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Chapter 2

Geohistory, Epistemology, and Extinction: Byron and the Shelleys in 1816

Introduction

In a letter dated 17 May 1816, Mary Shelley paints an idyllic picture of the holiday that she and Percy Bysshe Shelley were taking at the Hôtel d'Angleterre in Sécheron, just outside Geneva: 'You know that we have just escaped from the gloom of winter and of London; and coming to this delightful spot during this divine weather, I feel as happy as a new-fledged bird'.[1] By the start of June, however, the weather was very different: 'unfortunately we do not now enjoy those brilliant skies that hailed us on our first arrival to this country. An almost perpetual rain confines us principally to the house; but when the sun bursts forth it is of a splendour and heat unknown in England. The thunder storms that visit us are grander and more terrific than I have ever seen before'.[2] This sublime changeability was the prelude to a two-year period of unusual climatic conditions and famine in Europe and across the world. As I discussed in the introduction, scholars have noted the importance of the global climate crisis created by the Tambora eruption to the 1816 writings of the Shelleys and their friend Lord Byron, particularly 'Darkness', 'Mont Blanc', and *Frankenstein*. However, this insight has tended to generate broad contextual readings rather than close analysis. This is true even of the astute discussion of the Diodati Circle and the 'Year without a Summer' in Gillen D'Arcy Wood's study of Tambora.[3] My aim in this chapter is to shed new light on the complexity with which Byron and the Shelleys wrote about environmental catastrophe in 1816. They knew nothing of Tambora, but the bad weather that it largely caused was an important influence on their creativity, in combination with their interest in contemporary

natural philosophy and their experience of the sublime landscapes around Geneva. This chapter brings together their 1816 writings to reveal the richness of their reflections on the vulnerability of human communities living with uncontrollable geophysical and climatic forces, the entanglement of humans and nonhuman nature, and the possibility of human extinction.

Figure 2.1 provides a detailed chronology for the summer of 1816. Byron left England on 25 April, and travelled slowly through Europe before arriving in the Geneva area on 25 May. The Shelley group, including Mary's stepsister (and Byron's former lover) Claire Clairmont, had left on 3 May but only took ten days to get to Geneva. The two parties met on 27 May and spent a considerable amount of time together until the Shelleys left for England on 29 August. During this period, Byron wrote a number of poems, including 'Darkness' (1816), 'Prometheus' (1816), *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), and Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816), and began *Manfred* (1817). Mary began *Frankenstein* (1818), following the famous ghost-story competition between the three authors and Byron's doctor John William Polidori, and drafted much of the novel before returning to England. Percy wrote several lyrics, most importantly 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1817) and 'Mont Blanc' (1817). This last poem was first published at the end of the Shelleys' *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), which describes a journey that they had taken through Europe in 1814 and their impression of the area around Geneva in 1816. Although the *History* is the only one of these texts to present itself as a collaborative work, the group worked so closely together during this period that we should understand all of their 1816 writings as involving elements of collaboration. As in chapter one, I am concerned with a complex assemblage of texts, for addressing the group's individual writings in isolation from each other is to miss out on much of their richness.[4] I understand them as the collaborative products of a creative community and show that they share a concern with the fragility of human dwelling within a potentially

violent universe. In articulating this concern, they draw on a shared language of catastrophe – a kind of textual ecology – that repeats, with different inflections, key images and tropes. There is nothing utopian about this ecology; in fact, it often reveals a breakdown of human structures. The two related forms of community that it tends to show as most resilient are, first, the relationship between the individual subject and the nonhuman objects of the sublime landscape, and, secondly, interactions within an elite group of intellectuals whose capacity simultaneously to comprehend and transcend the 'natural' marks them out from the majority of people. Due to wealth and rank, Byron and the Shelleys were protected from the terrible effects that the climate crisis had on the poorer inhabitants of Europe. Like Raffles, therefore, their position within the catastrophic assemblage was one of relative safety. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has famously argued, although the history of climate change is intertwined with the history of inequality, it cannot be reduced to that history because ultimately it threatens the whole of humanity.[5] Byron and the Shelleys speak to the concerns of the Anthropocence as some of the very first modern Western thinkers to contemplate the finitude of the human species detached from any eschatological narrative.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the invocation of 'deep time', and particularly the global cooling theory of the Comte de Buffon, in the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* and 'Mont Blanc'. The potential threat that glacial augmentation poses to human 'dwelling' is explored in a number of 1816 texts and often represented through the image of the destruction of pine forests that stand metonymically for human vulnerability. I focus particularly on the suggestion in *Frankenstein* that the Creature may be better equipped to flourish in the desolate world imagined by Buffon, and on the disturbing resistance of ice to human attempts to write themselves on to the landscape. Byron and the Shelleys, I argue, understand ice as manifesting agency: as 'a restless activeness, a destructive-creative force-presence'.[6] Ecological precariousness and the relationship between human beings and

elemental forces are also important to my discussion of Byron's 'Darkness'. Byron, I suggest, is sceptical about the possibility of any form of positive collective response to environmental catastrophe, in part because his poetry is troubled by the idea of human consciousness as part of an embodied community of creatures. The idea that human beings (or perhaps an exceptional subset of them) are profoundly caught between the spiritual and earthly realms is most powerfully articulated in *Manfred*, which seeks to assert the power of the individual imagination against a hostile universe. The chapter ends with an extended analysis of 'Mont Blanc' that draws on recent philosophical work in speculative realism and object-oriented ontology.[7] Particularly useful to my approach are Quentin Meillassoux's critique of 'correlationism' ('the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other'), Raymond Brassier's discussion of extinction as it 'indexes the thought of the absence of thought', and Timothy Morton's analysis of 'hyperobjects' ('things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans').[8] My analysis marries epistemological, political, and ecological approaches to the poem by examining how its concern with perception and absence evokes the difficulty of imagining an earth without humanity.

Deep Time and Global Cooling

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, natural philosophers, aware that the earth was considerably older than six thousand years, began to tell the story of prehuman history. Three thinkers about deep time were particularly influential on Byron and the Shelleys.[9] One is the Comte de Buffon, who in 1749 had 'set out a module of continuous but directionless terrestrial change […] a kind of dynamic equilibrium' in the first volume of his epic *Histoire Naturelle*.[10] However, in 'Les époques de la nature' (1778) and other later works, he presented a quite different narrative, describing how the planet had undergone a process of

gradual cooling since its creation and imagining an icy future in which it would be rendered uninhabitable.[11] Byron was particularly responsive to the work of Buffon's rival and compatriot Georges Cuvier, who eventually concluded from his study of fossils that the earth had experienced several catastrophic geological upheavals and extinction events.[12] Finally, Nigel Leask has identified the influence of the Scottish geologist James Hutton on Percy Shelley.[13] His long and esoteric *Theory of the Earth* (1795) had been made accessible by John Playfair's *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth* (1802), and argued against catastrophists like Cuvier by presenting the earth as a body in dynamic homeostasis designed to ensure its habitability for humans.[14] Romantic-period geology was riven with debate, but what was not in doubt was the capacity of landscapes to change over long and short periods through natural processes. In the eighteenth century, sudden environmental catastrophes like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 had problematised providential and theodical thinking and – despite the efforts of deists such as Hutton – geological developments were continuing this process.[15] The tendency in much Romantic literature and philosophy to valorise the autonomous, self-willing subject may be understood partly as a response to this challenge to anthropocentrism. As Nigel Clark puts it, 'the trouble with the newly unfurling temporal spans, along with the previously established immensity of cosmic space, was that it implied whole domains of existence in which no humans were present, vast stretches in which other-than-human objects were left to their own devices'.[16] The 1816 writings of Byron and the Shelleys show a profound attempt to make sense of a universe in which the human species seemed to be in danger of moving from the centre to the margins.

The area around Geneva was a particularly rich environment for thinking about deep time. As Europe's high point, Mont Blanc was fascinating to geologists like Horace-Bénédict de Saussure who in 1787 had been one of the first climbers to ascend the mountain and who used his observations of its strata as the basis for what Martin Rudwick calls 'a vivid

narrative of imaginatively witnessed geohistorical events'.[17] By 1816, there was also increasing interest in the geomorphic power of glaciers.[18] In the third letter to Thomas Love Peacock published in the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, Percy Shelley suggests that it was likely that the Chamonix glaciers were perpetually increasing in size, rather than waxing and waning (as Saussure had argued): 'these glaciers flow perpetually into the valley, ravaging in their slow but irresistible progress the pastures and the forests which surround them, performing a work of desolation in ages, which a river of lava might accomplish in an hour, but far more irretrievably' (158).[19] The desolating power of ice is a key trope in the group's texts of 1816, and Percy goes on to consider the global implications of this local observation, noting in a much-cited passage that

> It is agreed by all, that the snow on the summit of Mont Blanc and the neighbouring mountains perpetually augments, and that ice, in the form of glaciers, subsists without melting in the valley of Chamouni during its transient and variable summer. If the snow which produces this glacier must augment, and the heat of the valley is no obstacle to the perpetual existence of such masses of ice as have already descended into it, the consequence is obvious; the glaciers must augment and will subsist, at least until they have overflowed this vale. I will not pursue Buffon's sublime but gloomy theory — that this globe which we inhabit will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost by the encroachments of the polar ice, and of that produced on the most elevated points of the earth. (161-2)[20]

An earlier section of the letter addresses the sublime power of this landscape on the receptive individual, emphasising its capacity to produce an 'extatic wonder' (152) in a passage that would be further developed in 'Mont Blanc'. Here, however, this power is not understood

only in aesthetic terms, but also in relation to Buffon's ideas about deep time and humanity's future. As part of his argument for the influence of Huttonian geology on 'Mont Blanc', Leask claims that critics have been wrong in assuming that Percy endorses 'Buffon's theory of a returning ice-age' which he '*flippantly* attributes to Peacock', and relates the letter to Playfair's critique of Buffon's 'dismal and unphilosophic vision'.[21] However, while Percy does not straightforwardly support Buffon's theory, he clearly finds it worthy of serious consideration based on the empirical observation of glacial augmentation.[22] He considers it a 'sublime' theory, one suspects, for several reasons: its intellectual ambition; its assumption of a vast timescale of geological change; its applicability as a model to planets across the universe; and the dark pleasure that one might take in imagining future destruction from a position of present-day safety. To that extent, the implications of Buffon's theory are still aestheticized, and Percy's pleasure here is very much the pleasure of being contradicted. When the poet himself contemplated future climate catastrophe in other texts, it tended to be in the utopian terms of an eternal spring or summer that signifies political liberation, as can be seen in *Queen Mab* (1813) or *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).[23] His interest in Buffon's more 'gloomy' apprehension is the product of a particular place, a particular set of environmental conditions, and a particular creative community, and (as I will show) actually ignores Buffon's rather optimistic view about the human capacity to change the climate.

In fact, Percy goes on to make some pessimistic suggestions about how global cooling might affect the human species:

> Do you, who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost, so sculptured in this their terrible magnificence by the adamantine hand of necessity, and that he casts around him, as the first essays of his final usurpation, avalanches, torrents, rocks, and

> thunders, and above all these deadly glaciers, at once the proof and symbols of his reign;—add to this, the degradation of the human species—who in these regions are half deformed or idiotic, and most of whom are deprived of any thing that can excite interest or admiration. This is a part of the subject more mournful and less sublime; but such as neither the poet nor the philosopher should disdain to regard. (163)

Eric G. Wilson helpfully contextualises this passage in relation to Peacock's and Percy's interest in Zoroastrianism, which had been the inspiration for Peacock's unfinished poem *Ahrimanes*. At Bracknell in 1813, they had met the vegetarian thinker John Frank Newton, who had argued that 'humans, now overly civilized and thus separated from nature, were suffering under the reign of "Ahrimanes," the evil, dark, destructive deity in the dualistic Zoroastrian religion'.[24] Wilson argues that Percy's allusion to Ahriman, however, does not present him as 'a demonic magus to be overcome. On the contrary, as a personification of necessity, he is to be embraced'.[25] He goes on to claim that 'Mont Blanc' provides a way of embracing such cosmic forces by suggesting that the landscape is 'as much created in [the speaker's] own mind as it is discovered in his sight, for the impressions of his mind will one day produce the scene in the minds of others'.[26] While Wilson's overall argument here is plausible enough, he misreads the final sentence of the 'Ahriman' passage. The pronoun 'this' in the final sentence is not absolutely clear, but it seems unlikely to refer to 'Ahriman', which is Wilson's claim. The Persian deity – whom we shall see also appears as an embodiment of powerful inhuman forces in *Manfred* – is for Percy clearly a figure of sublimity: a personification of Buffon's 'sublime but gloomy theory'. The 'more mournful and less sublime' subject which should also be of concern to poets and philosophers is not Ahriman's supremacy, but 'the degradation of the human species'. Perhaps uncomfortable with Percy's racialised language and obvious disdain for the region's rural poor, critics have

tended to ignore this part of the letter, but it is crucial to his understanding of environmental catastrophe and resonates with anxieties about the future of humanity in *Frankenstein*, 'Mont Blanc', and 'Darkness'.[27] His concern with how global climate change might cause the human race to degenerate suggests the influence of Buffon.[28] The naturalist had argued that quadrupeds of the Old World were bigger than those of America, where 'animated Nature is weaker, less active, and more circumscribed in the variety of her productions'.[29] He described Native Americans as physically, mentally, and sexually enervated, 'wandering savages' who had proved incapable of improving the landscape. The cause was a cold and humid climate in which 'every circumstance concurs in diminishing the action of heat'.[30] The implication of Percy's allusion is that global cooling – Ahriman's 'final usurpation' – would lead to the degeneration of all human beings to the level of North American or Swiss 'savages'. He therefore shows himself to drawing on the same discourse of climate improvement that was so influential on colonial administrators like Raffles. For Buffon, as Alan Bewell puts it, 'to be controlled by climate is to be closer to animals and plants than to civilized human beings'.[31]

Glacial augmentation, therefore, was not a topic of idle geological interest: it raised questions about the very future of humanity. Unsurprisingly, it is also a concern in other texts by the Diodati Circle that depict ice as a dynamic force. The 'Second Spirit' conjured by Manfred in Byron's poem describes how 'the Glacier's cold and restless mass / Moves onward day by day'.[32] Visiting the valley of Chamonix, Victor Frankenstein describes the Montanvert glacier as 'tremendous and ever-moving' and, in the 1831 text, notes that it 'with slow pace is advancing down from the summit of the hills, to barricade the valley'.[33] The ill-fated protagonist of Polidori's novel, *Ernestus Berchtold; or the Modern Oedipus* (1819), states that whenever he is high in the Alps, he 'seems always to crouch some invisible being beneath whose power is infinite', and which he feels he cannot 'resist':

> It seems that I hear him laughing audibly at our vain attempts to encroach upon his dominion. It appears to me as if the avalanche were but the weapon of his impatience, while he insidiously steals upon those habitations he has covered with his snows, by the silent, gradual approach of the glaciers.[34]

The influence of Shelley's letter to Peacock on this later passage is apparent, as is that of 'Mont Blanc', which is printed a few pages after the mention of Buffon in the *History*.[35] The poem uses ice as a metonym for the sublime power of nonhuman forces, describing the 'glaciers' that 'creep'

> Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
> Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,
> Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
> Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
> A city of death, distinct with many a tower
> And wall impregnable of beaming ice. (180)

Ice, here, has a kind of threatening agency. Percy's use of assonance and consonance – 'gla**cier**s **cree**p', 's**lo**w ro**ll**ing on' – emphasises the power of the glaciers through repetition while also slowing the movement of the verse to mimic the slow violence of global cooling. As William Keach points out, 'Mont Blanc' is remarkable in its 'crossing of extended blank-verse enjambment with irregular rhyme', and the poem uses its rhymes to provide structure and shape.[36] The uncharacteristic aba rhyme of 'power' and 'tower' closely connects the terms, emphasising the scornful commentary that sublime and 'impregnable' glacial

architecture – the rather Gothic 'city of death' – makes on more vulnerable human dwellings. The description of the ice as 'beaming' suggests not only its incandescent brightness, but also its expansive energies. The buildings 'piled' up by 'Frost and Sun' echo the 'palaces of death and frost' in the letter to Peacock, as well as 'the palaces of Nature, whose vast walls / Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps' in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: the verbs 'piled' and 'pinnacled' both suggest natural agency (II, 100, ll. 591-2). There is a further echo in *Ernestus Berchtold*, in which the protagonist compares human and glacial architecture: 'the pyramids might rise unnoticed upon the rocks before my view […] I cannot bear that human strength should be unable to stamp its hand on these towering memorials of convulsions we could not influence'.[37] The poem's sense of human weakness and insignificance in the face of the 'slow rolling on' of the glaciers coheres precisely with Percy's understanding of Buffon's views.[38] As Bewell puts it, 'Mont Blanc' 'describes a world in which the human power to create temperate environments seems impotent in the face of a power that dwells apart from human control'.[39]

The ice's destructive power is further emphasised as the poem shifts to a different metaphor, imagining it as 'a flood of ruin / […] that from the boundaries of the sky / Rolls its perpetual stream'. This strange mingling of air and water suggests the glaciers' climatological force. In an image that will be repeated across a number of 1816 texts, the 'flood' leaves even 'vast pines' either 'strewing / Its destined path' or standing 'branchless and shattered'. Although the geomorphic capacity of glaciation was not fully understood in the early nineteenth century, Percy describes how

> […] the rocks, drawn down
> From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
> The limits of the dead and living world

Never to be reclaimed. (181)

The phrasing here is ambiguous, but seems to suggest the power of glaciers and the rocks that they transport (from the supposedly dead world that is beyond human time) to make the living world desolate –compare the 'desolating snows' in the letter to Peacock – and to break down 'the division between the two worlds'.[40] For their world is revealed to be not really 'dead' at all, but a world of nonhuman agents. The glaciers have the power to 'draw down' the rocks, which themselves 'overthrow' boundaries. These images of destruction lead the poem to contemplate the vulnerability of animals and humans in the face of this inevitable ('destined') process:

[…] The dwelling-place
Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
So much of life and joy is lost. The race
Of man, flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
And their place is not known. (181)

Since Jonathan Bate's influential book, *The Song of the Earth*, ecological approaches to Romantic writing have often emphasised its concern with place and (following Heidegger) the capacity of poetry especially to create 'a *revelation* of dwelling': a strong sense of humanity's connection to the nonhuman world.[41] And yet Romantic texts are often equally concerned with the difficulty or impossibility of dwelling within a strange or hostile environment. The destruction described here is physical and epistemological: the glacier's

huge power (ironically imagined as a 'city') threatens humanity's sense of place and suggests its smoke-like evanescence as a species. 'Tempest's stream' echoes the mingling of air and water a few lines earlier and again suggests the climatological power of ice. The final line in the quotation is probably an allusion to Psalm 103:

> As for man, his dayes as grasse: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
> For the winde passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.[42]

In both texts, humans lose their place in the world – they are blown by the wind like smoke or plants – due to longer-standing natural processes. And in both texts, the subject of 'known' is ambiguous. If people know landscapes, it seems that landscapes also know people, and if there is knowledge then there can always be forgetting. Percy's shift from the psalm's 'man' (meaning individual men) to the more communal 'race of man' suggests that he is going beyond simply observing the transience of individual lives. The unstoppable process of glaciation will erase the human species from the land.

Nonhuman animals also have an important role in this passage. By covering the pastures and forests, the glaciers efface the dwellings of 'insects, beasts, and birds', leaving only an absence of 'life and joy'. Michael O'Neill suggests that the passage 'serves both to bind humans and animals into a shared ecosystem and to imply their separate destinies', for the animals 'will presumably die' while humans may be able to flee somewhere else.[43] He argues that the comma after 'man' emphasises this separation; I would add that the full stop and caesura after 'joy is lost' is just as significant. He also argues that the repetition of 'dwelling' serves to emphasise the connection, to which I would also add the importance of the rhyme of 'place' (of animals) and 'race' (of humans) and then the repetition of 'place' (of

humans). At this stage in the poem, the idea of a shared response to environmental change between the human and nonhuman is stronger than any sense of difference. The poem's engagement with anthropocentrism is, of course, philosophically complex, and I will return to the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals later in the chapter. For the moment, I want to focus particularly on the threat to human 'dwelling', which connects 'Mont Blanc' strongly to *Frankenstein*, a text that is also deeply concerned with the difficulties of finding one's place in the world and the future of 'the race of man'.

Frankenstein, Global Cooling, and the Posthuman

Mary Shelley's novel is concerned with the impossibility of stable dwelling. Its restless movements between different parts of Europe and the Arctic mimic the Creature's restless and ultimately fruitless search for a location where he will be able to dwell unmolested, as well as Victor's restless desire to shape his environment. As in her husband's work, the locale around Mont Blanc provoked Mary to consider the fragility of human communities. After the trauma of William's murder by the Creature and Justine's unjust execution, the Frankenstein family hope to find recuperation in 'an excursion to the valley of Chamounix' (121). One morning, Victor awakes to depressingly bad weather, reminiscent of the 'dreary night of November' when he brought the Creature to life in what is described as a 'catastrophe' (84). He seeks solace in a lone trek to the summit of Montanvert, on the northern slopes of Mont Blanc. 'The presence of another would destroy the solitary grandeur' of the landscape, he notes,

> It is a scene terrifically desolate. In a thousand spots the traces of the winter avelanche may be perceived, where trees lie broken and strewed on the ground […] The path, as you ascend higher, is intersected by ravines of snow, down which stones continually

> roll from above; one of them is particularly dangerous, as the slightest sound, such as even speaking in a loud voice, produces a concussion of air sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of the speaker. (123)

Like other Alpine tourists of the period, Victor seeks an encounter with the sublime. But this version of the experience does not involve the safe contemplative distance that is often associated with the ability to aestheticize a potentially dangerous landscape. As befits Victor's risk-taking character, he emphasises the physical danger affecting the human observer. Given the emphasis on the sublime power of *silence* in 'Mont Blanc', it is significant that the 'slightest sound' in this setting needs to be avoided: the silence necessary to avoid causing an avalanche also emphasises the alienness of the landscape. And, as in Percy's poem, the threat to human dwelling is represented metonymically through the destruction of the trees. Along with glacial augmentation, this is a key trope in the repertoire of the Diodati Circle in 1816. It is most starkly presented by Byron, who was always looking for symbols of self-ruination. The entry for 23 September 1816 in his 'Alpine Journal' describes how he 'passed *whole woods of withered pines — all withered* — trunks stripped and barkless — branches lifeless — done by a single winter — their appearance reminded me of me & my family'.[44] The journal was kept for Byron's beloved half-sister Augusta Leigh, a prototype of Manfred's lost Astarte. Early in that poem, Manfred contemplates suicide on the Jungfrau and compares himself, 'grey-hair'd with anguish' to 'these blasted pines, / Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless, / A blighted trunk upon a cursed root' (IV, 64; I.ii.66-8). Both passages emphasise what has been lost – ecologically and emotionally – by turning nouns into negative adjectives through the addition of the suffix '-less'; a key technique, as we shall see, in 'Darkness', a text which also contemplates the destruction of forests as linked to the fate of humanity.

The image of the 'strewing' and 'stripping' of the pine trees by the glacier's power connects 'Mont Blanc', *Frankenstein*, *Manfred*, the 'Alpine Journal', and the Shelleys' journals from the period. In the third journal-letter to Peacock in the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, Percy describes the Boisson glacier in the Chamonix valley as 'the most vivid image of desolation that it is possible to conceive. […] The pines of the forest, which bound it at one extremity, are over-thrown and shattered to a wide extent at its base' (159-60). Similarly, in Mary's journal for 24 July 1816 – when she also makes the first mention of composing *Frankenstein* – she writes that

> Nothing can be more desolate than the ascent of this mountain — the trees in many places have been torn away by avelanches and some half leaning over others intermingled with stones present the appearance of a vast & dreadful desolation.[45]

The Shelleys' prose accounts of the pines emphasise the scene's superlative 'desolation'; that is, its barrenness and its lack of inhabitants. 'Desolate' derives from the Latin *desolatus*, meaning 'left alone': this is a landscape in which human communities cannot flourish. This inhospitality is further emphasised in Mary's account as the travellers try to ascend Montanvert, but are forced to retreat:

> It began to rain almost as soon as we left our inn — when [we] had mounted considerably we turned to look on the scene — a dense white mist covered the vale & tops of scatered pines peeping above were the only objects that presented themselves — The rain continued in torrents — we were wetted to the skin so that […] we resolved to turn back.[46]

One might see the white mist as marking the boundary between the living and the dead worlds described in 'Mont Blanc'. The travellers succeed in making the ascent the following day and find themselves, with familiar hyperbole, in 'the most desolate place in the world'.[47] This place is undoubtedly alien; 'Mont Blanc', as we shall see, considers the extent to which such an environment can be comprehended by human consciousness. However, *Frankenstein* presents the possibility of a new species arising that will be more comfortable in Buffon's frozen environments.

After ascending Montanvert, Victor walks across the glacier to the opposite mountain, so that he has a view of Mont Blanc 'in awful majesty' (124). The individual apotheosis potentially offered by the sublime – the swelling of the heart provoked by a 'wonderful and stupendous scene' – is cut short by his sudden encounter with the Creature, their first since his creation (124). Victor's sublime solitude is interrupted by a painful reminder of the communal responsibilities that we have to each other, but also of his inferiority to his creation, who travels with 'superhuman speed' and 'easily eludes' Victor's attempt to attack him physically. The Creature responds to his creator's loathing with counter threats, but also with justifications, pointing out his natural benevolence, his loneliness, and Victor's failure to care for him. Therefore, he states,

> The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. (126-7)

The inhospitable landscape where humans and animals cannot 'dwell', and which for Victor is a kind of touristic site, is for the Creature the safest dwelling place that he can find. Cast

out by his creator, and by the human communities to which his sensibility, if not his appearance, should connect him, the Creature has been forced to find a different sort of connection by living within the apparently 'dead' world of rocks and glaciers and finding a form of fellowship (as the punning word 'hail' suggests) even with the 'bleak' weather.

The anthropologist Julie Cruikshank has contrasted a Western colonial idea of glaciers as 'pristine, wild, and remote from human influence' with the views of indigenous populations in Alaska and the Yukon, who (she suggests) see them as 'intensely *social* spaces where human behaviour, especially casual hubris or arrogance, can trigger dramatic and unpleasant consequences in the physical world'.[48] Whereas for Victor the glacier is a sublime backdrop to his anthropocentric imagination, for the Creature it offers the possibility of a relationship with the world. Despite his apparently 'unnatural' beginnings, the Creature is therefore shown here and at other points in the text to be more connected to nonhuman nature than the human characters. He can flourish in any environment, but has to tell his story to Victor in an constructed dwelling: a mountain hut with a fire and therefore at a temperature suitable for his creator's 'fine sensations' (127). The state of nature can be presented in idyllic, Rousseauvian terms, as when he promises that he 'will go to the vast wilds of South America' with his mate and live a vegetarian existence: 'we shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human' (170). But writers of the Romantic period were increasingly aware of another state of nature: a state of rapid, violent, and uncontrollable change.[49] The encounter between Victor and the Creature in the vale of Chamonix connects the Creature's agency to that of the glaciers. This agency is often destructive, although the allusion to 'Kubla Khan' (the 'caves of ice' within the Khan's 'pleasure-dome') in the Creature's speech may suggests a creative power as well. After all, in 'Mont Blanc', the glaciers not only

destroy dwellings, but also construct ‘dome, pyramid, and pinnacle’. Furthermore, beneath this ‘flood of ruin’,

> […] vast caves
> Shine in the rushing torrent’s restless gleam,
> Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling
> Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,
> The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
> Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves,
> Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air. (181-2)

The allusions to ‘Kubla Khan’ are palpable, but whereas in Coleridge’s poem, the river that bursts forth from ‘that deep romantic chasm’ eventually sinks ‘in tumult to a lifeless ocean’, here the glaciers are seen as part of a global hydrological cycle upon which life is dependent. It is the Creature’s potential to create new life that Victor finds most disturbing.

Just as Percy extrapolated from the augmentation of a single glacier to consider the icy fate of the whole world, the Creature’s power and resilience generates reflections on the future of humanity as a species. His appearance offers an ironic commentary on Victor’s fantasy on the way to Chamonix of ‘the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth, the habitations of another race of beings’ (121). In a recent discussion of *Frankenstein* and human extinction, Claire Colebrook follows earlier political readings by seeing the Creature as ‘a disenfranchised other who could, in theory, be redeemed and included’.[50] She places Mary with thinkers like Marx, Adorno, and Jameson, who seek political solutions to what may seem an intolerable existence: ‘what appears to be existentially unacceptable should be transformed through

social and political revolution. If recognition were granted to the potential hordes of the future one would be faced not with violence but with sympathy and pity'.[51] Colebrook seems to see such thinking as narrow and utopian, given humanity's impact on the environment: 'the question is not one of how we humans can justify hostile life, but how we can possibly justify ourselves given our malevolent relation to life'.[52] As Colebrook recognises, political critique is crucial to the novel; nonetheless, I think she underestimates its willingness to face up to the prospect of human extinction, rather than seeing it as a problem to be solved. The Creature may present to Victor a vision of a 'peaceful and human' existence in South America with his mate (170), but this is a rhetorical ploy; to view the Creature as no more than a surrogate for disenfranchised humans is to miss precisely what is important about the novel in the context of Romantic geotheory and the Diodati Circle's concern with human-environmental interactions. Victor eventually destroys his work on the Creature's companion due to his fear that the two might procreate: 'a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror' (190). Victor assumes that this new posthuman species would be far more resilient than humans and would therefore destroy them; having read Buffon, he is well aware of the adaptive value of being able to survive in colder climates.[53] It is therefore entirely fitting that the novel begins and ends in the Arctic. After being responsible for the deaths of Victor's family, the Creature leads him 'to the everlasting ices of the north' so that he will suffer further privations: 'you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive' (227). *Frankenstein* raises the spectre of a posthuman future in which a new species develops that is able to flourish on Buffon's icy globe.[54]

As Siobhan Carroll has recently shown, Arctic exploration in the Romantic period was enmeshed with debates around climate change and geoengineering projects. She argues convincingly that 'situating *Frankenstein* in a climatological context enables us to see the

ramifications of Victor's experiment as symptomatic of a larger cultural concern over Europeans' readiness to wield the nature-shaping power of imperial science'.[55] The relationship between knowledge and power is a key concern of the novel and evident in how Walton and Victor try to impose their wills on to the world. One of Walton's goals is to find the fabled Northwest passage linking the Atlantic to the Pacific. Such a discovery would have been of enormous benefit to British imperialism and was, of course, the aim of a number of government-supported expeditions in the nineteenth century. Walton's 'voyage of discovery' through 'pathless seas' (58, 317) is an attempt at reterritorialization: by beginning with an entirely deterritorialized idea of the Arctic as a blank space without indigenous human inhabitants, or nonhuman creatures, or elemental agencies, he presents the possibility that it can be mastered cartographically as well as physically, so that he may achieve 'the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man' (50). His fantasy is of a land 'where cold and frost are banished' (49), but the Arctic itself proves resistant to imaginative projections: '*Frankenstein* sounds the death knell of dreams of the undiscovered *terra nullius* in its depiction of Walton's defeat in polar space'.[56] This resistance is most powerfully apparent in the cold reality that 'immures' his ship among threatening 'mountains of ice' (234) and forces Walton and his crew to turn back when the ice eventually breaks up. Imperialism seeks to impose itself on to the environment through writing the landscape as possession. However, in Mary's novel ice is a force recalcitrant to any such process. Furthermore, their experience of the Alpine landscape and Buffon's speculations suggested to the Shelleys that the empire of ice itself had the capacity to over-write all traces of the human.

The novel's concern with Arctic exploration is inflected by its relationship to 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'.[57] In his second letter to his sister, Walton notes that 'I am going to unexplored regions, to "the land of mist and snow;" but I shall kill no albatross,

therefore do not be alarmed for my safety' (55).[58] It is likely that Mary was working from the *Lyrical Ballads* version of the poem, although it had been reprinted, with the addition of Coleridge's marginal gloss, in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). Its depiction of human vulnerability in the face of extreme weather conditions must have resonated particularly during a period of climate crisis: 'And now the storm-blast came, and he / Was tyrannous and strong'.[59] Like *Frankenstein*, Coleridge's poem is particularly concerned with the power of ice over humans:

> Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,
> And it grew wond'rous cold :
> And Ice mast-high came floating by,
> As green as emerald.
>
> And thro' the drifts the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen;
> Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken—
> The Ice was all between.
>
> The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
> The Ice was all around:
> It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—
> Like noises of a swound![60]

This is another 'desolate' space, where there is no place for humans or animals: another space defined by absence ('ne shapes […] we ken'). In such an environment, the ice itself is given an uncanny agency through anaphora and personification. Like Mont Blanc's glaciers, it is

not static, but threatens through its unpredictable movements. The final simile seems to suggest that it resembles a person experiencing some sort of violent fit ('swound'). Coleridge's poem, like *Frankenstein*, presents the failure and vulnerability of humanity's imperialising aspirations when faced with uncooperative objects. Both texts have been subject to dubious moralising interpretations by ecological writers. Bruno Latour finds in Mary's novel the injunction 'love your monsters': 'Dr. Frankenstein's crime was not that he invented a creature through some combination of hubris and high technology, but rather that he *abandoned the creature to itself*'.[61] He sees the novel as offering a 'parable for political ecology' by showing that human beings need to take responsibility for the entanglements of their technologies with the natural world. *Frankenstein* is therefore co-opted in line with ecomodernist discourse, which calls for a 'good Anthropocene' created by a doubling down on the human capacity to shape the planet.[62] A more traditional ecological moral is evident in James McCusick account of Coleridge's poem: 'by blessing the water-snakes, the Mariner is released from his state of alienation from nature [...] [He] has learned what the Albatross came to teach him: that he must cross the boundaries that divide the natural world, through unmotivated acts of compassion between "man and bird and beast"'.[63] One might well sympathise with these readings, but they each have the two same problems. First, they focus on the relationship between humans and nonhuman creatures and ignore the significance of recalcitrant objects to the moral framework of both texts. Secondly, they do not reflect the complexity of their sources, and particularly the way in which both texts are concerned with fear, abjection, disgust, and the deep difficulties of connecting with others. Rather than offering straightforward moral messages, *Frankenstein* and the 'Rime' are focused on the potential incompatibility of human aspirations and desires with the dynamic environmental processes upon which we are dependent. In different ways, Latour and McKusick offer a

inadequately anthropocentric responses to texts that, whatever else they do, tend to emphasise the precarity and finitude of the human.

Humans, Animals, Elements

The relationship between ecological precariousness and problems of knowledge and navigation is also important in Byron's 'Darkness'. The poem has a range of influences, from the climate of 1816, to various apocalyptic passages in the Bible, to Enlightenment thinkers including Buffon, to the European sun-spot panic of the same year.[64] Although it is unlikely that Byron knew anything about the Tambora eruption, his vision of the Earth descending into utter blackness also resonates strongly with accounts of the effects of the ash cloud in Raffles's narrative. But the poem's imagining of the heat-death of the universe, and particularly of human extinction, without any form of eschatological recompense moves far beyond its intertexts to produce a vision of nihilistic horror. Towards the end of *Nihil Unbound*: *Enlightenment and Extinction*, Raymond Brassier offers a reading of an essay by Jean-François Lyotard that considers the philosophical implications of the future death of the sun.[65] As Brassier puts it,

> The extinction of the sun is a catastrophe, a mis-turning or over-turning (*kata-strophe*), because it blots out the terrestrial horizon of future possibility relative to which human existence, and hence philosophical questioning, have hitherto oriented themselves.[66]

There is a sense, therefore, in which imagining the death of the sun means that human extinction *has already happened*: not in the sense of 'the termination of a biological species', but in that it destroys any idea of human transcendence by revealing our contingency and

superfluousness: 'if the extinction of the sun is catastrophic, this is because it disarticulates the correlation' (that is, the idea that reality can only be understood in terms of the human relationship to it).[67] Furthermore, because the 'time of extinction' entails '*the extinction of space-time* […] it is not so much that extinction *will* terminate the correlation, but that it *has already* retroactively terminated it'.[68] The paradoxical temporality of extinction is reflected in Byron's poem. The speaker has a prophetic 'dream, which was not all a dream' (IV, 40, l.1) and as a result is able to describe the destruction of all life on earth and the universal triumph of Darkness in the past tense, as if it has already happened. The poem simultaneously affirms human exceptionality – our unique power to imagine our own absence – while presenting our destruction alongside that of all other lifeforms and forces in the universe.

> The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
> Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
> Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
> Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air. (IV, 40 ll. 2-5)

This describes on a cosmic scale the future desolation that the Shelleys imagined when they contemplated the advancing glaciers in the valley of Chamonix. In Byron's poem, the planet becomes unable to sustain human life; as the words 'rayless', 'pathless', and 'moonless' suggest, the poem is defined by absence, loss, and confusion. The image of the earth swinging blindly through the air suggests a movement that deviates from its normal orbital trajectory. The usual order of the universe has collapsed; the darkening of the sun is mirrored by the other stars which now wander without a clear path. Ultimately leaving the planet 'lifeless', the dwindling of the sun leads initially to anthropogenic environmental destruction:

> And the thrones,
> The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,
> The habitations of all things which dwell,
> Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed
> […]
> Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour
> They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks
> Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black. (IV, 41, ll. 10-13, 19-21)

As in 'Mont Blanc', the dwellings of humans and nonhumans – 'all things' suggests both – are destroyed, although in this case the environmental factors are mediated through human action. And, once again, the destruction of forests, in this case by fire rather than ice, stands for the fate of humanity. In this black world, volcanos – those old symbols of human vulnerability – become places of shelter: 'Happy were those who dwelt within the eye / Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch' (IV, 41, ll. 16-17). Buffon's 'Epochs of Nature' had described the importance of volcanos to early human development and cultivation of the land:

> To destroy the brushwood and the forests, they would employ the flames derived from volcano's [sic], or from their burning lavas; for, with the assistance of this powerful element, they cleared and purified the grounds which they chose to inhabit.[69]

'Darkness' shows humanity regressing to a primitive state in which technology of fire no longer has any purpose, for there is nothing left to burn. As Buffon had imagined it had begun, human civilisation ends by depending on volcanic energy.

Like ‘Mont Blanc’, ‘Darkness’ addresses the effects of a cooling world on humans and nonhumans. People wander in the ‘despairing light’ in horror, anger, and madness. Normal animal activity is disrupted:

> The wild birds shrieked
> And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,
> And flap their useless wings; the wildest brutes
> Came tame and tremulous; and vipers crawl’d
> And twined themselves among the multitude,
> Hissing, but stingless—they were slain for food. (IV, 41, ll. 32-7)

Significantly, the effects of the catastrophic environmental change on animals are as much behavioural as physical. The birds’ wings are ‘useless’ because of fear. Losing their ability to navigate the air, they mimic the pathless stars and the blindly swinging Earth in the poem’s opening lines and become prone and vulnerable. The behaviour of the vipers can be read as the kind of strange portent that might accompany a Biblical apocalypse, but it can also be read ecologically. In the absence of the sun’s rays, cold-blooded creatures are unable to maintain their body heat. Therefore they seek to ‘twine’ themselves among humans for warmth. In a poem full of cruel ironies, this leads to their destruction. ‘Darkness’ shows birds losing their defining characteristic of flight and serpents losing their defining characteristic of venom. (That there are such things as flightless birds and venomless snakes does not detract from the symbolic power of the idea.) ‘Stingless’ is yet another negative adjective created from a noun, in a text littered with them. This loss of species-being may also explain why the vipers are drawn to humans; their intertwining with the ‘multitude’ suggests how the darkness erases the differences between creatures.

With the planet deprived of the sun's energy, lack of food causes bloody conflicts around resources. 'War… / Did glut himself again', and

> All earth was but one thought—and that was death,
> Immediate and inglorious; and the pang
> Of famine fed upon all entrails—men
> Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;
> The meagre by the meagre were devoured,
> Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,
> And he was faithful to a corse. (IV, 41-2, ll. 38, 42-8)

Citing this passage, Wood argues that 'with a remarkable, prescient sympathy, Byron's "Darkness" anticipates the full-blown humanitarian disaster as it was to unfold in Switzerland and around the world over the subsequent three-year global climate emergency'.[70] The bad weather of 1816 certainly led to a terrible subsistence crisis in Europe. Switzerland, which already had many inhabitants who were barely surviving, was particularly affected; in 1817, the price of grain almost tripled. It is indeed remarkable that Byron and the Shelleys write so forcefully about environmental catastrophe in the early stages of the Tambora crisis, without of course knowing about the volcanic eruption the previous year. However, I am not sure that 'sympathy' is the right word to use for any of their accounts. The Shelleys' approach to the poor Swiss whom they encounter in the *History* is generally disdainful rather than sympathetic.[71] And Byron generally treats human suffering in 'Darkness' with a kind of horrified irony. In the above passage, famine paradoxically feeds, men are reduced to 'tombless' flesh and bones, and the starving consume the starving, presumably with little success. Environmental catastrophe leads not to stronger communities – whether among

humans or between humans and nonhumans – but a brutally Hobbesian universe. Even dogs – supposedly humanity's most loyal companion – turn out to be another species that lose their defining characteristic: in this case, by turning on their masters. The one 'faithful' dog, who protects his master's body from animal and human predators until he himself dies of starvation, does not offer an ethical model but is rather an exception who proves the general rule of selfish predation. The mode of the poem is sceptical rather than sympathetic. Perhaps its most terrifying aspect is the way in which it condenses a period of global cooling that Buffon had imagined taking place over millennia, so that civilised rules and ethics, and whole ecosystems, are shown to collapse in the speed it takes to read a few lines of text. Beginning with the blindly wandering planet and stars of the poem's opening lines, much of the poem gives a feeling of chaotic and futile energy that dissipates as we arrive at the final few lines. They continue the emphasis on loss and absence from the beginning of the text – 'Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless' (IV, 43, l. 71) – but also present a new sense of stillness after the death throes of all human, creaturely, and even elemental agencies:

> The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
> The moon their mistress had expired before;
> The winds were withered in the stagnant air
> And the clouds perish'd. (IV, 43, ll. 78-81)

Given our increasing understanding of the speed with which climate change can take place – and the extent to which natural variation can be escalated by human action – the poem's powerful compressions seem much more prescient than any sympathy.[72]

In a suggestive discussion of *The Last Man*, Kate Rigby argues that the novel subverts 'patriarchal and anthroparchal assumptions': 'the demise of Man (as defined in accordance

with the logic of colonization), it is hinted, might just open the way for the emergence of a new kind of human-nonhuman collectivity'.[73] The question of human exceptionalism is also of considerable importance to the texts of 1816. We have seen that 'Mont Blanc' suggests at one point that humans and nonhumans are similarly affected by the destruction of dwelling, although, as I will discuss below, it also asks whether human beings give the universe meaning in a way that other creatures do not. *Frankenstein* suggests how an obsession with improving the human race could lead to its demise. It is notable that Victor prefers bleak, sublime environments denuded of flora and fauna; his only significant encounter with nonhumans are the 'living animal[s]' (82) that he vivisects in order to discover the secrets of life. In contrast, the Creature enjoys pastoral landscapes and is often fascinated by 'the pleasant song of the birds' (130), which he tries to imitate. The utopian life in the New World that he imagines with his mate suggests a potential *post*human-nonhuman collectivity: 'my food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite' (170). There is a significant parallel here with Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), a poem that draws on the familiar tropes of extinction and ruination to contemplate the fate of a prisoner who sees his brothers die and is the last of a 'failing race'.[74] Bonnivard's solitary anguish is simultaneously subjective and cosmic in scope: 'There were no stars—no earth—no time / […] / But silence, and a stirless breath' (IV, 10, ll. 245-7). But the end of the poem describes a new form of community that has emerged from loss and devastation:

> With spiders I had friendship made,
> And watch'd them in their sullen trade,
> Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
> And why should I feel less than they?
> We were all inmates of one place,

> And I, the monarch of each race,
> Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell!
> In quiet we had learn'd to dwell—
> My very chains and I grew friends
> So much a long communion tends
> To make us what we are:—even I
> Regain'd my freedom with a sigh. (IV, 16, ll. 381-94)

Despite the horrors of his confinement, Bonnivard is eventually able to turn his cell into a dwelling place through the relationships that he builds, not only with nonhuman animals, but with the objects that confine him ('my very chains'). In contrast to some of Byron's other verse of 1816, identity here emerges not from the solitary striving of the sublime individual but from a 'communion' with apparently insignificant entities. One might read the poem's ending as ironically bathetic in that it reveals the depth of Bonnivard's fall through the lowliness of his connections and the fact that he has become institutionalised to the extent that he regrets regaining his freedom. But, in part due to the first-person perspective, the tone here is very different from that of 'Darkness': empathetic rather than ironic.

'Darkness', in contrast, is sceptical about any form of collectivity and some other Byron poems of 1816 also suggest the desire to separate human and nonhuman worlds. The tragedy of the human, as explained in *Manfred*, is that we are caught between the creaturely and the spiritual: 'half dust, half deity, alike unfit / To sink or soar' (IV, 63, l. 40). And in 'Prometheus', 'Man is in part divine / A troubled stream from a pure source' (IV, 32, ll. 47-8). In Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, absorption in the sublime landscape offers a temporary respite from this painfully antithetical state:

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain. (II, 103, ll. 680-8)

This stanza splits human experience into the elemental-spiritual and the creaturely-physical. The speaker's claim that he loathes 'nothing' in nature is undercut by his professed desire to break the 'fleshly chain'. There is a kind of litotes at work here: by seeking to escape from the physical body, and therefore from all connection with other humans and animals, he actually seems to loathe a great deal. 'Nature', here, describes elemental forces and objects rather than biological entities. A key question for the Diodati Circle was the extent to which human beings should be 'class'd among creatures'. Does a human being have much in common with a dog or a bird or a serpent, or does the power of the imagination – and associated technologies – make humanity a cosmic, elemental force that transcends 'creatureliness'?

The Romantic sublime was not just manifest in a desire to dissolve the self into the nonhuman world, but also in a desire to shape and control that world. In 'Epochs of Nature', Buffon had suggested that global cooling might be at least temporarily delayed, or even reversed, by human cultivation of the earth: 'the draining, clearing, and peopling a country

will give it a warmth which will continue for some thousand years'.[75] He adduces several examples to show that

> Man can have an influence on the climate he inhabits, and, in a manner, fix its temperature at any point that may be agreeable to him; and, what is singular, it is more difficult for him to cool than to heat the earth. He is master of the element of fire; which he can augment and propagate at pleasure, but not of the element of cold, which he can neither lay hold of or communicate.[76]

Buffon's surprising confidence in the salvific technology of fire is treated ironically by Byron and Mary Shelley.[77] In 'Darkness', the destruction of the forests stands for the destruction of humanity, as it does in 'Mont Blanc', but the agents of the destruction in Byron's poem are humans themselves who are engaged not in enlightened cultivation, but the last desperate act of an imminently doomed species. In *Frankenstein*, Waldman celebrates 'the new and almost unlimited powers' of natural philosophers: 'they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake' (76). Victor's enthusiasm first catches fire at the age of fifteen when he witnesses 'a most violent and terrible thunder-storm' emerging from 'behind the mountains of Jura'. This scene was no doubt inspired by the weather of 1816, for it echoes Mary's account in the *History* of the thunder storms at the start of June that I quoted from at the beginning of this chapter and in which she describes 'observing the lightning play among the clouds in various parts of the heavens, and dart in jagged figures upon the piny heights of Jura'. One particularly sublime storm 'lit up' Lake Geneva, 'when a pitchy blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over our heads amid the darkness' (99-100). Byron, of couse, would have seen the same storms and in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* imagines the 'live thunder' leaping among 'the rattling crags', producing a sort of

call-and-response between Jura and the Alps (II, 110, ll. 164-5). In both Byron's poem and *Frankenstein*, the solitary subject is thrilled by the sublime weather and desires its power, to the extent that Byron's narrator fantasises about throwing

> Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
> All that I have sought, and all that I seek,
> Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into *one* word,
> And that one word were Lightning. (II, 112, ll. 908-11)

This moment of supreme creativity offers a conflation of subjective and elemental agency, therefore briefly overcoming the idea of human precarity that haunts the Diodati Circle's texts.

In *Frankenstein*, a bolt of lightning 'utterly' destroys 'an old and beautiful oak': a 'catastrophe' that thrills Victor (69-70). This key term connects the destruction of the oak tree to the destruction of Victor's family, the 'catastrophe' of the Creature's creation (84), and the Creature's self-immolation. Victor's Promethean spark is shown as ultimately destructive rather than creative. The Creature, too, uses fire for destructive purposes, most obviously when he burns the De Laceys' cottage after he eventually realises that it is not a place in which he will ever be able to dwell (in a passage that echoes the burning of the 'huts' in Byron's poem):

> As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose from the woods, and quickly dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens: the blast tore along like a mighty avelanche, and produced a kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all bounds of reason and reflection. I lighted the branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted

> cottage. […] With a loud scream, I fired the straw, and heath, and bushes, which I had collected. The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues. (163)

As Andrew Griffin notes, 'the whole cosmos seems to conspire in [the Creature's] revenge'.[78] The passage develops the Creature's earlier assertion of his 'fellow-feeling' with the weather by suggesting not only that it reflects his mood but also that it aids his plans. The wind is a cruel mixture of fire and ice: a 'mighty avelanche' that fans the flames. With grim irony, this passage presents the Creature as a profoundly elemental force whose gifts of firewood earlier in his relationship with the De Laceys have been transformed into a destructive sacrifice. At this point in the novel, the Creature embodies those aspects of nature that prove to be beyond human dominance and control and suggests the limits of the Promethean vision of humanity as inevitably improved by the communication of fire or other technology. Indeed, in the same chapter the Creature even compares himself to an avalanche: 'finding myself unsympathized with, [I] wished to tear up the trees, [and] spread havoc and destruction around me' (161). The novel is therefore akin to 'Mont Blanc', which – in its vision of the glacier's 'scorn' for human power – recalls Buffon's insistence on the recalcitrance of 'the element of cold' to human control or transmission.

The relationship between the human and the elemental is also profoundly important to *Manfred*, concerned as it is with the 'Mysterious Agency' of nonhuman nature (IV, 54; I.i.28). In the first scene of the drama, the protagonist seeks to 'compel' the 'spirits of the unbounded Universe' to his will: 'the Promethean spark, / The lightning of my being' (IV, 58; I.i.154-5). He eventually succeeds through 'a tyrant-spell, / Which had its birthplace in a star condemn'd, / The burning wreck of a demolish'd world' (IV, 54; I.i.43-5). Somehow, out of cosmic destruction emerges Manfred's earth-shattering power, but that power is also

shown to be profoundly dangerous to its wielder. He summons seven spirits, of 'earth, ocean, air, night, mountains, winds, [and] thy star' (IV, 57; I.i.132). The latter seems to be the earlier 'star condemn'd', for its ruling spirit describes how before the earth was even created, it existed as 'a world as fresh and fair / As e'er resolved round sun in air; / Its course was free and regular' (IV, 57; I.i.112-14. Now, however, it has become

> A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
> A pathless comet, and a curse,
> The menace of the universe;
> Still rolling on with innate force
> Without a sphere, without a course.
> A bright deformity on high,
> The monster of the upper sky! (IV, 57; I.i.117-23)

The star's amorphousness is part of its threat; like other hyperobjects, it challenges the idea that the human imagination can shape the world. In its vision of a deformed star wandering 'pathless' through the universe, *Manfred* draws richly on the etymology of the word 'disaster', as does the image of the 'pathless' stars and 'blind and blackening' earth in 'Darkness'. The term connects Manfred's earthly power and misfortune to the cosmic realm: a dis-aster is a star that has gone bad and portends suffering on earth. These longstanding links between the human and the sidereal are given new force in the Romantic period by a more scientific concern with the role of the human in relation to huge scales of time and space. To what extent, the play asks does the imagination have any significance in relation to vast, cosmic forces? One possible answer can be found in the dramatic form itself, which can be read as a form of mental theatre in which all the characters, human and nonhuman, are

merely projections of Manfred's psychodrama. But, as Timothy Morton points out, the play hesitates between this solipsistic view and a dramatic framing through which 'theatrical space itself, an analogue for the environment of the Alpine setting, surrounds and negates Manfred's power'.[79] Thus it is appropriate that the spirit of Manfred's monstrous birth-star simultaneously obeys and scorns the magician and suggests that his apparent mastery is temporary: 'forced by a power (which is not thine, / And lent thee but to make thee mine)' (IV, 57; I.i.126-7).

Later in the poem, Manfred refuses to bow down to Arimanes, the master of the spirits, and yet he needs his power to summon the ghost of Astarte. Arimanes, like Ahriman in Percy's letter to Peacock, embodies all the volatile forces of the cosmos and their lack of care for humanity:

> Hail to our Master!—Prince of Earth and Air!—
> Who walks the clouds and waters—in his hand
> The sceptre of the elements, which tear
> Themselves to chaos at his high command!
> He breatheth—and a tempest shakes the sea;
> He speaketh—and the clouds reply in thunder;
> He gazeth—from his glance the sunbeams flee;
> He moveth—earthquakes rend the world asunder.
> Beneath his footsteps the volcanoes rise;
> His shadow is the Pestilence; his path
> The comets herald through the crackling skies;
> And planets turn to ashes at his wrath.
> To him War offers daily sacrifice;

To him Death pays his tribute; Life is his,
With all its infinite of agonies—
And his the spirit of whatever is! (IV, 81; II.iv.1-16)

In contrast to the unrhymed pentameter of Manfred's Shakespearean soliloquies, this is the rhymed language of worship and incantation. The use of anaphora, caesurae, archaic verb forms, and exclamations creates a mode of address that is both formal and full of unruly energy. 'Life' is defined by the Spirits who celebrate Arimanes as a set of catastrophes and traumas – 'an infinite of agonies'; he causes cosmic destruction through the most basic aspects of his being: breathing, speaking, gazing, and moving. He may be a grouping of elements, but the inclusion of 'War' also suggests the entanglement of human and nonhuman forces. Arimanes is a catastrophic assemblage and his capacity to destroy planets links him to the 'demolish'd world' that is the source of Manfred's power.

Like Victor Frankenstein and Childe Harold, Manfred prefers the 'Wilderness' denuded of other beings: 'where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing / Flit o'er the herbless granite' (IV, 72; II.ii.64-5). If he is unfortunate enough to encounter another person, he feels himself 'degraded back to them' (IV, 73; II.ii.78). There is a tension in the play between Manfred's identification with other humans – 'We are the fools of time and terror' (IV, 76; II.ii.164) – and his resistance to the idea of being classed among any living creatures. There is a similar tension in Byron's 'Alpine Journal', which relishes its human encounters but also seeks to replace them with landscapes: 'I have lately repeopled my mind with Nature'.[80] In the 'Journal', this aspiration is unachievable, with Byron lamenting at the end that he has been unable to 'lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory'.[81] *Manfred* is more celebratory of the power of sublime selfhood. For Andrew Hubbell, Manfred's 'attempt to commune with nature is actually self-communing, part of his

quest to separate himself from all other "breathing" creatures, a quest based on a dualist understanding of nature as dead matter animated by (his own) dominating spirit'.[82] One might therefore read the play in ecologically moralising terms, as suggesting the ways in which the human capacity and desire to harness the elements threatens a dangerous denial of the reality that we are part of the natural world and vulnerable to elemental forces. But the arc of the text resists any such straightforward conclusion. Famously, in the final deathbed scene, Manfred refuses his apparently Faustian fate by sheer force of will, refuting the claim that his 'power' was temporarily gifted to him by the spirits: rather, it was 'purchased by no compact with thy crew / But by superior science' (IV, 101; III.iv.113-15). Like Byron's 'Prometheus', Manfred makes 'Death a Victory' through his defiance of cosmic forces and his assertion of the power of the human mind to stand against the brute contingency of the universe (IV, 33, l. 59). It is a pyrrhic victory, of course, for while he will not kneel to Arimanes, he prostrates himself to his 'own desolation'; nonetheless, this seems to me the most anthropocentric of all the texts produced by the Diodati Circle in 1816. It presents human destinies, however ill-starred, as profoundly different to those of nonhuman creatures and heroises Manfred's refusal to bow down to the elements.

'Mont Blanc' and the Problem of Extinction

This chapter concludes by returning to the topic of deep time in 'Mont Blanc', a poem which offers the richest example of the Diodati Circle's meditation on anthropocentrism and extinction. To use modern philosophical language, it is a text about correlationism, which Quentin Meillassoux defines as 'the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other'.[83] The poem worries away at the question of the extent to which the universe means anything beyond human consciousness. In an influential account, Earl Wasserman argues that

Shelley (to summarise crudely) generally adopts a sceptical version of Berkeleyan idealism that grounds reality not in the mind of God but in a 'universal Mind'.[84] If Shelley adheres to 'a metaphysics that eternalizes the Self or the Mind, turning the latter into the perennial mirror for the manifestation of the entity' then, following Meillassoux, he cannot be a correlationist in the strict sense.[85] However, critics have also connected 'Mont Blanc' suggestively to the Kantian sublime, with its emphasis on the power of consciousness, and to Kant's attempt to bridge the apparent dichotomy between materialism and idealism.[86] Other scholars have emphasised instead Shelley's debt not to the idealism of Berkeley or Kant but to 'a sceptical epistemology derived from David Hume and William Drummond'.[87] Cian Duffy even forcefully argues, partly against Wasserman, that the poem's 'ontology is unequivocally empirical and materialist'.[88] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give an account of Percy Shelley's complex and shifting philosophical views, or fully to address the ontology or epistemology of 'Mont Blanc': in any case, it seems to me helpful to read it as a poem of tentative questioning rather than philosophical dogma. This chapter attempts to understand the poem's epistemological questions as also ecological ones, as indeed they were for Kant. Nigel Clark has suggestively analysed Kant's separation of human beings from nonhuman nature in the context of the sense of vulnerability engendered by environmental catastrophes such as the Lisbon earthquake, about which the philosopher wrote a seismological treatise: 'beneath the exaggerated claims of autonomy, the often repressed sensuous and somatic aspects of selfhood, the desire to lord it over nature, lies Kant's intuition of bodily vulnerability, an awareness that humankind is both individually and collectively bared to its elements'.[89] This provides a useful way of thinking about the oscillating shifts between mind and universe in 'Mont Blanc'. For Percy Shelley, addressing epistemology also means addressing the fate of the human species in a potentially hostile universe. According to Clark, Kant 'sought to adequate the regularities and potentialities of

the universe with those powers that defined our species being, only to find, again and again, that the magnitudes of the geo-cosmic side of the equation defied containment in the categories provided by the self-willing subject'.[90] I want to suggest that 'Mont Blanc' can be accurately described in similar terms, and self-consciously reflects on its own failures to 'contain' the nonhuman. In the Preface to the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, Percy describes the poem as an attempt to 'imitate' the 'untameable' and 'inaccessible' (6). Its knowingly quixotic attempt to imagine a desolate landscape separate from human perception is also an attempt to imagine a universe existing on a time scale that reduces human beings to transient phenomena.

Much of the sublimity in 'Mont Blanc' comes not from the vast size or obscurity of the mountain, but from the speaker's sense of the locale's connection to deep time. The pines around the Arve are described as 'children of elder time' and the sound that they create while 'swinging' in the wind as 'an old and solemn harmony'. We have seen that, for the Diodati Circle, pine trees could stand metonymically for humans in their mutual vulnerability to more powerful forces, but these sturdier pines stand for the prehuman past. The 'Ravine of Arve', the addressee of this section, manifests 'its own deep eternity', a phrase on the verge of tautology that is difficult to understand in the 1817 text in the *History*:

> Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
> Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
> Robes some unsculptured image; the strange sleep
> Which when the voices of the desart fail
> Wraps all in its own deep eternity. (177)

The first main clause describes the play of light and water in the ravine; ‘unsculptured’ may have both physical and epistemological meanings, referring to a rock face that has been carved out by natural rather than human processes, and also a landscape that does not depend on human perception for its existence.[91] The second part of the quotation is more difficult, in part because the semicolon suggests a relationship between the ‘strange sleep’ and the ravine’s waterfalls and rainbows, but the relationship is not explained.[92] The Scrope Davies Manuscript has a version of the passage that helps in some respects:

> […] even the sleep,
> The sudden pause that does inhabit thee
> Which when the voices of the desart fail
> And its hues wane, doth blend them all and steep
> Their periods in its own eternity.[93]

The ‘strange sleep’, it is now clear, is a ‘pause’ when the landscape’s ‘unresting sound[s]’ are silent, or at least inaudible, and ‘its hues wane’. The editors of the Longman edition suggest that this describes ‘the interval of suspense when the sound is interrupted and the view [of the Arve] obscured by an obstacle’.[94] This seems a little simplistic, however, because it hardly helps to make sense of the final clause. The sleep is a ‘pause’ that somehow manifests an ‘eternity’ that includes the ‘periods’ of sound and colour. At this point, the poem seems to be in danger of collapsing under its own paradoxes. The landscape’s sounds do not rest and yet they can be paused. The sleep is temporary but also eternal. ‘Periods’, as pointed out in the Longman edition, refers both to ‘their times of existence’ and ‘their times of cessation’.[95] For all its brilliance, ‘Mont Blanc’ is a poem in which ambivalence and complexity sometimes tips over into incoherence, a fact that has not always been accepted by the poem’s critics.

However, it helps to connect that ‘strange sleep’ to ‘the trance sublime and strange’ a few lines later. Rather than caused simply by a material blockage in sight and sound, the sleep is a pause in consciousness when the external world fades and flattens, and the perceiving subject turns inward. Whether one thinks of the poem as concerned here with individual or universal mind, the implication is that consciousness simultaneously transcends and incorporates (‘blends’) the temporary ‘periods’ (however long) of ‘the universe of things’, even the ‘elder time’ of pine trees and especially rocks. The human apprehension of deep time is celebrated as an epistemological folding in of the universe within human perception. ‘Eternity’, it is implied, is ultimately a product of the human imagination. One of the crucial effects of this sublime apprehension is that the present becomes ‘ethereal’ and insubstantial. The speaker moves into ‘a trance sublime and strange’ which apparently breaks down subject and object into an ‘unremitting interchange’:

> One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
> Now float above thy darkness, and now rest,
> Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
> In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
> Seeking among the shadows that pass by
> Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
> Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
> From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (177)

Wasserman suggests that ‘along the walls of the cave, as in Plato’s myth, pass sensory images, […] not the things-in-themselves, which the human mind cannot know’. He argues that the trance ultimately confirms that ‘reality is neither the subjective impression nor the

external thing, but the active and irresolvable mental tension between the two that is embodied in the word "Seeking"'.[96] This insight supports an ecological approach to the poem which would see Mont Blanc as a kind of 'hyperobject', a thing that is 'massively distributed in time and space relative to humans' and that can be apprehended only partially by human perception and is always retreating from it. As Morton puts it, 'hyperobjects are not simply mental (or otherwise ideal) constructs, but are real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans'.[97] Mont Blanc is much more than the topographical feature perceived by the poem's speaker: 'any "local manifestation" of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject'.[98] The phrase 'ghosts of all things that are' suggests that the effect of the human apprehension of eternity – the mind's ability to contain the 'periods' of the landscape – is to make the everyday phantasmagorical. But this is not necessarily a fully idealist position, as Morton explains: 'ecological existence is with ghosts, strangers, and specters, precisely because of reality, not in spite of it. […] An object fails to coincide with its appearance-for another object, no matter how accurate that appearance-for'.[99] Mont Blanc is a hyperobject particularly in its temporal 'nonlocality'; the 'ghosts' of the present-day landscape evoke a deep and haunting geological history.[100] One might read the whole poem as an attempt to understand the reality or otherwise of the history – a human narration – of a period that is outside human consciousness. It addresses what Meillassoux identifies as a key problem for modern correlationist philosophy: 'the conditions of meaning for dia-chronic statements […] about events that are anterior or ulterior to every terrestrial-relation-to-the-world'.[101]

The following section of the poem moves from the potential solipsism of the 'still cave' to an outward-looking gaze. As Wasserman states, 'the ability of thought to float above that darkness [of the ravine] into the transcendent is now symbolized by the dramatic gesture of the poet's raising his glance above the ravine to the snow-covered peak of Europe's

highest mountain'.[102] In addition, the transcendent properties of the mind are symbolised by its capacity to imagine a world in which humans are absent:

> A desart peopled by the storms alone,
> Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
> And the wolf tracts her there—how hideously
> Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
> Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.—Is this the scene
> Where the old Earthquake-demon taught her young
> Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
> Of fire, envelope this silent snow?
> None can reply—all seems eternal now. (179)

Frances Ferguson notes how, despite its sublime subject, the poem 'projects an air of sociability'.[103] The paradoxical phrase 'voices of the desart' is repeated in the 'desart peopled' by storms. The non-anthropocentric sociability is emphasised further by the connection between nonhumans (the eagle and the wolf) and 'peopling'. In an ironic twist, the only human imprint on this 'peopled' landscape is in the form of an archaeological relic, intimating how deep time succeeds as well as precedes the human. The suggestion that this apparently deserted place has its own 'voices' should be read alongside the description in the *History* of the Shelleys' journey towards Geneva and the Alps – 'the natural silence of that uninhabited desert contrasted strangely with the voices of the men who conducted us' (93) – as well as the passage in *Frankenstein* in which the human voice is seen as dangerous in such a 'desolate' environment because it may cause avalanches (123). 'Mont Blanc' imagines a form of community that includes the perceiving subject and the various forms of the

landscape – and potentially supplants connections with human communities – much as Byron declares in the 'Alpine Journal' that 'I have lately repeopled my mind with Nature'.[104] The landscape appears 'eternal', but perhaps it is only the 'eternity' of the human mind in a moment of sublime transcendence that can comprehend its catastrophic changeability.[105] The mind achieves this through a form of sociable projection, imagining what Ferguson calls a 'domestic circle' featuring the 'Earthquake-demon' and her young.[106] The rhetorical questions suggest both the uncertainties of early nineteenth-century geology – was the landscape created by an earthquake or a volcanic eruption? – and the stimulatingly confusing effect that deep time has on the human subject (and which is most palpable in the complex rhetorical question that ends the poem). They also suggest a desire for connection with this ever-receding landscape: for the mountain to answer back.

At the end of the section, the 'wilderness' is imagined to speak with a 'mysterious tongue'. The poem asserts that the mountain has 'a voice […] to repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe'. Ferguson's important essay on 'What The Mountain Said' has surprisingly little to say about this one moment when the mountain is given the power of speech (although we do not hear from it directly), suggesting only that its capacity to repeal the 'large codes' comes from 'making it clear that a love of humanity is easy if one can love a mountain that is physically inimical to men'.[107] More recently, Louise Economides has read this passage as key to the poem's critique of anthropocentrism and its concern with 'the contours of nature as a material force that exceeds human communication'. She finds in the mountain's voice 'an absence that can only negate, repealing discursive fraud but not grounding new forms of linguistic stability'.[108] Neither reading, it seems to me, really addresses the political claims being made at this point in the poem. As far as I am aware, Cian Duffy and Nigel Leask are the only critics to have addressed its politics of catastrophe. Leask suggests that Shelley is working against the mobilisation of catastrophe by 'counter-revolutionary apologists to figure

the characteristic manifestation of divine providence, intervening in natural and human history as an agent of castigation'.[109] Following Hutton and others, Shelley 'set out to show catastrophe as part of a *self*-regulating (as opposed to *divinely* regulated) economy'.[110] Leask's apparent assumption that less homeostatic geotheories than Hutton's were providential can certainly be challenged; Cuvier's geological 'revolutions', for example, had little to do with any divine plan. However, he is right to draw attention to the relationship between the mountain's evocation of deep time and its moral and political meanings. The history of environmental change may emphasise human vulnerability, but it also challenges conservative Christian readings of the landscape such as Coleridge's 'Hymn before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni' (1802), to which Shelley was in part responding.[111] As Duffy argues, the poem offers an alternative and politically radical view available to the 'cultivated imagination' by understanding 'Nature' as 'subject not to divine regulation, but to its own internal (Necessary) laws'.[112] Similarly, in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', the 'frail spells' of religion and superstition are rejected in favour of a more philosophical response to the sublime that may 'free / This world from its dark slavery'.[113] The politics of both poems can be connected to Ahriman and 'the adamantine hand of Necessity', as described in the letter to Peacock: a terrifying force whose 'avalanches, torrents, rocks, and thunders, and above all these deadly glaciers' threaten to destroy humanity. But Ahriman's 'usurpation' is also a revolution against providential understandings of the universe. In Shelleyan terms, Mont Blanc and the catastrophic necessitarian power that it represents should be understood as closer to the frightening but liberating Demogorgon of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) rather than the oppressive and despotic Jupiter. That this can only be understood by a small elite of 'the wise, and great, and good' is entirely in keeping with the tendency of the Diodati Circle's texts of 1816 to place intellectuals far above other groups of people, such as the supposedly brutish Swiss peasantry or the apparently empty-headed tourists, including the English

woman whom Byron mocks in the 'Alpine Journal' for experiencing Chamonix as 'rural' rather than sublime.[114] As in the case of the narrative of the eruption discussed in the previous chapter, Byron and the Shelley's response to the Tambora crisis must be understood as a perspective only possible for an elite protected from its more severe effects by rank, wealth, and education.

Mont Blanc offers a moral and political lesson precisely because it shows the contingency of all human understandings of the universe and our vulnerability to the power of Necessity. As a hyperobject, it is simultaneously available and unavailable to the speaker's consciousness, experienced as 'remote, serene, and inaccessible'. These qualities separate it not only from the speaker, but from other aspects of the environment:

> The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
> Ocean, and all the living things that dwell
> Within the daedal earth; lightning, and rain,
> Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane
> […]
> The works and ways of man
> […]
> All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
> Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell. (179-80)

This is a difficult passage to relate to the rest of the poem, in part because the main verb ('are') is delayed until the twelfth line. Before then, we get an assemblage that includes topographical features, weather, geological phenomena, seasons, and humans, all of which are shown to be subject to the transience that 'Power', embodied by the mountain, rises

above.[115] Here 'eternity' lies separately from the human mind *and* from the ancient landscape. The apparent contrast between human life and the events of deep time is briefly collapsed, for environmental phenomena, even those responsible for the earth's geomorphology, seem to be included as part of the list of 'things that move and breathe'. 'Daedal earth' is a conventional poetic phrase suggesting the world's richness and variety; 'daedal' can also suggest cunning artifice.[116] But if the earth is wrought, it can also be unwrought by a 'remote' and disinterested Power, and the gap between humanity and deep time is reasserted later in the fourth section where human dwelling is described as threatened by perpetually expanding glaciers. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the poem's emphasis on the destructive power of ice, but noted that the very end of the fourth section also presents it as a creative force in that it feeds the 'majestic' Arve – 'The breath and blood of distant lands' (181) – as part of the hydrological cycle: 'Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves / Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air' (182). For Duffy, this shows the poem moving beyond 'the conventional catastrophic account of the natural sublime' to comprehend the 'long-term benefits' of apparent destruction. He reads this move in political terms, with the creativity of Mont Blanc's glaciers 'showing the ultimate triumph of revolutionary values'.[117] This is plausible enough in relation to his excellent general discussion of the politics of the sublime in Shelley. But his reading of the glaciers in relation to 'Volneyan ruins of empire tropes' ignores the fact that 'Mont Blanc' is not only concerned with human history.[118] Certainly natural and political histories are intertwined in the poem, as they are throughout Shelley's work, but when 'Mont Blanc' is read in relation to the other 1816 writings discussed in this chapter, it also raises the possibility that natural history supersedes that of the 'race of man'. In Meillassoux's terms, the poem understands elemental forces not only as *ancient* (distant in time), but as *ancestral* (anterior or ulterior to any human relationship to the world).[119]

The complexities of 'Mont Blanc's' fourth section show how difficult it is to make sense of the poem's understanding of the relationship between humans, mutability, and eternity. Frances Ferguson argues that the poem 'creates an image of sublimity that continually hypostatizes an eternity of human consciousness'. She understands the poem in line with post-Kantean correlationism: 'because even the ideas of the destructiveness of nature and the annihilation of mankind require human consciousness to give them their force, they thus are testimony to the necessity of the continuation of the human'.[120] This seems a little too neat for such a troubled text. Certainly it is not clear that the poem goes so far as to assert the 'necessity' of human continuation, and the reference to the 'secret strength of things / Which governs thought' (182) in the final section seems to suggest a greater interest in the power of materiality over human consciousness than Ferguson's reading allows for. This section presents a landscape denuded of human perception, in which 'none beholds' the descending snows, 'Winds contend / Silently', and the lightning is 'voiceless' (182). The poem then, famously, turns things on their heads by asking what sort of meaning they have outside human experience:

> And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
> If to the human mind's imaginings
> Silence and solitude were vacancy? (183)

As we have seen, Ferguson finds in the poem 'an implicit argument for the transcendent existence of man—not because man is able to survive the threat posed by the power of the material world, but because he is able to domesticate the material world as Mont Blanc from an object into a found object'.[121] Charles E. Robinson reads the ending in similar terms: 'if the human mind did not interpret — did not make meaningful and moral — the powers of

nature, then these energies would remain insignificant — vacant, barren'.[122] Other critics have understood it more ambivalently. Wasserman sees it as an expression of Shelley's scepticism about the possibility of certitude in empirical or imaginative experience.[123] I. J. Kapstein suggests that the lines, despite their ambiguity, form an 'anti-climax' that contradicts the assertion of the mountain's power over the mind earlier in the poem.[124] More recently, Duffy has argued that 'the poem's final lines re-affirm the central sceptical point of Shelley's revision of the discourse of the sublime: only the "wise" imagination can go beyond the defeat of the understanding towards an intuition of the Necessity informing the landscape'.[125] And Economides reads the question as 'compellingly open rather than rhetorical because it acknowledges that some aspects of the domain we call "nature" may well exceed our socio-linguistic constructions'; that is, it asks the reader whether silence should be equated with vacancy.[126] Despite the richness and sophistication of these critical accounts, they seem to me to miss something important by focusing solely on individual epistemology. Clearly the poem asks profound epistemological questions, but what if we were to read it in relation to the future of 'the race of men' rather than the perception of the individual mind? After all, at the end Shelley is not only imagining a particular place desolate of humankind, but *the whole universe*. One might read the ending as arrogantly anthropocentric in its implication that the world without us is nothing but 'vacancy'. But the poem as a whole manifests a more complex engagement with the paradoxes inherent in human representations of a world without humans. It therefore, like 'Darkness', relates to one of the key tensions in Anthropocenic thinking: the ways in which we imagine ourselves as haunting a future from which we are simultaneously absent (extinct) and present (as writers of the stratigraphic record and through the very act of imagining). As Colebrook puts it, 'how might we imagine a world without organic perception, without the centered points of view of sensing and world-oriented beings? […] Can we imagine a mode of reading the world, and its

anthropogenic scars, that frees itself from folding the earth's surface around human survival?'[127] The poem does not offer a solution to these questions, or to Meillassoux's related problem of diachronicity (that is, how we are able to make statements about the world as it exists separate from our relationship to it). Rather, and with remarkable prescience, it tests the limits of language's capacity to move between 'the dead and living world' and explores different perspectives on the significance of the human species to the universe: as vulnerable and transient victims of environmental flux, as co-creators participating in an 'unremitting interchange', and as transcendental subjects without whom there would be only 'vacancy'.[128]

In all its contradictions and capaciousness, 'Mont Blanc' addresses the key ecological and philosophical ideas that run through the texts that I have examined in this chapter. Like 'Darkness' and *Frankenstein*, it explores the precarity of human dwelling on an ever-changing planet, and imagines the possibility of a posthuman universe. At the same time, it also imagines the transcendental power of the human mind, as it is celebrated (ambivalently) in *Manfred* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and (partly) ironised in *Frankenstein*. For all its speculative force, the poem is also deeply grounded in the empirical experience of the Swiss landscape and the 'Year without a Summer' that we find captured in the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* and the letters and journals of the Diodati Circle. Taken as a whole, these texts suggest a deep connection between assertions of the human capacity to transcend the material world and an apprehension of human vulnerability due to the 'radical asymmetry of the relationship between human existence and nature'.[129] Ice is a particularly powerful symbol of this asymmetry; it stands metonymically for the epistemological 'withdrawnness' of objects and the existence of a '*glacial* world […] capable of subsisting without any of those aspects that constitute its concreteness for us'.[130] There is certainly a utopian strand in Romantic writing about environmental change, but for these authors in 1816, standing in the twin

shadows of Tambora and Mont Blanc, the human species seemed unlikely to resist the violence of deep time. However bleak this view may seem, it also offers a valuable counter to what Bronislaw Szerszynski describes as the 'soteriological dream of security' offered by 'a calculative technological response' to weather and climate.[131] Even those texts that emphasise human power over the elements hardly offer a stable sense of salvation, for such power is shown to be temporary, dangerous, and isolating. The intertextual connections that are so crucial to all of these works offer a potentially positive communal response through sympathetic interchange to the problems of human vulnerability. But this is an elite community cut off from the majority of the human race, who are presented as unable to transcend their mere creatureliness: most powerfully, in the brutal state of nature depicted in 'Darkness'. The perils of such an exceptionalist perspective are suggested by the threat that Frankenstein's creature represents to humanity as a whole. The precarity and finitude of the human species, detached from any eschatological narrative, is investigated with remarkable prescience in these texts, as is the capacity of apparently enlightened humans to exacerbate the destructive power of natural forces.

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[1] [Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley], *History of a Six Weeks Tour* (London: T. Hookham and C. and J. Ollier, 1817), 96-7. Further references to the *History* are in the text. Until she married at the end of 1816, Mary was known as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, but I have referred to her throughout this chapter as (Mary) Shelley, as this is how she is known as an author. In discussing the Shelleys, I have done my best to move between forenames and surnames so that it is always clear to which one of them I am referring. Percy Shelley is referred to as Shelley throughout the final section of the chapter, as it focuses on 'Mont Blanc'.

[2] Shelley and Shelley, *History*, 99.

[3] Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), especially chapter 3. A key earlier intervention is by Jonathan Bate, who discusses 'Darkness' and 'To Autumn' in relation to Tambora in *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2001), chapter 4. Bate was not the first critic to discuss the importance of Tambora to the Diodati Circle: see John Clubbe's unduly neglected article, 'The Tempest-toss'd Summer of 1816: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*', *Byron Journal* 19 (1991): 26-40. A groundbreaking account of 'Mont Blanc' in relation to Tambora can be found in Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), chapter 6.

[4] Earlier studies on textual relations between these authors include William D. Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Charles E. Robinson, *Byron and Shelley: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Flight* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); and Robinson's 'Byron and Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*' (University of Nottingham: Byron Centre, 2000), accessed 26 March 2016, http://byron.nottingham.ac.uk/resources/digital/foundation%20lectures/Robinson.pdf.

[5] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 197-222.

[6] Lowell Duckert, 'Glacier', *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 4 (2013): 68-79 (71). Duckert is quoting Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 54. Fascinating meditations on ice, agency, culture, and climate change can be found in Julie Cruikshank, *'Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005) and Susan Oliver, 'Ice Thoughts 2', 9 November 2016, accessed 20 January 2017, https://susanoliverweb.com/2016/11/09/ice-thoughts-2/.

[7] As noted in the introduction, these terms are contested and I am not suggesting that either describes a monolithic philosophical 'movement'.

[8] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Raymond Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 5; Raymond Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 229-30; Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1.

[9] For a fine analysis of the relationship between Romantic literature and geology, see Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[10] Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 140.

[11] Rudwick, *Bursting*, 142-9. According to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Percy had read Buffon in 1811 and even 'carefully' translated a 'treatise' by the naturalist: see *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), I, 458. Given that most earlier parts of the *Histoire Naturelle* had been translated into English twenty years earlier by William Smellie, this may well have been the 'Les époques de la nature'. While recognising the importance of this text, Smellie had not provided a full translation of it on the basis that it was 'perhaps too fanciful to receive the general approbation of the cool and deliberate Britain': see Buffon, Georg-Louis Leclerc, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, 9 vols (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell), 3rd edition, IX, 258. Mary Shelley's reading list for 1817 includes 'Buffon's theorie du terre', which outlined his first 'steady-state' geotheory (and not, as some critics seem to think, his theory of global cooling): see *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-44*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2

vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 100. It is not clear whether Mary had read Buffon's theories about global cooling separately or only knew of them via Percy.

[12] See Martin Rudwick, ed., *Georges Cuvier, Fossil Bones, and Geological Catastrophes: New Translations & Interpretations of Primary Texts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). Cuvier's catastrophism is an important influence on *Cain* (1821). For useful accounts of Cuvier and the later Romantics, see Melissa Bailes, 'The Psychologization of Geological Catastrophe in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', *ELH* 82 (2015): 671-99 and Christine Kenyon Jones, '"When this world shall be *former*": Catastrophism as imaginative theory for the younger Romantics', *Romanticism on the Net* 24 (2001), 16 paragraphs, accessed 22 March 2016, http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2001/v/n24/006000ar.html.

[13] Nigel Leask, 'Mont Blanc's Mysterious Voices: Shelley and Huttonian Earth Science', in *The Third Culture: Literature and Science*, ed. Elinor S. Shaffer (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 182-203.

[14] Rudwick, *Bursting*, 158-72.

[15] For the philosophical impact of the Lisbon earthquake, see Nigel Clark, *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet* (London: Sage, 2011), chapter 4, and Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[16] Clark, *Inhuman Nature*, 93.

[17] Rudwick, *Bursting*, 233.

[18] Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 93.

[19] Buffon had suggested in 'Epochs of Nature' that the Alpine glaciers '*constantly augment in all their dimensions*' (IX, 363; italics in original). Certainly, glacial expansion around Chamonix had been a serious threat to the local inhabitants in the seventeenth and early

eighteenth centuries: see Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History 1300-1850* (New York: Basic, 2000), 123-7.

[20] The original letter does not include the nineteen words after 'mass of frost'; *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 499. It is likely that Mary Shelley added them to the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, possibly to emphasise the importance of polar ice to Buffon's theory. See Siobhan Carroll, 'Crusades Against Frost: *Frankenstein*, Polar Ice, and Climate Change in 1818', *European Romantic Review* 24 (2013): 211-30 (227).

[21] Leask, 'Mysterious Voices', 195.

[22] Heringman also takes issue with Leask on this point (*Romantic Rocks*, 76).

[23] See Eric Gidal, '"O Happy Earth! Reality of Heaven!": Melancholy and Utopia in Romantic Climatology', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 8 (2008): 74-101.

[24] Wilson, *Spiritual History*, 97. See also Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65-7.

[25] Wilson, *Spiritual History*, 105-6.

[26] Wilson, *Spiritual History*, 106.

[27] An exception to this critical neglect is Noah Heringman, who reads the passage in the context of Shelley's critique of the idealisation of Swiss mountaineers: see *Romantic Rocks*, 77-79.

[28] The passage transcribed by Mary Shelley in the *History* omits the final sentence of this paragraph in the original letter: 'It presents views, a development of which I reserve for conversation' (*Letters*, I, 499). This tantilising statement suggests that Percy was genuinely interested in racial degradation and wanted to consider it further. For evidence of Mary's transcription, see her *Journal*: 'In the evening I copy S.'s letter to Peacock' (I, 117)**.** Percy's

concern with climate and degeneration is apparent in *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813), which connects humanity's adoption of meat-eating and consequent problems with 'some great change in the climates of the earth': *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray, 1 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), I, 77.

[29] Buffon, *Natural History*, V, 115.

[30] Buffon, *Natural History*, V, 133. Buffon's ideas were popularised by writers such as William Robertson: see Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Climate: Making Climate Change in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 37-8.

[31] Alan Bewell, 'Jefferson's Thermometer: Colonial Biogeographical Constructions of the Climate of America', in *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History*, ed. Noah Heringman (New York: SUNY Press, 2003), 111-38 (122).

[32] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), IV, 55 (I.i.68-9). Further references to Byron's works are to this edition and are in the text.

[33] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf, 2nd edn (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2005), 123, 338. Further references to *Frankenstein* are in the text.

[34] John William Polidori, *Ernestus Berchtold; or the Modern Oedipus. A Tale* (London: Longman, 1819), 12.

[35] Unless otherwise noted, I am using the version of 'Mont Blanc' originally published in the *History*.

[36] William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (Methuen: New York and London, 1984), 196.

[37] Polidori, *Ernestus Berchtold*, 12.

[38] In two other versions of these lines, 'mortal power' is 'human power': *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 3 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-12), III, 518.

[39] Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, 224.

[40] Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 519.

[41] Bate, *Song*, 266.

[42] Psal. CIII. 15-16. The quotation perhaps also alludes to Nahum III. 17 and Job VII. 10. Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 520.

[43] Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 520.

[44] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-82), V, 102.

[45] Byron, *Journals,* I, 117-8.

[46] Byron, *Journals*, I, 118.

[47] Byron, *Journals*, I, 119.

[48] Cruikshank, pp. 10-11.

[49] Building on Susan Neiman's work, and with particular attention to Kant, Clark (*Inhuman Nature*, chapter 4) relates the development of the autonomous 'modern subject' during the period to anxieties about human vulnerability to environmental change.

[50] Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 195.

[51] Colebrook, *Death*, 196.

[52] Colebrook, *Death*, 198.

[53] Before attending university, Victor attends an incomprehensible lecture and therefore 'became disgusted with the science of natural philosophy, although I still read Pliny and Buffon with delight, authors, in my estimation, of nearly equal interest and utility' (70). This

passage does not appear in the 1831 edition. Carroll points out that Victor fears the Creature because it is 'well-suited to inheriting a frozen world' ('Crusades', 222).

[54] Mary Shelley would of course return a decade later to the theme of the total destruction of humanity in *The Last Man*, a text that is also deeply concerned with climate change: see Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, chapter 9; Carroll, 'Crusades', 222; Kate Rigby, *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press), chapter 2.

[55] Carroll, 'Crusades', 220. See also her book *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750-1850* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 51-5. Other useful accounts of *Frankenstein* and Arctic exploration include Adriana Craciun, 'Writing the Disaster: Franklin and *Frankenstein*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65 (2011): 433-80 and Jessica Richard, '"A Paradise of My Own Creation": *Frankenstein* and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 25 (2003): 295-314. See also Wood, *Tambora*, chapter 6, for a discussion of the warming of the Arctic in the context of Tambora.

[56] Carroll, *Empire*, 54.

[57] For a useful reading of this relationship, see Beth Lau, ed., *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), chapter 3.

[58] See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raymond Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004), 68.

[59] Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose*, 63.

[60] Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose*, 62.

[61] Bruno Latour, 'Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care For Our Technologies As We Do Our Children', *Breakthrough Journal* 2 (2012), accessed 8 May 2016, http://thebreakthrough.org/index.php/journal/past-issues/issue-2/love-your-monsters.

[62] See 'An Ecomodernist Manifesto', accessed 31 July 2017, http://www.ecomodernism.org/. Latour is not a signatory of the manifesto, although it clearly draws on some of his ideas.

[63] James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 47.

[64] For the poem's sources, see Jerome McGann's endnote in Byron, *CPW*, IV, 459-60; see also, R. J. Dingley, '"I had a Dream…..": Byron's "Darkness"', *Byron Journal* 9 (1981): 20-33; Catherine Redford, '"No love was left": The Failure of Christianity in Byron's "Darkness"', *Byron Journal* 43 (2015): 131-40; Jeffrey Vail, '"The Bright Sun Was Extinguish'd": The Bologna Prophecy and Byron's "Darkness"', *Wordsworth Circle* 28 (1997): 183-92. Buffon had noted in the *Natural History* (I, 79) that at some future point 'the sun itself will be extinguished'.

[65] Brassier, *Nihil*, 223-30. Lyotard's essay is entitled 'Can Thought go on Without a Body?' and is published in *The Inhuman* (1991).

[66] Brassier, *Nihil*, 223.

[67] Brassier, *Nihil*, 224.

[68] Brassier, *Nihil*, 230. Brassier's arguments can be connected to Morton's suggestion in *Hyperobjects* that 'the end of the world has already occurred' (7).

[69] Buffon, *Natural History*, IX, 382.

[70] Wood, *Tambora*, 69.

[71] Wood makes the interesting suggestion that the Creature 'bears the mark of the famished and diseased European population by which [Mary Shelley] was surrounded by that dire Tambora summer' (*Tambora*, 66), although the worst part of the crisis would occur after the Shelleys had returned to England.

[72] See Nigel Clark, 'Volatile Worlds, Vulnerable Bodies: Confronting Abrupt Climate Change', *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, 2-3 (2010): 31-53.

[73] Kate Rigby, *Dancing*, 79, 77. See also Olivia Murphy, 'Apocalypse Not Quite: Romanticism and the Post-human World', in *Romanticism and Sustainability: Endurance and the Natural World, 1780-1830*, ed. Ben P. Robertson (Lexington Books: Lanham MD, 2015), 245-59.

[74] For a valuable discussion of *Chillon* in the contexts of 1816 and Byron's more general interest in the 'last of the race' myth, see Fiona Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 7.

[75] Buffon, *Natural History*, IX, 396.

[76] Buffon, *Natural History*, IX, 401. For a suggestive analysis of this aspect of Buffon's thought, see Noah Heringman, 'Deep Time at the Dawn of the Anthropocene', *Representations* 129 (2015): 56-85.

[77] It is also treated ironically by Percy in *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, which reads the myth of Prometheus as revealing the connection between the discovery of fire, meat-eating, and disease (*Prose Works*, 78-9).

[78] Andrew Griffin, 'Fire and Ice in Frankenstein', in *The Endurance of* Frankenstein*: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 49-73.

[79] Timothy Morton, 'Byron's Manfred and Ecocriticism', in *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies*, ed. Jane Stabler (London: Palgrave, 2007), 155-70 (156). In relation to theatricality, it is interesting to note that first version of 'Mont Blanc', discovered in the Scrope Davies notebook, is entitled 'Scene–Pont Pelissier in the vale of Servox'. Percy also uses the word 'scene' to describe the area around Mont Blanc several times in the *History* (152, 155, 164).

[80] Byron, *Journals*, V, 99.

[81] Byron, *Journals*, V, 105.

[82] Andrew Hubbell, 'Our Mix'd Essence': Manfred's Ecological Turn', *Byron Journal* 42 (2014): 5-20 (12).

[83] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5. Useful discussions of Meillassoux and Percy Shelley can be found in Greg Ellermann, 'Speculative Romanticism', *SubStance* 44 (2015): 154-74; Evan Gottlieb, *Romantic Realities: Speculative Realism and British Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), chapter 4; and Chris Washington, 'Romanticism and Speculative Realism', *Literature Compass* 12 (2015): 448-60. See also Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 57-9.

[84] Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 146-7.

[85] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 10-11.

[86] Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 58-72. Classic epistemological readings of the poem include Frances Ferguson, 'Shelley's *Mont Blanc*: What the Mountain Said', in *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed (London: Methuen, 1984), 202-14; I. J. Kapstein, 'The Meaning of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', *PMLA* 62 (1947): 1046-60; Wasserman, *Shelley*, 222-38.

[87] Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6. The key study behind this approach is C. E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962).

[88] Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 114. Gottlieb also questions Wasserman's claim about 'Shelley's belief in a universal mind' (*Romantic Realities*, 162).

[89] Clark, *Inhuman Nature*, 95.

[90] Clark, *Inhuman Nature*, 100-1.

[91] Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 512. 1816 was probably a particularly good summer for rainbows due to the wet conditions (Mary Shelley, *Journal*, 111). See also Mary Shelley description of the waterfall at the Nant d'Arpenas as '*more like cloud than water, imitating a viel of the most exquisite woof*'. The idea of sculpture is clearly suggested by her observation of the water striking 'an enormous rock resembling' a 'colossal Egyptian statue of a female deity' and 'concealing the lower part of the statue' (*Journals*¸ 113-4).

[92] O'Neill suggests that 'the syntactical incompleteness mirrors the sense of reverie, of floating intuitively induced in the poet': Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 511.

[93] Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 80.

[94] *The Poems of Shelley Volume 1: 1804-17*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (London: Routledge, 1989), 538.

[95] Shelley, *Poems of Shelley*, 538.

[96] Wasserman, *Shelley*, 227.

[97] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 15.

[98] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 1. In making this connection, I differ from Gottlieb who sees the mountain as 'clearly localized' and therefore not a hyperobject in Morton's sense (*Romantic Realities*, 169).

[99] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 195-6.

[100] In a passing reference to Shelley's poem, Morton notes that 'the mountain comes in and out of phase', another property that he associates with hyperobjects (*Hyperobjects*, 72).

[101] Meillasoux, *After Finitude*, 112-3. For Meillasoux, crucially, this problem of diachronicity is qualitatively different from how correlationism makes sense of spatial distance because it does not deal with an event that is unwitnessed but with one that precedes or succeeds the possibility of witnessing (i.e. the very being of the universe in correlationist terms).

[102] Wasserman, *Shelley*, 228.

[103] Ferguson, 'What the Mountain Said', 208.

[104] Byron, *Letters and Journals*, V, 99.

[105] 'Eternal' is an important term in other 1816 texts. Byron describes 'summits of eternal snow' in the 'Alpine Journal'. In Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the Alps are (using the language of human dwelling that we also find in 'Mont Blanc') 'The palaces of Nature, whose vast walls / Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps, / And throned Eternity in icy halls /Of cold sublimity' (Byron, *Complete Poetical Works*, II, 100, ll. 591-5). In the third letter to Peacock in the History, Shelley describes how the bases of the mountains in 'the valley of the Arve' are 'still covered with the eternal forests' (Shelley and Shelley, *History*, 147).

[106] See also the description of an Alpine storm in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which describes the 'mountain-mirth' of the 'loud hills', 'as if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth' (Byron, *Complete Poetical Works*, II, 111, ll. 876-7).

[107] Ferguson, 'What the Mountain Said', 211.

[108] Louise Economides, '"Mont Blanc" and the Sublimity of Materiality', *Cultural Critique* 61 (2005): 87-114 (106).

[109] Leask, 'Mysterious Voices', 187.

[110] Leask, 'Mysterious Voices', 188.

[111] Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime*, 58-61; Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 111-3.

[112] Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 119-20.

[113] Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, III, 75, 77; see Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 105.

[114] Byron, *Journals*, V, 97.

[115] At this point in the poem, the mountain is much more than a topographical feature. It embodies 'Power', which Wasserman (along with other critics) plausibly reads as causation or Necessity (*Shelley*, 229-31).

[116] 'daedal, adj.'. *OED Online*. March 2017. Oxford University Press. http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/46834?rskey=kQb2Uk&result=2 (accessed May 20, 2017).

[117] Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 125.

[118] Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 124.

[119] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 20.

[120] Ferguson, 'What the Mountain Said, 210.

[121] Ferguson, 'What the Mountain Said', 213.

[122] Robinson, *Snake*, 125.

[123] Wasserman, *Shelley*, 238.

[124] Kapstein, 'Shelley's "Mont Blanc"', 1057-8.

[125] Duffy, *Revolutionary Sublime*, 119.

[126] Economides, 'Sublimity of Materiality', 108-9.

[127] Colebrook, *Death*, 23.

[128] After writing my account of 'Mont Blanc', I came across Greg Ellermann's discussion of its ending in relation to Meillassoux's ideas. Ellermann also seeks to move beyond epistemological readings by understanding 'Power' as an absolute contingency that exists beyond the correlation and which can be intuited through the contingency of language: 'by insisting on their own status as mere words and letters – on their own fundamental meaninglessness, that is – the lines and marks that comprise "Mont Blanc" bring into view the contingency of all things' ('Speculative Romanticism', 169). While this analysis is astute and suggestive, I find no such insistence in the poem.

[129] Clark, *Inhuman Nature*, 50.

[130] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 115. For the 'withdrawnness' of objects, see Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

[131] Bronislaw Szerszynski, 'Reading and Writing the Weather: Climate Technics and the Moment of Responsibility', *Theory, Culture and Society* 27 (2010): 9-30 (25).