy underwrote the classical political liberalism of eighteenth-century moral philosophy and political economy, constructs a virtual model of sentiment, a "dramaturgy of emotion . . . actualized in . . . social

spaces" that makes affective reality "inseparable from its social phenomenology, that is, from its mode of appearance as 'behavior.'" Voiding emotion of content, Smith "renders the inner life moral ... precisely [for] its susceptibility to being transformed from mute and inchoate desire into socially expedient sentiment," a precursor of behaviorism. Put another way, sympathy's virtual logic of sentiment stages Bentham's utilitarianism as a specular form that tropes, maps, and regulates emotions as "socially and objectively classifiable phenomena." Democracy's managerial success is thus Romanticism's emotional failure as transport, transformation, or transgression. Joel Faflak similarly argues that Romanticism's post-moral philosophy trains, administers, and manufactures feelings as manageable behavior within civil society. For Faflak, Jane Austen's fictions, particularly her final *Persuasion*, puts this behavior into the cultural practice of a cheerful readerly acquiescence whose harmlessly felicitous payoff is the last influence of a happiness quotient, whose felicific calculus computes our current solution to dread.

Yet there is more than one way to view "failure." As a "zone of indistinction," emotions register the alterity of being within everyday experience, for which we have little regard except when we are nervously compelled by *being* nervously compelled.[22] Like disease in Hegel or like the event for Badiou, emotions are the rupture of a material happening whose break calls forth truth's reality out of truth's non-existence, reminding us of our bodily matter precisely where and when we are embodied as virtual presence. Richard Sha's essay addresses this issue as the motion or *force* of emotion. This "metalepsis" of the human and non-human (mechanical/divine) force constitutes an unstable but productive matrix of relationality through which subjectivity materializes as a non-quantifiable entity that nonetheless has the allure of quantifiability (force = mass × acceleration). In Sha's words, "Emotions ... literally matter because of the force they contain." Exploring elective affinities between Romantic science and literature, Sha sees force as the "mechanism by which the mental becomes somatic and emotion is communicated." Yet force also suggests automaticity, an "agency without an agent." Or rather, emotions lack agency, but not intentionality. In Goethe's *Elective Affinities* and Wordsworth's "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal," Sha reads emotional force as a moving inertia resistant to knowledge, yet one that redefines agency "as the ability to accept and not thwart this unknowing."

For Sha emotions confuse the "border between matter and sociality," so that "affinities are necessarily multiple, and by implication, transient," leaving the borders of and between subjects "fungible." Emotions thus