

# Responding to the Spectral Voice of the Outcast: Reading of William Wordsworth's "The Thorn"

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## ■ ABSTRACT ■

William Wordsworth's "The Thorn" revolves around the following questions: Who is Martha? Why does she go to the mountain top and repeat her doleful cry? To these questions, it gives us two different kinds of answers; one derives from the villagers, and the other from the narrator. This essay attempts to examine how the answers exemplify two different critical approaches to the problem of community, using Jacques Lacan's account of sexual difference in his seminar on *Encore* as a guiding thread of analysis. The important thing to retain here is that sexual difference in Lacan's seminar on *Encore* does not so much indicate biological determinations as two distinct forms of relating to the other which are intimately bound up with the question of how a community is constructed and maintained. The first form, called "masculine," suggests that it is a radical exception to a community that makes possible the community as a field of totality or sameness; the second form, called "feminine," shows that each of the subjects cannot be regarded as a member of a closed community which is guaranteed by the exceptionality, but as an exception that is radically singular. This in turn leads us to consider the possibility that the masculine form has to do with the villagers' effort to distinguish themselves from Martha and the feminine form with the way in which the narrator confronts and represents her. In the course of his formulation of sexualization graph, Lacan stresses that the masculine side must be supplemented by the feminine side, which allows us to elaborate on why,

concerning Martha, the narrator does not just keep the completely different position from the villagers'. This is to say that the villagers' representation of Martha as an exception to the community should be supplemented by the narrator's attempt to tell Martha's story as the villagers do and at the same time to capture something of her enigmatic unrepresentability. Bearing in mind Charles Shepherson's elaboration of traumatic memory, this essay also tries to clarify how the narrator preserves and even transmits something of Martha's truth that is embodied in her uncontrollable and unassimilable cry.

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Key Words

hermeneutic anxiety, community, witchcraft accusation, outcast figure, exception, primal horde in *Totem and Taboo*, Lacan's sexuation graph, traumatic memory, Wordsworthian poet

In *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, Giorgio Agamben provides an intriguing case for our understanding of the notion of human infancy in the context of the discussion of experience. "In terms of human infancy," he writes, "experience is the simple difference between the human and the linguistic" (50). The human infancy, as Agamben elaborates, is nothing other than "a wordless experience" (47). This means that the infancy is not "a psychic reality located outside or beyond language in some nebulous so-called 'mystical experience' " (51). Rather, what is at stake for Agamben is the infancy as a sort of disjunction between the human and the linguistic. And as implied in his comment, "The individual as not already speaking, as having been and still being an infant—this is experience," Agamben stresses that experience can be defined as being exposed to the disjunction between the human and the linguistic (50). We need to redirect, in this connection, our attention to the figures in William Wordsworth's poems who are mad, outcast, exiled or abandoned, because they, as the instances of the disjunction between the human and the linguistic, are intertwined with the problem of 'unintelligibility' or 'silence' or 'the void in signification.'

This is exemplified in a particular way in "The Thorn," included in the 1798 version of *Lyrical Ballads*, where we are exposed to the 'wordless experience' always already included within the linguistic, more precisely, some ineffable but repeated cry of a wandering mad woman named Martha. Interestingly, the place haunted by Martha is regarded as her infant's grave.

Specifically, in "The Thorn," a narrator, along with his interlocutor, poses a series of questions with regard to a mystery at the heart of his experience, that is, a wandering woman named Martha: Who is Martha?, Why does she go to the dreary mountain top?, Why does she repeat the doleful cry?, and so on. But he is left with Martha's repeated cry, "Oh misery! oh misery!/O woe is me! oh misery!"<sup>1)</sup> Can we say that Martha's cry marks one of the moments in Wordsworth's poetry when language seems to verge on silence or present experience as finally unintelligible? And taking one more step, can we read the moment when language presents experience as finally unintelligible as a reference point of ethical speculation in the sense that it is intimately connected with the outcast figures such as Martha? Does this mean that Martha as the figure marking a divergence or a moment of rupture in the narrative of "The Thorn" is embedded within the question of ethical relation? Indeed, in "The Thorn," the villagers' explanation of Martha and the narrator's story of her correspond respectively to two different kinds of answer to the question of how we confront Martha as a rupture in meaning. The villagers try to define Martha as a kind of criminal practicing infanticide or as the stain of crime and guilt that should be removed and expelled from their community. And it turns out that the villagers' effort to distinguish themselves from Martha on the basis of the law of morality contributes to maintaining their community as a field of sameness or universality. However, the narrator, even if he remains within the community to a greater extent and collects rumors and gossips about Martha, implicitly suggests that the villagers seek to

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1) "The Thorn" in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, 65-66. References to "The Thorn" are cited hereafter by line in my text.

domesticate or interpret Martha's enigmatic unrepresentability. We could say that the narrator keeps oscillating between the villagers and Martha, which intimates that, with regard to Martha, there remains the so-called ethical experience, that is, what cannot be entirely reduced to the law of morality. In what follows, I try to reread "The Thorn" on the basis of Jacques Lacan's insights concerning psychoanalytic ethics that draw attention to the ethical experience as the gap inherent in the law of morality. This rereading proceeds according to the unique elaboration of sexual difference Lacan provides in his seminar on *Encore*. Two pairs of logical formulae of sexuation introduced by Lacan help us to specify further the distinction between the villagers' explanation which tries to narrate Martha's story and to give it meaning on the one hand and the actual resistance to meaning that she presents in the poem on the other.

## I. The Problematic Relationship between the Village Community and Martha

"The Thorn" is a poem which pertains to the question of the problematic relationship between a wandering woman and community. The narrator's report of the wandering woman named Martha begins with a series of questions asked, in a rather breathless way, by his interlocutor:

'Now wherefore thus, by day and night,  
'In rain, in tempest, and in snow,  
'Thus to the dreary mountain-top  
'Does this poor woman go?  
'And why sits she beside the thorn  
'When the blue day-light's in the sky,  
'Or when the whirlwind's on the hill,  
'Or frosty air is keen and still,  
'And wherefore does she cry?—

'Oh wherefore? Wherefore? tell me why  
'Does she repeat that doleful cry?' (78-88)

It can be said that "The Thorn" is nothing but the narrator's (failed) attempt to give answers to these questions concerning Martha. Who on earth is Martha? Martha is a woman who was once a community member, but has been driven out of her mind after being abandoned by her fiancé Stephen Hill. Six months after her abandonment, she was witnessed to climb to the mountain-top which was assumed to be the place where she killed and buried her own child. What is interesting here is that the narrator's account of Martha is based on information or gossips offered by her neighbors ignorant of the motives behind Martha's actions, which is demonstrated by phrases repeatedly used like a sort of mantra; for instance, "they say," "many swear," "some say," "all and each agree" and so on (133, 173, 216, 218).

Alan Bewell takes up the issue of witchcraft belief or witchcraft accusation, reviewing "The Thorn" in his essay "A 'Word Scarce Said': Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth's 'Experimental' Poetry of 1797-1798." Why has Martha haunted a mountain-top site outside the village for twenty years? Nobody actually knows the reason, as the narrator himself says: "I cannot tell; I wish I could;/For the true reason no one knows" (89-90). But it is significant that everybody in the village has an opinion about Martha or Martha's conduct. Their opinions about Martha converge on her guilt as an infanticide. In this connection, Bewell gives his attention to the scene in which villagers heard "[c]ries coming from the mountain-head" that were both "plainly living voices" and "voices of the dead" and that were assumed to be Martha's cries (171, 172, 174). For bearing in mind "the mountain-head" as the usual site for nocturnal sabbaths, it is not surprising that villagers would "conclude that she had entered into a compact with the devil and murdered her child" there (Bewell 380). But in this scene, we cannot fail to notice the essential fear or anxiety

that villagers feel toward Martha as an enigma which renders problematic any neat distinction between living voice and dead voice. It might be said that the villagers' anxiety about Martha urges them to hastily announce her as a witch committing infanticide.

Why don't the villagers attempt to get some decisive solutions to questions about Martha through the direct confrontation with her? They never try to come face to face with her: "I never heard of such as dare/Approach the spot when she is there" (98-99). Rather it seems that they want Martha to be just spied on from a distance and so to remain obscure or enigmatic. Thus at issue in "The Thorn" is nothing less than the problematic relationship between Martha and the village community which simultaneously excludes and includes her. This is why Bewell, with respect to "The Thorn," places his specific emphasis on the social dynamics of witchcraft accusation; according to him, "witchcraft accusations were rarely spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment charges made by individuals, but instead reflected a community consensus, reached over a long period of time" (380).

Bewell claims that "The Thorn" gives one example of how the witchcraft accusation is necessarily bound up with a community consensus. In this context, it might be worth recalling that every villager has his or her own opinion about Martha, although nobody actually knows the reason why Martha has haunted a mountain-top site outside the village for twenty years. It can be argued that everybody in the village constructs his or her own 'fantasy' with regard to Martha or that constructing a 'fantasy' of Martha serves as the condition of possibility of the community. This is to say that constructing a fantasy of Martha ultimately amounts to keeping her at a proper distance and thereby establishing the community as a field of totality and universality. The important point to stress here is that the villagers can keep their community stable and meaningful only on the condition that they presuppose Martha as a kind of absolute exceptionality. This enables us to draw a paradoxical conclusion: Martha is always already included in the community in the way of being excluded from it.

Now we are in a position to spell out Martha's enigmatic status as what is in and beyond the community. To gain some sense of how Martha is placed in and beyond the community, it is necessary to cast some light on the narrator of this poem. For the narrator presents himself as a newcomer to the community. In the note attached to "The Thorn," Wordsworth makes clear that the narrator is "a Captain of a small trading vessel" who "had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live."<sup>2</sup>) What interests us here is the possibility that the narrator, as an outsider with an itinerant past of his own, is exposed to the danger of becoming isolated from his adopted community like Martha. But even if the narrator enters the community as a stranger, he chooses to be engaged in gathering and presenting bits of story about Martha, thereby gradually integrating himself into the community. In fact, at times, the narrator professes that he cannot believe what he has been told; he says that "I cannot tell; I wish I could;/For the true reason no one knows" or that "But kill a new-born infant thus!/I do not think she could" (89-90, 223-24). But nonetheless he never ceases to repeat rumors and gossips which he has heard. There is another issue that is worth noting with respect to the narrator: he has an interlocutor who is also new to this village. For example, at various points, the narrator gives information and suspicions concerning Martha as if he makes answers to questions asked by someone eager to learn about her, which suggests that constructing the story about Martha is an ongoing process. As Toby Benis points out, "The Thorn" implicitly shows that it is the mechanics of the community-building process that requires the outcast to remain isolated (see Benis 111).

By considering the possibility that the community-building process corresponds to the fantasy-building process, we can take a step further in the direction of understanding the narrator's complex and enigmatic

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2) See Commentary in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, 139.

status different from the villagers' status. Since Martha began to haunt a mountain-top site outside the village twenty years ago, the villagers have provided their interpretations or explanations of her which actually amount to their fantasies belatedly constructed on the basis of groundless rumors and gossips. As already mentioned, the narrator has also participated in the process of constructing the fantasy of Martha. But at issue here is that the narrator's attempt to tell a story of Martha cannot be entirely reduced to the fantasy-building process of the villagers. It is necessary to recall, in this connection, that the narrator often says "I cannot tell." Let us take a closer look at the scene in which the narrator goes to measure the size of the pond. The narrator himself, as if he were not content with the rumors and gossips, that is, the half-knowledge given by the villagers, tries to measure the size of the pond, one of the natural objects that characterize the spot occupied by Martha: "I've measured it from side to side: 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide" (32-33). Of key importance in this context is that even after this attempt, the narrator still keeps saying "I cannot tell." This is to say that the narrator "cannot tell" a whole story of Martha, although he gathers enough information about her or he maintains a neutral position without recourse to the villagers' groundless supposition and prejudice. It could be argued that "I cannot tell," the phrase which is dispersed throughout the poem, hints at the structural limit of the narrative of Martha.

## II. Lacan's Sexuation Graph: Two Modes of Relating to the Other

The question of how one should encounter or represent Martha as an outcast figure is at the heart of "The Thorn." In "The Thorn," there are many explanations or interpretations of Martha that attempt to domesticate her strangeness or unintelligibility—for example, the story that says she

is suffering from abandonment by her fiancé, or from the trauma of her forced infanticide, and various other explanations such as witchcraft as well as forms of suspicion, gossip, etc. It is by producing 'meaning' that all these explanations seek to cover up the fundamental unintelligibility or strangeness of Martha. In order to clarify what is at stake in the explanations of Martha given by the villagers and besides, how the narrator's representation is different from that of the villagers, we need to examine the unique elaboration of sexual difference Lacan provides in his seminar on *Encore*, more precisely, his logical formulae of sexuation which enable us to reconsider the nature of community and the question of exception connected with it. For Lacan, the question of community cannot be properly developed without considering the problem of sexual difference. Lacan's account therefore develops two distinct forms, two possibilities of relating to the other, each of which is called "masculine" and "feminine." Here we should be circumspect about the way we understand the difference between men and women; for, as Tracy McNulty indicates, "Lacan's characterization of 'woman' is not strictly or even necessarily related to the female sex; 'masculine' and 'feminine' are, for Lacan, positions taken up in relation to the signifier, and not biological determinations" (266n35).

Let us briefly review the main outline of Lacan's argument on the sexuation graph.<sup>3)</sup> To begin with, in the logical formulae of sexuation, the two formulae on the "masculine" side can be read as "All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier" and "There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier." The point of these formulations might be encapsulated in the following terms: it is a radical exception to the symbolic order that makes possible the symbolic order as a field of totality. As is well known, the pattern which establishes the "masculine" subjective structure stems from Sigmund Freud's elaboration of the mythical primal horde introduced in *Totem and Taboo*. According to Freud's revision of Darwin's

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3) For Lacan's sexuation graph and his own account connected with it, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX: Encore*, 73-89.

account of the primal horde,

All that we find there is a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up....One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually....They hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too....A sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. The dead father became stronger than the living one had been—for events took the course we so often see them follow in human affairs to this day....They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. (141, 143)

On the basis of this narrative, Kenneth Reinhard paraphrases the first formulation of the "masculine" side, "All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier," to mean that "to be a man is to be under the universal thrall of the phallus as signifier; and the name for the limitations that this signifier imposes is 'castration,' the price of entry into the technologies of symbolic mediation" (51). All men, as "castrated subjects," enter the rule of the symbolic order, and in this symbolic order, they form a collective with equal rights and equal restrictions as suggested in Freud's narrative. But the second formulation of the "masculine" side, "There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier," makes explicit that there is one man who remains uncastrated; it is the primal father in Freud's narrative that embodies the uncastrated man who "supports the illusion of 'having it all,' the possibility of unlimited enjoyment, that enables men to bear their own castration" (Reinhard 53).

The important point to retain with respect to Freud's analysis of the primal horde is that it does not merely show how the symbolic order is established—more specifically, the way in which the primal father is expelled from the community, in order for all the sons to enter the symbolic order which would be a meaningful totality—but rather who or what is responsible for the obscene malfunction of the symbolic order itself. One familiar way to interpret Freud's account of the primal horde is to view it as a kind of mythical narrative, in which an original state (primitive authoritarian domination) is replaced by a more civilized and rational state (the quasi-democratic rule of the brothers). But Lacan remarks that Freud's account is quite different from this kind of imaginary history, and that its purpose is also quite different, insofar as it aims to account, not for the lawlessness of the original primal father, but rather for the peculiar disequilibrium that accompanies the very establishment of the law itself. What is in question here is the possibility that the myth of the primal father is constituted as a response to, or a defense against, the originary condition of the symbolic order. What if the symbolic order bears within it a kind of disequilibrium that produces a dimension of meaninglessness?

This is why, in Lacan's sexuation graph, the two formulae on the "masculine" side must be considered with, or more precisely, supplemented by two formulae on the "feminine" side; these formulae on the "feminine" side open up an interesting path to a conception of community which would not simply be based on the symbolic order as a field of totality, universality and sameness. The "feminine" side is also made up of two formulations: "Not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration" and "There is no subject that is not subjected to the phallic signifier or the symbolic order." When it comes to the first formulation, "Not all of a woman is subject to symbolic castration," the phrase "not all" requires more careful consideration. Indeed, Lacan attaches considerable importance to the phrase "not all," as shown in the following passage:

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[W]hen any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner "women," it is on the basis of the following—that it grounds itself as being not-whole [not-all] in situating in the phallic function. That is what defines what? Woman precisely, except that Woman can only be written with a bar through it. There's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital *W* indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence...She is not-whole [not-all]. (72-73)

Reinhard's commentary on this passage helps us to shed light on the status of the not-all (not-whole) in Lacan's argument. According to him, "the 'not-all' does not mean that not all women are under the law of the phallus....Nor does it mean that not all of a woman is castrated, that some part of her being or her body remains unscathed, free of the signifier's cut" (57-58). To put it another way, we must be careful not to make the false assumption that the woman's not-all "involves the nonfunctioning or suspension of the paternal signifier and consequent nontotalization of the field of signifiers" (Reinhard 59). Reinhard makes the further claim that whereas there is a unified category "all men," guaranteed by the exceptionality, women are radically singular, which in turn suggests that "[n]o authentic positive characterization of Woman in general is possible" and that women are "not examples of a class or members of a closed set, but each one an exception" (58).

The second formulation of the "feminine" side is "There is no subject that is not subjected to the phallic signifier or the symbolic order." It appears that, on the logical level, the implication of this formulation is not different from that of the formulation on the "masculine" side, "All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier." Charles Shepherdson, in this connection, observes that the second formulation on the "feminine" side does not have "a universal proposition, a statement that could be distributed across all subjects ('All men,' etc.)" ("Philosophy" 139). As the feminine version of subjection to the law, the formulation "relies on the particular ('There is no woman who is not' etc.)" (Shepherdson,

"Philosophy" 139). At stake here is, after all, the difference between a universal quantifier "all" and a quasi-existential "there is." As we have seen above, there is no way of characterizing "women in general," which is to say that woman, as "a subject with a predicate that would cover the field of 'all women,' and allow us to capture her essence as a social or biological totality," does not exist (Shepherdson, "Philosophy" 140). But "there is" femininity; according to Shepherdson's account, "it is 'possible' that 'there is' something of femininity, which has precisely the character of not being fully inscribed in the signifier—a being in the mode of 'not-being-written' " (Shepherdson, "Philosophy" 140). It can be argued that woman, not wholly inscribed within the phallic function, points to some structural lack within the phallic function or the dimension of meaninglessness within the symbolic order. In the words of Reinhard, the woman's not-all "defines something more like a nonaccord or noncompliance with the phallic function, submission to it with reserve" (59).

### III. The Place of Martha in and beyond the Community

The two formulae of the masculine side in Lacan's sexuation graph are summed up in the following words: One subject must be expelled from the community, in order for all of the other subjects to become the members of the community as a field of totality. When it comes to "The Thorn," the relationship between the villagers and Martha can be construed as being based on the masculine logic; that is to say, it is Martha as a radical exception that enables all the villagers to enter the community as a field of totality or sameness. How, then, is Martha constructed as an exception to the community by the villagers? It is worth recalling at this point Freud's elaboration of the primal horde introduced in *Totem and Taboo* in which the primal father is mythically situated in 'pre-history,'

as if this stain of crime and guilt (the 'outlaw' position of the father) could be eliminated from the symbolic order, so that law (the social contract) could function. On the basis of the masculine logic which requires two positions in relation to the law—total submission on the one hand (the sons) and absolute exceptionality on the other hand (the primal father), we can say that, for the villagers, Martha functions as a kind of 'criminal' or 'guilty party' in the explanations of the community which give her story this particular meaning. The hermeneutic anxiety she presents is converted by their mythological explanations into guilt.

Let us look further at a scene which puts very succinctly how the villagers define Martha as a kind of criminal and expel her from their community. Insisting that Martha, suspected of an infanticide, should be brought to public justice, some of the villagers decide to dig up the moss heap to find the bones which would be used as evidence. And yet, at the very moment they set to work, they are faced with some supernatural intervention:

And for the little infant's bones  
With spades they would have sought.  
But then the beauteous hill of moss  
Before their eyes began to stir;  
And for full fifty yards around,  
The grass it shook upon the ground. (234-39)

This event forces the villagers to give up their project. What we should take seriously in this event is that the villagers share "what must be thought of as a kind of hallucination" (Simpson xiv). Are the villagers afraid of not finding what they expect and thus confirming that they have misjudged as to Martha or Martha's crime? Probably for this reason, despite their failure to find the infant's bones, all of the villagers who concern themselves with the project may "still aver/The little babe is buried there" (240-41). The fact that the villagers still insist that Martha must kill her own baby

even after their failure to find its bones leads us to be alert to the possibility that the villagers' story of Martha can be retroactively constructed in order to defend themselves against the enigma of Martha. But what if the community is the very engine that produces the villagers' anxiety in the first place? What if Martha points to a rupture that always already remains within the community or that accompanies the very establishment of the community itself? In other words, what if the villagers' story of Martha corresponds to the attempt to localize the very anxiety which is caused by the rupture or disequilibrium within the community and then to remove it from the field of subjects and the community?

In this context, we should attend to another layer of "The Thorn," that is, the relationship between the narrator and Martha which is necessary to be examined in terms of Lacan's account of the feminine side of the sexuation graph. For "The Thorn" develops a thought of community that would not simply be based on law and the symbolic order understood as a field of totality or universality or sameness, but that would rather be capable of registering its own incompleteness, its own relation to the void in meaning that Martha presents. In "The Thorn," Martha appears, at first sight, to function as an exception that guarantees the constitution of a unified group or community into which the narrator tries to integrate himself. But building upon Lacan's formulation of the feminine side of sexuation graph, the question arises as to whether there isn't such thing as the transcendental exceptionality which can be clearly separated and excluded from the community. Or if we bring Lacan's articulation of not-all (not-whole) to bear on this issue, we can say that the narrator shows that Martha is 'not-all' inscribed within the community whereas the villagers insist that she is 'not-at-all' inscribed within it.

Let us now take a closer look at the narrator's representation of Martha. As already mentioned, the narrator is a captain who retires to some village of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. It amounts to saying that he could be an outcast and a stranger

like Martha. But at the same time he remains within the community to a greater extent by telling his story of Martha. This commits us to a search for the possibility that the narrator's representation of Martha is considered in relation to the feminine logic which focuses on what resists the law without standing as an exception to the law, in other words, what is neither simply outside nor entirely inside the community. Moreover, the narrator's complex and enigmatic status, as an outcast who nonetheless remains within the community, is highly significant in respect to the idea that, in Lacan's elaboration of sexual difference, the feminine logic cannot replace the masculine logic, but can only 'supplement' it. The narrator is still telling Martha's story as the villagers do. Yet of crucial importance here is that the narrator's representation of Martha is different from that of the villagers. It could be claimed that he functions to transmit anxiety in some way, so that, instead of explaining Martha by producing a story of guilt or crime like the villagers, he captures something of her enigmatic unrepresentability, and transmits it in language to the community.

The first thing to note concerning the narrator's representation of Martha is that his story, unfolded through a first-person narration, but not through a third-person narration that assumes a vantage-ground from which to control the whole narrative, begins with a description of three natural objects that characterize the place haunted by Martha. The thorn is "both infantile and ancient": "It looks so old and grey./Not higher than a two-years' child" (Benis 94; 4-5). Another thing to point out here is that the thorn resembles a man, in David Bromwich's phrase, "a peculiarly disfavored or wretched man"; it is "reduced to knots and joints like a skeleton, bereft of every sign of youth" (106). And the pond is "neither a proper pond nor dry land": "You see a little muddy pond/Of water, never dry" (Benis 94; 30-31). The moss heap also looks like "an infant's grave," but it is described as "so fair" (52, 55). As to these natural objects, Bromwich notes that many precise measurements are scattered in the description of them. Here is his summary of the three objects:

[The Thorn] stands on a mountain's highest ridge, "not five yards" to the left of the path; three yards farther to the left is a muddy pond, which is never dry, and yet so small it ought to be occasionally dry: "I've measured it from side to side:/Tis three feet long, and two feet wide." And beside the thorn, one other thing—a hill of moss, "Just half a foot in height," of "lovely tints" in network as if made by a lady's hand—a hill, we are told, "like an infant's grave in size." (106)

This is to say that villagers endeavor to make comprehensible the enigmatic natural objects which cannot be reduced to any oppositional way of thinking. Interestingly, as shown in "I've measured it from side to side:/Tis three feet long, and two feet wide," the narrator himself goes to the pond to measure its length and width. This can be considered as a scene implying that the narrator does not just take a stand against the villagers' attempt to explain away Martha, which also allows us to glimpse the supplementary relationship between the villagers' representation of Martha and the narrator's (32-33). Like Martha, though, those three natural things won't be sized up so easily and cannot be clearly comprehended, which is why the interlocutor, even if he was already told of the narrator's direct encounter with Martha at the place surrounded by the thorn, the pond, and the hill of moss, cannot help but ask the following questions once again: "But what's the thorn? And what's the pond?/And what's the hill of moss to her?" (210-11). It might be argued that such natural objects as a thorn, a pond, and a hill of moss surrounding Martha are situated in the same condition as her in that they partake of ambiguous properties which defy binary opposition. The questions which the interlocutor asks, obsessively fixing on the natural objects consisting of Martha's place, can be said to contain an important clue to Martha's enigmatic status. The narrator does not provide any proper answer to these questions that are formulated in terms of "what is...?," which alerts us to the possibility that Martha, along with the natural objects surrounding her, is a mere gap or, in Lacan's term, *objet a* within the symbolic order.

In order to have a better understanding of the narrator's representation, we must engage in a closer reading of the scene in which he encounters Martha. The narrator is described as the only one who comes face to face with Martha, the problematic figure from whom the community implicitly tries to keep a certain distance. The reason why significance should be ascribed to the narrator's direct contact with Martha is that, although local curiosity or suspicion revolves around Martha, any member of the community will not confront her. When the narrator, as an old sailor who first came to the village, had not yet heard of Martha's name, he came upon Martha at some lonely, stormy mountain ridge. What constitutes the critical moment in this scene is the narrator's mysterious initial response to Martha:

I did not speak—I saw her face,  
Her face it was enough for me;  
I turned about and heard her cry,  
'O misery! O misery!' (199-202)

The narrator, in fact, does not mention his encounter with Martha until the seventeenth stanza, which leads readers as well as his interlocutor to expect that the encounter would help to explain Martha's enigmatic actions. Yet, ironically, far from resolving the uncertainty with regard to Martha, the encounter makes her much more elusive. Why did the narrator, on seeing Martha's face, turn away from it? We cannot find any specific answer to this question in the poem. Furthermore, after hearing the narrator's story of his encounter with Martha, the interlocutor asks the above-mentioned questions about the natural objects surrounding Martha: " 'But what's the thorn? and what's the pond?/' And what's the hill of moss to her? " (210-11). To these questions, the narrator gives his answer, "I cannot tell," as he does to a series of questions about Martha herself (214). The narrator's answer "I cannot tell" deserves emphasis in

that it implies that he 'sees' Martha's unintelligibility in some way, but he does not wish to domesticate or interpret her as the villagers do. It can be argued that the event of 'seeing' or 'witnessing' Martha makes the narrator blind in some way, and that the blindness causes him to keep telling the story of her.

We can say that, unlike the villagers, the narrator wants to preserve and even transmit something of Martha's truth—her strange status as a void or rupture in meaning. In the narrator's story, something of Martha's truth is transmitted through the repeated doleful cry: "Oh misery! oh misery! Oh woe is me! oh misery!" This cry, which emerges in the scene where the narrator first talks about Martha to the interlocutor, is repeated in the last stanza once again; but it is in the initial encounter with Martha that he first heard the cry. In her essay "*Lyrical Ballads* and the Language of (Men) Feeling: Wordsworth Writing Women's Voices," Susan Wolfson leads us to examine in detail the last stanza of "The Thorn," focusing on the question of by whom the cry is repeated: By Martha herself or by the narrator or by Martha in (and beyond) the narrator? Acutely aware that the narrator has heard Martha's cry not once but "full many a time," Wolfson contends that the narrator's imagination seems "not only inspired by but possessed by this spectral woman's voice" (247; Wolfson 45). It indexes the fact that "her repetition has become his," or going even further, that the poem "concludes with the woman's voice inside the balladeer's" (Wolfson 45). Wolfson considers the relationship between the narrator and Martha as an example of "blurring of gender distinction under the influence of passion" which resonates intertextually in *Lyrical Ballads* (34). The narrator, says Wolfson, is fascinated with "the voice of female suffering," which exposes him to a "perilous transgressiveness" (42). Thus Wolfson brings the issue of feminization of man to the surface, and she even goes on to say that the narrator "enacts classic female hysterics"; more specifically, as symptoms of hysteria shown in the narrator, she points out "blocked speech—I cannot tell; I wish I could," and "possession

by other voices—his fixated repetition of her cry, 'Oh woe is me! oh misery,'" and "his notorious garrulity" (42).

Wolfson's analysis of the cry, which seems to be useful and provocative up to a point, needs to be theoretically problematized, since it assumes a rigid and knowable division between man and woman so as to articulate the feminization of man or the blurring of gender distinction. Nevertheless, it is important to remember her point that "the text of 'The Thorn' always marks Martha Ray's cries in quotation marks," which indicates that the narrator tries to distance himself from the spell of the song that he rehearses (Wolfson 45, 46). For her point reveals the possibility that the narrator's marking Martha's cries in quotation marks paradoxically demonstrates his inability to properly assimilate Martha or her cries into his own story. This is to say that the cry "Oh misery! oh misery! Oh woe is me! oh misery!" might be reconceptualized as a sound coming from inside the narrator but at the same time as a spectral sound which cannot be dominated or controlled by him.

The way in which the narrator represents Martha can thus be seen in the scenes discussed earlier; the scene in which the natural objects surrounding Martha's place remain irreducible to any oppositional way of thinking; the scene where the narrator, on seeing Martha's face, turns away from it; and the scene in which the narrator seems to be possessed by Martha's uncontrollable and unassimilable cry. These scenes help us to elaborate on why the narrator's representation of Martha should be considered in terms of the feminine side of sexuation graph, because they make clear that it is possible that 'there is' something of Martha's truth, which has precisely the character of not being fully inscribed in the symbolic order.

Before concluding this essay, we need to dwell a while upon how something of Martha's truth is transmitted. This issue is worthy of further exposition in that the narrator has an interlocutor who is eager to learn about Martha. Can we say that the repeated cry "Oh misery! oh misery!

Oh woe is me! oh misery!" serves as a specific way in which something of Martha's truth is transmitted? To sharpen the sense of what's at stake here, we would do well to take a look at Shepherdson's discussion of traumatic memory. According to him, the concept of trauma raises "the question of 'events' that were never experienced as such, but that nevertheless become part of the subject's existence and continue to have effects," thereby obliging us "to speak of 'unprocessed' or even 'unsymbolized' experience, which can only lead to the enigma of an experience that is never experienced, never given an adequate place in the order of historical memory" (*Limits* 91). The important thing here is that the traumatic event which "never took place, in the sense that it never came to be properly inscribed in any symbolic chain," far from being simply forgotten, "remains and is even transmitted" (Shepherdson, *Limits* 92). Thus the question arises as to how the traumatic event can be transmitted. To this question, we might answer that the traumatic event which is not integrated into the symbolic order can only have the status of a disruption or break in the symbolic order.

However, Shepherdson asks us to pursue this question a little further from a Lacanian point of view; that is, he seeks to define more clearly the limits of the symbolic order entailed in the problem of transmitting the traumatic event. In this connection, it is necessary to recall the Lacanian notion of the real, since Lacan, in his attempt to formulate the real, develops a more nuanced understanding of the limits of the symbolic order. For Lacan, the real is a result of the symbolic, but it is narrated as if it were an original state that was lost or a lost object, which Shepherdson articulates by asserting that the real should not be understood as "pre-existing reality" but as an "innermost core" which "only acquires its repressed or traumatic character in relation to the familiar order of representation" ("Intimate" par. 45). Shepherdson's insistence that the real obtains its traumatic character only in relation to the symbolic order allows us to see the precise reason why the traumatic event is by no means something like "a natural, prediscursive foundation which the symbolic could either approximate or

betray" and why it "cannot be confused with what one might imagine 'actually happened' "; the reason is that the traumatic status of the event "depends upon the return, after the fact, of an event whose peculiar character consists in the fact that it never simply 'took place' " (Shepherdson, *Limits* 94).

Can we read the narrator's encounter with Martha in the same way that Shepherdson articulates the traumatic event? The traumatic status of the event of the encounter with Martha is attributed to the process in which the narrator belatedly returns to the event and attempts to speak of it or construct a narrative about it. It signifies that Martha cannot simply be said to belong to a pre-linguistic domain; the point is, rather, that Martha acquires her strange status of a void or rupture within the field of meaning as a result of the operation of representation. In Shepherdson's words, the event of the encounter with Martha is "imprinted upon" the narrator "without becoming part of" his experience, and it "remains and is even transmitted, but it is not handed down in the manner of ordinary historical memory" (*Limits* 92). This argument on the narrator, who is not simply an outcast, but who is in the more mysterious position of 'transmitting' to the community some of the 'crazy nonsense' or 'resistance to meaning,' affords us a new approach to the definition of the poet which Wordsworth offers in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth asks "[W]hat is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself?"; his first answer to these questions is that the poet is "a man speaking to men."<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that the poet, as "a man speaking to men," is engaged in a poetic discourse that transmits the moment of 'resistance to meaning' or anxiety or the real in the Lacanian sense, just as the narrator of "The Thorn" transmits the truth of Martha.

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4) See "Wordsworth's Preface of 1800, with a Collation of the Enlarged Preface of 1802," included as an appendix in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, 165.

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