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Dark German Romanticism and the Postpunk Ethos of Joy Division, The Cure and Smashing Pumpkins

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DARK GERMAN ROMANTICISM AND THE POSTPUNK ETHOS OF JOY DIVISION,
THE CURE AND SMASHING PUMPKINS

by

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DEDICATION

To my Opa, who helped me to appreciate the complexities of music, understand the significance of history and inspire to learn the German language. Without him, this thesis would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of dark German Romanticism and its connection to the postpunk ethos in rock music. The music is dark and Romantic because of the artists' reach beyond finite limits to attain Romantic ideals. The postpunk artists explored, Ian Curtis of Joy Division, Robert Smith of The Cure, and Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins, present solipsistic lyrics relating to nineteenth century works by German writers Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffman, Heinrich Heine and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The spirit of dark German Romanticism dwells within the postpunk ethos adhered to by Curtis, Smith and Corgan, with each of them expressing disillusion, melancholy and angst in longing for the extraordinary dream. Each of them fixates upon Romantic ideals stretching beyond the possibility of measurable achievement. Discarding their disillusioned realities for infinite ideals brings these artists face to face with existential despair, and they each face destructive consequence for venturing too far in their pursuits. With their Romantic ideals becoming the all-consuming desire of their minds, they turn to artistic expression in rock as a platform to express their angst-laden yearnings and despairs. In adhering to a postpunk ethos of self-expression, authenticity, solipsism and visionary prowess, Ian Curtis, Robert Smith and Billy Corgan exemplify Dark German Romanticism as a transcendent, progressive and modern force stretching into rock music of the twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

GERMAN ROMANTICISM AND THE POSTPUNK ETHOS

Meine schönsten Lebensjahre,
Die verbracht' ich im Kyffhäuser,
Auch im Venusberg und andern
Katakomben der Romantik

– *Heine, die Katakomben der Romantik*

“Their songs grappled with classic existentialist quandaries: the struggle and agony of having a ‘self’; love versus isolation; the absurdity of existence; the human capacity for perversity and spite; the perennial ‘suicide, why the hell not’” (Reynolds, 2005, 7). In *Rip it Up and Start Again*, music journalist Simon Reynolds points to solipsism, meaning an inward focus, heard throughout the lyrics of artists adhering to the postpunk ethos. This heavy emphasis upon internal emotions is an artistic form of Romantic self-expression. Though Reynolds successfully acknowledges the existential struggles listed above, he fails to do so with Romanticism. He presents the reader with a thorough background on postpunk and its historical significance within the late twentieth century, though he does this without reference to nineteenth century Romanticism, more specifically *German* Romanticism. Postpunk’s ethos shares similarities with German Romanticism in producing art that represents one’s feeling, inspiration and impulse. Friedrich Schlegel writes this in the *Kritische Fragmente*. “Nicht die Kunst und die Werke machen den Künstler, sondern der Sinn und die Begeisterung und der Trieb” (Schlegel 1967, 153). The lyrical contents of postpunk were largely apolitical, but the political landscape had a profound effect upon the disillusionments that pioneered the

ethos' development. Therefore postpunk explores German Romantic themes such as melancholy, loss, nostalgia and existence. Postpunk artists are not necessarily aware of these underlying connections to German Romanticism, but they are aware of the role modern society and industrialization served in spawning their disillusion. German Romantic disillusion dealt with economic and social change in the late eighteenth century. The Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution acted as a catalyst for German Romanticism's rise as a form of art. Germany had a long way to go in becoming the nation that it is today. It was only a fragmentary patchwork of small states without a unifying cultural center. Author Maurice Cranston writes, "The Germans of Rousseau's time were living between two worlds; they had left the feudal past, but they had not been propelled into modernity, like the French, by absolutism or, like the English and Dutch, by Revolution" (Cranston 1994, 21). In the decades following World War 2, England faced issues of national identity, economic anxiety, fears of nuclear war, and radical youth movements that provided a catalytic backdrop for postpunk's emergence as a form of artistic expression (Reynolds 2005, 1). More of postpunk's development will be discussed within chapter one.

In *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, Author Robert Pattison argues that rock music is a vulgar art form of Romanticism. While his argument is convincing, he verifies his argument through predominately connecting rock lyrics with Romantic generalizations, which lack the context of literature, poetry and fragments of the movement.

"Romanticism is not an historical past," he writes, "but a vivid present with all its power experienced fresh" (Pattison 1987, 86). He relays a plethora of Romantic concepts, such as "The Romantic cherishes childhood and youth," (98) and "Rock shares with

Romanticism a habit and a pattern of fragmentation” (105). He writes that at a foundational level rock was born as musical expressions of “primitive yearnings” (36). These statements are true, but they do not provide the reader with the contextual origins in German Romanticism. Childhood innocence, fragmentation and primal unity are all concepts within the German Romantic movement, but without Pattison’s reference to the German sources, it is unclear what the connection between contemporary rock and German Romanticism might be. Pattison should be referencing Schiller’s essay *Über Naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, or Friedrich Schlegel’s theoretical contributions in the *Athenaeum*. Schiller writes of the primitive yearnings that Pattison refers to, and Schlegel’s *Athenaeum* Fragment 116 announces Romanticism as “eine progressive Universalpoesie” that “ist noch im Werden,” and “daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann” (Schlegel 1967, 181-182). The works of Reynolds and Pattison lack the sufficient content that connects postpunk and German Romanticism. An analysis is needed on the ways in which postpunk borrows topics from German Romanticism, yielding to a richer understanding of both the contemporary music scene as well as the enduring contribution of German thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century. Therefore, this thesis will analyze German Romanticism’s dark connection to the lyrics and lyricists representative of the postpunk ethos in rock music. I will analyze the experiences of these self-expressive artists, and interpret their lyrics in relation to the writings of Novalis, Heinrich Heine, Friedrich Schiller, E.T.A. Hoffman and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The postpunk lyricists of this study are Ian Curtis of Joy Division, Robert Smith of The Cure, and Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins. Much like the German Romantics of the nineteenth century, they struggle to balance reality with imagination, with both

groups channeling their social disillusion, infinite desires, and existential despairs through self-expressive art.

What is this disillusion experienced by both the German Romantics and postpunk lyricists? Romantic disillusion is a springboard for postpunk's commitment to authentic expression of the inner soul, and this is specifically evident within the lyrics of Curtis, Smith and Corgan. These Romantics "suchen unsere Blicke nach dem Entschwundenen," but there is only "überall Staub, Sand, Erstarrung, Verschmachten" (Nietzsche 1954, 112-113). Disillusions arose out of the growing divide between the material and spiritual, the past and present, and reality and fantasy.

One of the tendencies within the movement was to withdraw from everyday life, from reality, by means of feeling, imagination, and spirit. Whatever the reason for this escape from life – the reason was more apt to be sought in the historical situation and in the dissatisfaction with existing conditions than in fear of the responsibility that awaited the German bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century – there was no doubt that escape was the main concern (Hofrichter 1963, 10).

Modern scientific progress embodies the continuous striving for human development. Enlightenment ideas of absolutism and empiricism awakened German Romanticism as a reactionary movement against the universal creed of reason. The Romantic artists chose artistic autonomy and the individuality of the mind and ego over the Enlightenment limitations on perspective and life (Cranston 1994, 27). Romantic art reflected the desire to return to life before the authority of reason, where a sense of spiritual wholeness and unity were perceived to have existed between the human soul and nature. The spiritual aspects of life were fragmented by the scientific relegation of nature into a lifeless study of matter. Schlegel writes, "Viele Werke der Alten sind Fragmente geworden. Viele Werke der Neuern sind des gleich bei der Entstehung" (Schlegel 1967, 168). Modern

civil society brought forth “division within the self,” a “decline of the traditional community,” and “division between nature and self,” all resulting in *Entfremdung*, or alienation (Beiser 2003, 31). Modern man and modern art were seen as fragmented by the German Romantics, having lost a former harmony and completeness within the soul in exchange for human development. The fate of man was put into the hands of science, absent of god and religion. The writing of Romantic fragments in a way reflects this modern fragmentation through the interaction and counteraction of ideas both systematic and unsystematic (Behler 1993, 133). The Romantic mission became harmonizing oscillating antitheses such as modernity with antiquity and the Romantic with the Classic. Romantic art would aim to merge science with literature, poetry and philosophy to achieve a new wholeness and unity within art (131). The authoritative rise of reason suppressed spirituality and myth, with the early German Romantics seeking to unify the two opposing approaches to art and life. Friedrich Nietzsche reflects upon this modern divide.

Es gibt keine andere Kunstperiode, in der sich die sogenannte Bildung und die eigentliche Kunst so befremdet und abgeneigt gegenübergestanden hätten, als wir das in der Gegenwart mit Augen sehn (Nietzsche 1954, 111).

These hostilities, in their persistent animosity, stir up within the soul an “intellectual longing” for an “ultimately elusive closure,” and the creation of Romantic art became a place to relay the inner struggles of the soul (Pfau 2005, 229, 235). We will see that these struggles reappear within the late twentieth century lyrics of Curtis, Smith and Corgan, specifically regarding disillusion and disorder in urban life, primitive yearning for innocence, and tension in art. The progress of science and reason continue to inflict

melancholy upon the modern soul, with the goal of romantic striving and longing for unity and wholeness reemerging within the postpunk ethos.

German Philosopher Friedrich Schelling, inspired by philosopher Johann Fichte's system of Idealism, saw art as a mediator between the physical and spiritual, with artistic creation unifying them into one whole entity (Schultz 2020). Friedrich Nietzsche takes this approach through music in his book *Die Geburt des Tragödie*.

Wir werden viel für die ästhetische Wissenschaft gewonnen haben, wenn wir nicht nur zur logischen Einsicht, sondern zur unmittelbaren Sicherheit der Anschauung gekommen sind, daß die Fortentwicklung der Kunst an die Duplizität des *Apollinischen* und des *Dionysischen* gebunden ist (Nietzsche 1954, 21).

He insists upon the unification of *Dionysian* art, where emotional ecstasy and pain are merged with the plastic forces of form and restraint in *Apollonian* art (22-24). The synthesis of this duality in art is in itself a form of unification like Schlegel's vision for a universal and progressive Romantic poetry. Unity in art, whether in poetry or music, is an ideal requiring the synthesis of contradictory forces in order to reach completion. As mentioned previously with the Romantic fragment, this mission is a holistic approach for the artist to combine opposites such as reason with feeling, sensibility with imagination and structure with spontaneity (Gorodeinsky 2016). For many of the German Romantics, merging these conflicting forces served to be a difficult task. In the late twentieth century, this struggle also arises in the lyricism of Curtis, Smith and Corgan as they each grapple with Romantic ideals for wholeness, infinite time, and artistic perfection. These postpunk Romantics, as they ponder their visions and dreams, are approached by temptations to withdraw from reality and replace its insufficiencies with greater things.

It is important to clarify why Curtis, Smith and Corgan are described in the chapters below as relaying themes of *dark* German Romanticism. Dark German Romanticism arises from disillusion with modern reality, leading to solipsistic withdrawal. Withdrawn into the mind, the artist uses the imagination as a place of inspiration. It serves as a safe haven from the terrors and horrors of modern reality, limitless in its expanse to enrapture the mind with Romantic *ideals*. These ideals can be defined as a desired state or condition conceived within the imagination as a satisfying replacement for the insufficiencies of life. They are *infinite* ideals, because the desired outcome is immeasurable or unachievable within the physical realm. Problems therefore arise when the Romantic artist fixates upon this inward ideal and forgoes the normal sensory foundation of real life. When a Romantic ideal expands into the all-consuming object of desire, the results can be disastrous existentially and artistically. Fantasy, left unchecked, has the potential to consume the artist.

The conflict between reality and infinite ideals is at the core of dark German Romanticism's reemergence within the postpunk ethos of Curtis, Smith and Corgan. The chapters below will analyze their brooding lyrics and experiences as rock artists connected to the nineteenth century movement. Their Romantic pursuits push the limit of their finite capabilities, and they each face an inner struggle to choose between life and death, as well as art and expectation. German Romanticism has many examples of self-destruction and re-invention for those ensnared by the infinite ideal. To escape the catacombs of their solipsism, these postpunk Romantics can choose to follow the path of Novalis and Heine in self-contradiction and re-invention, or tragically sink into the existential abyss with Hoffmann's Nathaniel and Goethe's Werther.

The rise of dark Romantic expression within the postpunk ethos exemplifies German Romanticism as a *progressive* force resurfacing well beyond the nineteenth century, continuing its transcendent march into the postpunk ethos. This phenomenon will continue onward, reappearing whenever rebellion, disillusion and despair surface within the artistic soul. This dark cataclysm of artistic expression will be found blossoming amidst the gardens of modern industrialization, technological development and social unrest. Ian Curtis, Robert Smith and Billy Corgan, in their artistic expressions of disorder, disillusion and trauma, plunge into the darkness of German Romanticism.

CHAPTER 1

IAN CURTIS AND THE ABYSS OF TRUE IDEALISM

Someone take these dreams away
That points me to another day
A duel of personalities
That stretch all true realities
– Ian Curtis, “Dead Souls,” *Licht und Blindheit*

The conventions of modern bourgeois society often make an artist feel isolated. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution induced yearnings for a pre-Enlightenment state of society, before the invasion of the alien and artificial. In the 1970s, the industrial city of Manchester, England served as a breeding ground for disenchanted musicians yearning for more in life. These yearnings, though centuries apart, present Romanticism as a sickness of the soul stretching beyond the original movement. Friedrich Schiller diagnoses its persistence in his essay *Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung*.

Mit schmerzlichem Verlangen sehnen wir uns dahin zurück, sobald wir angefangen, die Drangsale der Kultur zu erfahren, und hören im fernen Auslande der Kunst der Mutter rührende Stimme. Solange wir bloße Naturkinder waren, waren wir glücklich und vollkommen; wir sind frei geworden und haben beides verloren (Schiller 1962, 706-707).

Humanity impetuously fled happiness for freedom of the mind, and the consequences were death to the naïve artist and the deconstruction of myth. “The trouble with demystification,” writes Author Simon Reynolds, “is that it strips the world of superstition and sentimentality, but also eliminates intuition and other non-rational forms of perception and awareness” (Reynolds 2005, 68). The modern artist, because of an

increasingly alien world, yearns for the lost, longs for the return to a naive world of immediate happiness. To experience these phenomena, the artist withdraws into a metaphysical space of ideals (Röder 2003, 3). There, in this haven, the artist reaches beyond for the extraordinary, swaying back and forth between “memory and presentiment” (Behler 1993, 103). Manchester’s bleak aesthetics exemplified how far modern empiricism and materialism had progressed in stripping humans off spirit and myth. Amidst the disillusion of Manchester, art would serve as an escape from the city’s dreariness, and one artist, Ian Curtis of Joy Division, would use the lyric to yearn for his escape.

Reynolds, in his postpunk handbook *Rip It Up and Start Again*, writes, “Joy Division’s music grappled with both the problems and possibilities of human existence in an increasingly technological world” (Reynolds 2005, 103). Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, also notes of scientific progress’ unpleasant effects on man.

Und nun steht der mythenlose Mensch, ewig hungernd, unter allen
Vergangenheiten und sucht grabend und wühlend nach Wurzeln, sei es
daß er auch in den entlegensten Altertümern nach ihnen graben müßte
(Nietzsche 1954, 124).

The band mates of Joy Division were stripped off myth, and they were led to create music in order to satisfy their souls. Their music had an aura to it that was alien yet unnervingly claustrophobic. The mechanical drumming of Stephen Morris, the melodic bass of Peter Hook and the choppy guitar of Bernard Sumner manifested modern urban decay through sound and rhythm. Atop the instrumentation was singer Ian Curtis’ harrowing voice, deep and brooding with lyrics projecting alienation and disillusionment. Ian Curtis’ lyrics were organically dark, melancholic, and moody unlike anything previously expressed in rock music.

From 1964 to 1967 the Beatles intellectualized rock by approaching it as artists rather than professionals or entertainers. They wrote rock for thinking rather than for dancing, and they did these things in self-awareness (Covach 2006, 38). *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* saw the band adopting the notions of genius and inspiration from the Romantic Movement. The Dionysian excess of psychedelic experimentation along with lyrics of alienation and disillusion elevated the music into an aesthetic experience (38). An example of this is the track 'I'm Only Sleeping' (Lennon, 1966) on *Rubber Soul*, where backtracked, or backward, arpeggios are used to evoke a sense of apathy and abandonment from life.¹ The lyrics complement this mood stating, "please don't spoil my day, I'm wide awake, and after all I'm only sleeping." What gives the Beatles genius is their naive approach to art, where inner harmony and unity is possessed. The genius creates through childlike simplicity, disregarding both audiences and critics hovering over the artist's shoulder as they work. It is art for art's sake, limiting the influence of external criticism. Only through a naive approach could the Beatles experiment with their music without worrying over repercussions. Ultimately, they broke down the wall between "high" and "mass" culture (Gleed 2006, 163). Now, any bourgeois dreamer could aspire to be a rock artist. This served both as a blessing and a curse though, depending on what one wanted to evoke within their art. As with anything popular within a consumer-centered society, there was potential for commercial exploitation. In what Nietzsche conceives as *Dionysian* art (Nietzsche 1954, 80), the excess of experimentation and raw emotion folded into safe commercial soft rock for the radio airways. Record labels and radio stations frantically

¹ The Beatles, "I'm Only Sleeping (Remastered 2009)," *Revolver*, YouTube video, 3:00, June 17, 2018, <https://youtu.be/BT5j9OQ7Sh0>

searched for the heir to the Beatles, yet this obsession with creating a rock star for monetary gain watered down artistic authenticity. Much of the rock industry began to focus on feeding the consumer and critic, with the “flabby leftover ideas of the sixties” degenerating into complacent hedonism by the seventies (Reynolds 2005, 78). Where was Dionysian self-expression in rock during the 1970s, with the awes and terrors of human pain presented in their basic forms? The vulgarity and rebellious nature of rock music was meant to drive humanity toward seeing the world deeper than it otherwise would (Nietzsche 1954, 103). Rock was supposed to be the music of the counterculture, music of emotional release, reflection, and expression in the face of modern reality. But rather than reflect upon these awes and terrors of individual existence, rock withdrew into *Apollonian* restraint. The plastic forces of Apollo allowed the masses to escape the harsh conditions of reality, submerging them into music of illusion and form (80). One of these developments was punk music, and the subgenre’s Apollonian extremities opened the door to welcome the return of the Dionysian.

Punk rock formed in the mid-1970s as a reaction to the dominance of soft rock, by forging a unity between working class kids and “arty middle-class visionaries” (Reynolds 2005, 87). Punk brought forth a “generation of youth with its DIY attitude toward music, fashion pins and thrift shops, and contempt for mass market music culture” (Bibby 2007, 1). The genre’s message was rooted in protest and defiance. In England, the genre served as a medium to demand change amidst unstable socioeconomics under Margaret Thatcher. Unemployment was on the rise, students protested in the streets, and the IRA terrorized the British mainland with bombings. Social unrest brought forth desires for change, along with new forms of artistic expression (Reynolds 2005, 54). Punk

demanded action and social change, and yet, despite the genre's passionate message, the music would degenerate into a commercial formula (1). The subgenre was plagued by Apollonian restraint in its "militant and anti-sexual anarchy," with rhythm and structure prioritized over melody (Bibby, 2007, 1-2). "Die Melodie gebiert die Dichtung aus sich" writes Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (Nietzsche 1954, 40). Melody is essential for the musician seeking to emulate poetic beauty in music. Punk rock relied on verse-chorus structures, 4/4-time signatures and three or four chord progressions blanketed by atonal shouts. Along with being formulaic, punk struggled to progress into new terrains sonically, and by 1977, punk was paralyzed in its uniformity (Schuftan 2009, 11).

Expressing rage against corporate capitalism and protesting against government corruption was noble, but the lack of *self*-expression was disenchanting. "We thought the punks never learned from the failure of the hippies," said Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo. "Rebellion always gets co-opted into another marketing device" (Reynolds 2005, 79).

Punk would split two ways into hardcore and postpunk. Art students seeking an experimental lifestyle outside of school propelled the postpunk movement, challenging the boundaries of punk by using literature, history and personal experiences for new ideas. As hardcore punk sought to create music that was assessable and unpretentious, postpunk saw an opportunity to break from tradition (1-2). Hardcore punk would be political, dismissive of the past, and the voice of progressive inclusiveness. Postpunk would be predominately apolitical and solipsistic in its message, though their audiences' interest in the music was perhaps political in listening as an act of rebellion against parents and the status quo. Joy Division was a postpunk band, and this was due to Ian Curtis' lyrics of pain and disorder, as well as the dark soundscape of the band as a whole.

Joy Division would set the stage for dark German Romanticism as a force within rock music. Curtis' lyrical lamentations were a darker form of self-expression that emphasized mood and transparency, reinstating the Dionysian voice within the genre. His pain-laced lyrics would be an inspiration for the blossoming of melancholy rock during the 1980s and 1990s (Bush 2020).

Joy Division's singer and lyricist Ian Curtis was emblematic of psychological despair. He was a tortured poet in every aspect of his life, and his lyrics expressed moodiness distant from punk's vision for social progress. Author Michael Bibby, in his book *Goth: Undead Subculture*, describes this moodiness as stemming from a place of powerlessness (Bibby 2007, 107). Curtis and Joy Division were powerless amidst the bleak backdrop of industrial Manchester. The band mates wanted escape; they wanted more than an ordinary life in bourgeois society. "Nobody starts a band so they can stay in their hometown," says bassist Peter Hook. "You yearn for London and Paris and America and all that – all the freedom that comes with it" (Hook 2013, 173). These desires resemble the German Romantic's desire to seek the extraordinary. The Romantics desired the extraordinary for the individual, something industrialized uniformity failed to provide. Joy Division's members desired extraordinary experiences by seeking to move beyond Manchester's hindrances toward their individuality. To them, Manchester offered little for personal successes and achievements, and their desire to escape the shackles of industrial oppression was perhaps the symbolism and origin behind their name. 'Joy Division' came from the 1965 novel *House of Dolls*, written by a holocaust survivor using her prison number as her penname. It is written from the point of view of a girl, perhaps the author herself, who is sent to Auschwitz's 'Freudenabteilung;' its 'joy

division,' where "females were kept as sex slaves for German troops returning from the Russian warfront" (Reynolds, 2005, 111). Drummer Stephen Morris argued that the name has to do with the prisoners rather than the oppressors, and this makes sense from a Romantic point of view. The factory worker, enchained by an industrial oppressor, is reduced to only a number or mechanical unit serving as a means to produce for a master entity. Stripped of their individuality, their purpose is to work for someone else's financial gain. The factory worker functions as a machine in this environment, rather than as a human. 'Joy Division' served as a metaphor for the band's perceived enslavement to ordinary industrial life in Manchester, where the creative elements of the human soul are restrained to working paycheck to paycheck for someone else's prosperity. "It was the flipside of it," Morris says, "Rather than being the master race, the oppressed rather than the oppressor" (111). Manchester represented the "joy division" of industrial progress. Together they yearned to escape their metropolitan oppressor, yet singer and lyricist Ian Curtis would yearn for a different type of escape. Curtis was a Romantic visionary and intellectual in the band. His lyrics expressed the idealization of an ordinary life beyond his extraordinary disorders. Curtis had interest in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, Herman Hesse and William Burroughs. Science fiction and existentialism were topics of great interest. He also enjoyed contemplating the realities of mental illness and disorder (112). Science fiction perhaps interested Curtis, because it offered him the freedom to stretch the imagination beyond his present darkness. His interest in mental illness was either a foreshadowing or the result of his own condition, as he was diagnosed with a severe form of photosensitive epilepsy on January 23, 1979 (Hook 2013, 149).

Depression and epileptic seizures seized control over his life, and he spent his time moving forward searching and hoping to regain that control.

Romantic artists each react differently to the process of disillusionment depending on their particular experiences and ideals (Röder 2003, 5). Some respond with self-understanding, while others experience an existential crisis leading to self-destruction. Predating the Romantic Movement, Goethe's Sturm und Drang novel, *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, portrays the tragic demise of a young idealistic man named Werther, who hopes for an impossible love that eventually ends in his suicide. Goethe's novel raises awareness of the harrowing effects of mental illness before the development of modern medicine, showcasing the power of Dionysian art in revealing the horrors of reality. Other German Romantic works highlight the conflict between idealization and reality via the figure of the artist, with the Romantic artist seeking to attain their absolute ideal through self-expression and art. Friedrich Schlegel writes "Nicht die Kunst und die Werke machen den Künstler, sondern der Sinn und die Begeisterung und der Trieb" (Schlegel 1963, 63). The solipsistic idealist finds his motives within himself, and Ian Curtis's motives are the driving force within the music of Joy Division. His idealized life is one beyond the oppression of his neurosis. As an artist in his early twenties with depression, domestic conflict and epilepsy, Curtis loses control of reality, and he falls into an inescapable abyss.

Joy Division's first full-length record, *Unknown Pleasures*, was completed in May 1979 (Hook, 2013, 267). From the very first verse of the opening track 'Disorder,' (Joy Division, 1979) Curtis yearns for a different life.²

² Joy Division, "Disorder," *Unknown Pleasures*, YouTube video, 3:29, November 8, 2014, <https://youtu.be/5BIEITtN6Fs>

I've been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand
Could these sensations make me feel the pleasures of a normal man
These sensations barely interest me for another day
I've got the spirit, lose the feeling, take the shock away

The poet is unable to reach this alternate world where normal pleasures and normal sensations run free. He therefore needs help beyond his current limited state. The title of the song tells us that this guide is to come and free him from disorder, which in the case of Curtis would be his epilepsy. His lyrics were about his personal experiences. The usage of the words “sensation,” “feeling” and “pleasure” are human emotions that can relate the singer to the listener. Curtis invites the audience into his struggles for pleasure and good feelings, and he sings with transparency of a reality that would induce awe and terror. The music takes the audience deeper than just Apollonian illusion. The distant sound of the guitar evokes the sublime as one is forced to join Curtis in looking beyond toward a distant place. Both sound and lyric are synthesized thematically. With these lyrics of yearning for his ideal, his art represented his current reality, revolutionizing the image of the rock artist. The band members were strikingly oblivious to what was truly happening in Curtis' life domestically and psychologically. Peter Hook writes that Curtis never shared anything about his issues. His marriage to Deborah Woodruff at nineteen years old had been unhappy from the start, but it would deteriorate even more with the increasingly occurring epileptic fits (Bonasia 17). Though the instrumentation was grim, Hook, Sumner and Morris never truly took the time to listen to the lyrics, only focusing on their instruments and synergy. “It was only after we recorded *Unknown Pleasures* that I could begin to take notice of the words, and it was quite startling then to see how they changed between that album...to *Closer*, which is even darker” (Hook 2013, 173). The lyrics of ‘Disorder’ continue into a specific depiction of a location,

It's getting faster moving, moving faster now, it's getting out of hand
On the tenth floor, down the backstairs, it's a no man's land
Lights are flashing, cars are crashing, getting frequent now

The specificity of the scene, with context of what is actually happening, is disorienting to the listener (Yi 2015). Curtis is relaying to the audience a specific experience of an epileptic fit, and he uses his words to present a picture of the scene. Curtis would often dance to the beat of Joy Division's songs on stage in Dionysian abandon, with erratic style mimicking the flail of his epileptic fits. Both on and off stage he was human. The lines "It's getting out of hand" and "getting frequent now" are signs of Curtis' worsening condition, and that perhaps the epileptic fits were increasing. The singer continues his laments of pain going forward lyrically on *Unknown Pleasures*.

The second track, 'Day of the Lords' (Joy Division 1979) is a reflection on life and death.³

This is the room, the start of it all
No portraits so fine, only sheets on the wall
I've seen the nights, filled with blood sport and pain
And the bodies obtained the bodies obtained

The room could be a hospital room, with sheets hanging like walls around a patient in labor. It could also be his childhood bedroom, with nights of pain and the quickening loss of innocence (Bonasia 2017). Blood sport is typically defined as hunting or killing for sport or entertainment, and perhaps Curtis sees birth as such. Birth involuntarily throws one into the blood sport of a competitive world ruled by pain. Using "bodies" instead of babies could imply that one is dead at birth, that perhaps to experience life is death itself. Novalis' fourteenth *Blütenstaub* fragment gives some insight to unraveling the metaphor.

"Leben ist der Anfang des Todes. Das Leben ist um des Todes willen" (Novalis 1960-

³ Joy Division, "Day of the Lords," *Unknown Pleasures*, YouTube video, 4:48, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/WhgaY4fuUvo>

1977, 415). With the mindset that life is the beginning of death, man is really born to die. Only time delays the inevitable. The child's birth is therefore not a celebratory event, but rather a funeral, with the world a massive graveyard. These metaphors expose deep disillusionment with life, and echo the lamentations of Heinrich Heine in his poem *Morphine* (Heine 1972, 433).

Gut ist der Schlaf, der Tod ist besser – freilich
Das beste wäre, nie geboren sein

Ian Curtis, like Heine, saw his neurosis so unbearable that living with it seemed inadequate. Though there are hopes for better days, there is skepticism in ever seeing them.

Curtis' sadness over the inadequacies of his life is an expression of the Romantic's *Weltschmerz*, or "world pain". Author Wilhelm Alfred Braun generally defines it in his book *Types of Weltschmerz in German Poetry*.

Weltschmerz may be defined as the poetic expression of an abnormal sensitiveness of the feelings to the moral and physical evils and misery of existence. It is usually characterized also by a certain lack of will-energy, a sort of sentimental yielding to these painful emotions. It is therefore entirely a matter of "Gemüt" (Braun 1966, 1).

In the track 'Insight,' (Joy Division 1979) Curtis expresses this description of *Weltschmerz* masked in a deceptive confidence. "I'm not afraid anymore," he sings.⁴ This confidence is misleading, as it is more so an expression of giving up, where he lacks the "will-energy" mentioned by Braun above. Numb and apathetic, the artist watches as the dream begins to fade away.

Yeah we wasted our time
We didn't really have time
But we remember when we were young

⁴ Joy Division, "Insight," *Unknown Pleasures*, YouTube video, 4:27, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/owjTYe4K1hk>

The worldly bliss sought is distant and infinite, far beyond the artist's reach. 'Insight' is Curtis declaring that he is done trying to fight. In 'New Dawn Fades,' (Joy Division 1979) Curtis sounds closer to his breaking point.⁵

The strain is too much
Can't take it anymore
It was me, waiting for me
Hoping for something more

Pressure builds, as the darkness refuses to release its grip. The lines "A loaded gun won't set you free" and "A change of scene, with no regrets" reveals the contemplation of suicide, although disregarded as an unsatisfactory option. Lastly in 'Shadowplay,' (Joy Division 1979) Curtis' disorders seek him out everywhere, with the journey ending in the same room as in 'Day of the Lords.'⁶ Whether it is a hospital room or bedroom, this room is the origin of Curtis' neurosis (Bonasia 2017). *Unknown Pleasures* is the revival of dark German Romantic expression by an artist experiencing an existential crisis.

Joy Division's 1980 album *Closer* was their final studio album. It is an ethereal album, with self-expression again as the basis of the lyrics. Death is written all over the album, with the cover art depicting a marble tomb. The tranquilizers Curtis took to control his epilepsy were clouding his judgment, further alienating him and intensifying his introverted tendencies. He was losing his sense of reality (Reynolds 2005, 116). The album experiments more than the band's debut *Unknown Pleasures*, introducing synthesizers throughout multiple tracks. The experimentation also extends to the lyricism, with self-expression furthering into morbidity. On the opening track, 'Atrocity

⁵ Joy Division, "New Dawn Fades," *Unknown Pleasures*, YouTube video, 4:52, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/7j5LmyNNsrE>

⁶ Joy Division, "Shadowplay," *Unknown Pleasures*, YouTube video, 3:54, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/Dvgbk4MkHF8>

Exhibition,' (Joy Division 1980) Curtis is cryptic, and the band experiments with dissonance and tribal drumming.⁷ He compares the band's performance venue to an asylum, where people come only to watch his body twist, as if they come to be entertained by his misery. At this point he expresses not only disillusionment with life, but fatigue in expressing authenticity. He cannot turn off the self-expression though, and Curtis sings "This is the way, step inside," inviting the listener to join him in his suffering. The album continues with the motif of self-defeat. The next track 'Isolation,' (Joy Division 1980) is Curtis expressing shame of the person he is.⁸ As the album progresses, the music gradually decelerates. Fatigue with life is setting in, but the artist continues to devote his heart to music. 'Heart and Soul' reflects this fatigue and apathy with existence, along with losing control over one's life.⁹ The final track, 'Decades,' (Joy Division 1980) looks back at all the events in life that have unfolded, while imagining what life could have been.¹⁰ The music has perhaps the most uplifting melody on the album, as if the artist has finally finished the battle, with contentment knowing at last he will be free. The lyrics reveal Curtis approaching the abyss.

Here are the young men, the weight on their shoulders
Here are the young me, well where have they been?
We knocked on the door of hells darker chambers
Pushed to the limit, we dragged ourselves in

Curtis is paralyzed; trapped with an inevitable outcome of death. He reflects an artist submitting to what Schiller calls *wahren Idealismus*, or "true Idealism," in which the

⁷ Joy Division, "Atrocity Exhibition," *Closer*, YouTube video, 6:04, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/NwGp0BCuWAE>

⁸ Joy Division, "Isolation," *Closer*, 2:56, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/5wY7OjWkbml>

⁹ Joy Division, "Heart and Soul," *Closer*, YouTube video, 5:54, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/atXB3qQ5CPU>

¹⁰ Joy Division, "Decades," *Closer*, YouTube video, 6:15, January 25, 2017, <https://youtu.be/5-SZraSMiEc>

mind forgoes all rational and moral limitations (Schiller 1962, 778-779). At the end of *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, Schiller describes its dangers.

Der wahre Idealist verläßt nur deswegen die Natur und Erfahrung, weil er hier das Unwandelbare und unbedingt Notwendige nicht findet, wonach die Vernunft ihn doch streben heißt (779).

Curtis's moral restraint collapsed first. He was pushed to venture beyond his moral boundaries for his ideal life, and it led to a platonic affair with the French journalist Annik Honoré (Hook 2013, 215). Though never physically intimate, their relationship provided Curtis with an escape from his domestic troubles. It also served him with a fragmentary glimpse into normal life (294). Nevertheless, Curtis could not be saved, and he pressed further and further beyond the limits of reason. On Sunday, April 27 1980, on the date of Joy Division's American tour debut, Curtis took his own life at the age of 24.

With his decline into true idealism, Curtis shares many similarities with the previously mentioned proto-Romantic figure of Werther. Werther is infatuated with a young woman named Lotte, who is already engaged to a man named Albert (Goethe 1945, 18-27). Werther cannot accept her engagement as being reality, because it does not fall in line with his idealizations with her. He continuously convinces himself that it's really him that she loves, and that Albert is irrelevant (85-86, 116). He continues to seek an idealized life with her, and in doing so he struggles to differentiate reality from his fantasy. Werther's sanity disintegrates throughout the course of the novel, and eventually he comes face to face with the impossibility of achieving his ideal.

Es ist beschlossen, Lotte, ich will sterben, und das schreibe ich dir ohne romantische Überspannung, gelassen, an dem Morgen des Tages, an dem ich dich zum letzten Male sehen werde (103).

As he cannot accept a different reality, one without Lotte, he responds by committing suicide. For Werther, the Romantic ideal was a life with Lotte, and for Curtis it was a life free of disorder. The ideal consumes them with such great intensity, that any alternative outcome leads to self-destruction. They chose the lighter existence within death, as the *Athenaeum* fragment says, “Der Tod ist eine Selbstbesiegung, die wie alle Selbstüberwindung, eine neue leichtere Existenz verschafft” (Novalis 1960-1977, Fragment 292). Curtis wanted the extraordinary dream of an ordinary life, where he could experience the pleasures and sensations of a normal man. For Werther, the only life he would accept was his solipsistic fantasy, and by the end of the novel, Schiller’s notion of true idealism takes its toll.

Ian Curtis’ mental illnesses distorted his view of the world, and he looked upon it as a graveyard, where life was inverted and replaced by death. As previously stated, each Romantic artist reacts differently to disillusion, and as for Curtis, he had his own desire for an infinite ideal beyond his finite disorders. Unfortunately for Curtis, his poetic self-expression could not help him manage the darkness, and it served to verify his inability to escape. Curtis’ lyrical portrayal of neurosis displayed the shocking reality of mental illness in modern society, much like Werther had in the eighteenth century. His lyrics revived the Dionysian excess of human emotions, moving from the universal to the individual. In doing this, the artistic focus becomes one man’s fate, rather than the fate of all humanity.

Moving forward, Joy Division’s implosion would inspire the rise of melancholy rock, specifically gothic rock, where individual expression is shrouded in darkness and despair. Joy Division provided postpunk the courage to expand beyond punk’s rigidity

and formulaic restraint, opening the doors to raw individual expression in rock. Acts such as The Cure, the Smiths, and Depeche Mode focused intently on dark lyricism as a result of Joy Division's infamous demise, releasing music that sought to imitate the pain and disillusion Curtis had expressed. Joy Division would reform into the new wave group New Order, where they would pioneer dance rock in the 1980s by blending synthpop, postpunk and house. Guitarist Bernard Sumner replaces Curtis on vocals, moving the band away from his pain-stricken lyrics. Curtis' decision to take his own life, though tragic, immortalized him as the proto type of authentic expression in rock. His death serves as a dark reminder of one's limitations when pursuing Romantic ideals. It also brings awareness to disorder and disillusion in modern life. The music of Joy Division exemplifies dark German Romanticism as a modern phenomenon progressing and transcending beyond the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

ROBERT SMITH AND THE LIMITATIONS OF TIME

Remember how it used to be,
When the sun would fill the sky
Remember how it used to feel
Those days would never end

– Robert Smith, “To Wish Impossible Things,” *Wish*

The German Romantic lyric often reflects disillusion with the artist’s present reality. As observed with Ian Curtis in Chapter 1, the Romantic artist looks forward to an ideal state of existence in the future. Curtis’ idealization had been self-reliant and, since it was only he who could seek this new and sufficient life for himself. The realization of its impossibility had driven him to the only alternative of death. Joy Division was the pioneer of solipsistic rock, where politics and reality were replaced by repressed desires of the soul. After Curtis’ suicide, the post-punk scene expanded creatively into various subgenres. One of these subgenres was the antimodernist movement of gothic rock. ‘Gothic,’ was used to describe the atmosphere of the music, with Joy Division’s producer Martin Hannett describing the band as “dancing music with gothic overtones” (Reynolds 2005, 351). Gothic rock served as a return of repressed longings expelled by the Industrial Revolution, with the subgenre relaying Romantic themes such as love, superstition, despair and even death. Postpunk historian Simon Reynolds gives a detailed description of the soundscape.

“...Scything guitar patterns, high-pitched Joy Division basslines that usurped the melodic role, beats that were either hypnotically dirgelike or ‘tribal’ in some ethnically indeterminate Burundi-meets-Apache way, and vocals that were either near operatic and Teutonic or deep, droning alloys of Jim Morrison and Ian Curtis” (353).

Tribal instrumentation goes back to the Beatles of the 1960s and resurfaces within postpunk and gothic rock. Siouxsie and the Banshees, Talking Heads and The Slit were some of the groups to incorporate afrobeat and dub into postpunk. The usage of instruments such as congas, steel drums and sitars symbolized a return to the ancient and primitive, with a soundscape more in tune with nature than the artificiality of electronic instrumentation.

One group that would become a staple of the gothic rock movement had a front man struggling with the limits of time. Robert Smith of The Cure was a melancholy lyricist and guitarist anticipating the day of his inevitable death. His childhood imagination and fixation with time served foundational to his ideal. He wished to escape his imprisonment in time, and he used the rock lyric to yearn for his distant world of immortal youth (Apter 2009, 12-15). This chapter is an analysis of The Cure’s front man, Robert Smith, as a Romantic dreamer self-destructive in yearning for a Romantic ideal outside of time and modern disillusion. It is also an analysis of his decision to balance contradictory extremities in art to overcome his ideal. Like the German Romantic poet Novalis, Smith experiences melancholy due to loss and limitations in time (Roger 154). He is an artist discontent with the finite realm, where the offerings of this world are never enough. Smith always wants more, and his irrational expectations to escape from reality forever nearly sends him into the existential abyss with Ian Curtis (Schuftan 2009, 97).

“Crawley is grey and uninspiring,” reflects Robert Smith upon his hometown. “It’s a dreadful place. There’s nothing there” (Apter 2009, 2). Like Joy Division, the catalyst for The Cure’s musical career arose from bourgeois disillusionment with an ordinary life. There was a desire for something beyond, a desire for the extraordinary. From a young age, Smith’s active imagination pushed him with great interest toward the infinite and extraordinary life. Before his move to Crawley in 1966, Smith’s childhood began in Blackpool, a seaside town in North Western England. He carries his memories of the sea with him to Crawley, and he associates its idyllic image with a former “happiness and childhood innocence” (10). The German Romantic writer Novalis echoes this phenomenon, “Wo Kinder sind, da ist ein goldenes Zeitalter” (Novalis, 1960, 453). This association of Smith’s struck him with an incurable homesickness, as he desired to return to a home no longer standing. All that’s left of home for Smith is the fragmented memories and sensations of youth. “Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein” (Novalis 1993, 857). Life became a sojourn of ceaseless wandering. He can never return to his childhood, and he knows it. Smith reflects,

I have such strong memories of it: the promenade, the beach, the smell, it’s a magical memory, that evocative time of innocence and wonder. My earliest memories are sitting on the beach in Blackpool and I know if I went back, it would be horrible. I know what Blackpool’s like – its nothing like I imagined it as a child (Apter 2009, 12).

There was a freedom within the innocence and wonder of his youth. Now lost, this is the basis for Smith’s endless melancholy, as nothing satisfies him quite like those innocent years. On top of this, Smith grew to question the existence of God amidst a world deeply consumed by its own material gain. If one’s only focus in life was the pursuit of monetary wealth, what was the purpose of existence? “When you have no belief in

anything except yourself,” Smith declares, “you tend toward apathy” (30). Smith’s disillusion was the result of an industrialized world where monetary gain dictated one’s extrinsic worth. Therefore it was nature that Smith associated with happiness and innocence, because the natural and innocent existed long before industrialization. Smith’s memory of Blackpool’s shores is his only glimpse at pre-enlightenment primal unity. Friedrich Schiller writes, “Der Dichter, sagte ich, ist entweder Natur, oder er wird sie suchen. Jenes macht den naiven, dieses den sentimentalischen Dichter” (Schiller 1962, 715). Smith is a sentimental poet eventually discovering the unifying effects of pop music in gothic rock. But at first his lyrics reflect the hopeless Romantic pursuit for the unconditioned (Novalis 1960, 412). Smith’s poetic spirit proves unquenchable, as he endures in ceaseless self-expression (Schiller 1962, 715). As the lyricist and vocalist for The Cure, Smith expresses disillusion with reality, and he dreams of his escape from the darkness of life (Reynolds 2005, 357). These expressions of his are moody and vulnerable. His lyrics swing like a pendulum of emotions shifting back and forth between despair and desire.

When Robert Smith became the front man of The Cure, drummer and keyboardist Lol Tolhurst saw Smith’s self-expression as an opportunity to impact the world, although this opportunity came with its risks (Tolhurst 2016, 55).

“People want their rock stars to go further out on the edge and hang out there for a bit, take a good long look at that abyss, and then transmit what they find there into their art. Ian Curtis did it...and so did Robert Smith, except he didn’t just look at the abyss, he was on intimate terms with it” (61).

Curtis’s intimacy with the existential abyss was so intense that he allowed it to consume his life. Robert Smith would reach the edge of this same abyss, but he learns to

acknowledge it, and chooses to step back into reality, despite its insufficiencies. Curtis wanted escape from his life, while Smith wants escape from death. Smith will reach a breaking point as he unhealthily obsesses over time and his own mortality. He will have to come to terms with the impossibility of his ideal, and negotiate between reality and fantasy. Adult life shows itself to be much darker than childhood, and Smith decides that he will let the world know of its horrors. He has something to say about human experience, and he uses the lyric to express his melancholy message. The Romantic lyric is not characterized by uniformity, but rather characterized by individuality, and Smith's individuality stands out as he communicates his personal fluctuations between joy and cynicism (Ratliff 2016).

The Cure's 1979 debut album *Three Imaginary Boys* had been a disappointment in the eyes of Smith, as it did not sit well with him creatively. The album sounds conservative, lyrically restrained and far too similar to their punk contemporaries. Smith had visions beyond the fortified walls of punk rock, yet the music of *Three Imaginary Boys* exemplified just how hard it was for the band to break through. Fortunately two bands, Wire and the eccentric Siouxsie and the Banshees, had a profound impact upon Smith and the band. They were the catalysts that would inspire The Cure's breakout. Wire's 1977 debut *Pink Flag* hinted at a potential shift away from the punk sound, heard through the melodic chord progression of 'Ex Lion Tamer' (Wire 1977).¹¹ Yet it was their sophomore album *Chairs Missing* that showed the band completely abandoning their punk ties in 1978. Tracks such as 'Outdoor Miner' (Wire 1979) shockingly debuted

¹¹ Wire, "Ex Lion Tamer," *Pink Flag*, YouTube video, 2:19, December 16, 2019, <https://youtu.be/YOIBDZuetBY>

lush melodies and vocal harmonies distant from the punk formula.¹² Wire's departure from the punk ethos inspired The Cure to experiment with their sound. In Siouxsie and the Banshees, front woman Siouxsie Sioux declared herself to be "a thorn in the side of mediocrity" (Reynolds 2005, 355). The band's 1978 debut, *The Scream*, was void of political lyrics, instead reflecting upon the darkness of human life. Siouxsie's lyricism was inward and focused upon herself, and her vision eventually convinced Smith that he could do the same with his band. These inspirations allowed the band to remove the shackles of punk's rock, resulting in their 1980 album *17 Seconds*.

On *17 Seconds*, an ideal desire for something beyond reach is expressed within the lyrics. Novalis describes the exertion of one's effort towards an infinite goal as *Trunkenheit*, or "intoxication," which bares similarities to Nietzsche's description of Dionysian abandonment within art (Molnár 1987, 61). When Novalis meets Sophia von Kühn in November of 1794, he completely submits himself to the intoxicating effects of love. His love for her becomes a sensational abandonment of rational thought, and Sophia becomes the all-consuming ideal of his existence. He begins to experience love as an affirmation of freedom, just as Robert Smith recalls childhood innocence as an affirmation of freedom (66). Unfortunately for Smith and Novalis, time prevents these experiences from lasting forever. Death becomes the focus of Novalis' life with Sophie's death in 1797. Death gradually becomes the focus for Smith as well, as the innocence of his youth is lost. They become "death intoxicated romantics," with their worlds collapsing into spiritual emptiness and desolation (69). "Es ist Abend um mich geworden," Novalis writes after Sophie's death, "und es ist mir, als würde ich früh

¹² Wire, "Outdoor Miner," *Chairs Missing*, YouTube video, 1:44, November 29, 2019, <https://youtu.be/83fpEaEET7k>

weggehen” (71). The Cure’s album *17 Seconds* begins Smith’s decline into his existential despair, with the darkness intensifying with each new release.

The single from *17 Seconds*, ‘A Forest,’ (Cure 1980) relays an unattainable dream of a lovesick idealist.¹³ Like Novalis, the poet gives everything within his power to reach the desired goal, with the goal being unity with a girl. The music is bleak, reflecting the futile hopes of the poet as he searches for this idealized girl.

Come closer and see
See into the trees
Find the girl
While you can

The romantic ideal of unity and wholeness can only be found within the natural world, as post-enlightenment society can only offer fragmentation. The forest girl represents the unconditioned, a primitive wholeness. She holds intrinsic values, which exist outside of societies perversion. In his German Romantic novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis writes a mythical story where the finite gives way to the infinite. It is a fairytale aiming to transcend reality and move beyond into the extraordinary (Behler 1993, 212, 214). The transcendence of reality occurs through the dreams of a boy named Heinrich. In Heinrich’s dream, he pictures an idyllic place somewhere within the natural world.

Nicht die Schätze sind es, die ein so unaussprechliches Verlangen in mir geweckt haben, sagte er zu sich selbst; fern ab liegt mir alle Habsucht: aber die blaue Blume seh’n ich mich zu erblicken. Sie liegt mir unaufhörlich im Sinn, und ich kann nichts anders dichten und denken (Novalis 1960, 195).

The poet in ‘A Forest’ is searching for a girl uncorrupted by materialism and greed. The poet desires not monetary treasures, but treasures of unblemished love (Behler 1993, 213). The girl he searches for is free of life’s impurities; she is seen as perfect. Like

¹³ The Cure, “A Forest,” *17 Seconds*, YouTube video, 5:55, August 18, 2014, <https://youtu.be/SbAxbmAHgx4>

Heinrich, the poet is only dreaming, and in the end he must reluctantly reenter into reality.

The girl was never there
It's always the same
I'm running towards nothing
Again and again and again and again

This vain effort to reach the unreachable reflects the aforementioned fragment, that “Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte, und finden immer nur Dingen” (Novalis 1960, 412). This ideal does not exist within the finite world, because the ideal is itself infinite. It is only a fantasy and dream. The closing track ‘17 Seconds’ (Cure 1980) continues this message.¹⁴

Feeling is gone
And the picture disappears
And everything is cold now
The dream had to end
The wish never came true

There is a desire for a metaphysical reality that exists only as a conceptual idea. This alternative from reality is so powerful and persuasive, that the poet cannot abandon his mission for its attainment. Smith’s continual search and desire for these ideals leads him into darker places and themes within the 1981 album *Faith*.

On *Faith*, Smith sounds closer to the existential abyss. “I was 21, but I felt really old,” Smith says about the time. I felt life was pointless. I had no faith in anything. I just didn’t see there was much point continuing with life” (Apter 2009, 144). The album’s single ‘Primary’ (Cure 1981) is an ode to lost childhood and innocence.¹⁵ Smith flirts with the idea that it is better to die young and still dreaming, than to grow old and live in

¹⁴ The Cure, “17 Seconds,” *17 Seconds*, YouTube video, 4:01, August 18, 2014, <https://youtu.be/NRI5fDATw5s>

¹⁵ The Cure, “Primary,” *Faith*, YouTube video, 3:46, 2010, <https://youtu.be/0xrZ61cuKlk>

misery. The Romantic ideal, for Smith, is his return to childhood, where life remains forever in its primary stage.

The innocence of sleeping children
Dressed in white
And slowly dreaming
Stops all time

The children's white clothing represent purity and innocence, and they slowly dream without the infiltration of worldly knowledge and pain. Worldly knowledge and experience spells the death of their childhood naivety.

The further we go
The older we grow
The more we know
The less we show

Time steals the children from their primal state, and where they once dressed in white, they bare new colors of red and yellow, within rooms of blue. These three primary colors represent their final conditions of purity before the darkness of life imprisons them in melancholy.

The death of Tolhurst's mother, as well as the band's increase in drug use, intensified their disillusion with reality. Existential themes were at the center of their 1982 album *Pornography*. Biographer Jeff Apter writes, "Robert Smith simply couldn't resist the temptation to dissect his own black soul and then put it on public display" (Apter 2009, 165). Smith's disillusionments are intensifying with each album, and at this point in 1982, he appears to be yearning for the abyss. Smith wrote the album's lyrics in a stream of consciousness, with the drugs causing him to lose touch with reality. Smith's dedication to his solipsistic expressions sends him spiraling into emotional instability. He

submits himself to the call of the stranger god, and he thrusts himself and his art into Dionysian abandonment. Smith later reflects,

At the time I lost every friend I had, everyone, without exception, because I was incredibly obnoxious, appalling, self-centred. The tension in the studio was palpable, really (171).

The album opens with the nihilistic anthem ‘One Hundred Years,’ (Cure 1982) a track characterized by Smith as “pure self-loathing and worthlessness” (178).¹⁶ The opening line reflects a full surrender to nihilism, as if the abyss begins to draw him down into its depths. “It doesn’t matter if we all die,” he shouts. Death saturates the album, and Smith appears to be an artist ready to quit. The wishful ideal of immortal youth has become distorted, and the death Smith was seeking to escape now waits at his doorstep. In ‘Siamese Twins,’ (Cure 1982) Smith laments that he is “broken inside,” and that “we all die, laughing into the fire.”¹⁷ He is fragmented, only a shadow of his former self. He is aware of his disintegration as the drugs continue to push him down into the fires of existential anarchy. The drugs offered an escape, as well as an illusionary glimpse at his ideal. The goal was for their use to prolong youth and irresponsibility, before the challenges of modern reality set in. ‘The Figurehead’ (Cure 1982) continues Smith’s reflecting upon his impetuous drug abuse.¹⁸ “I will lose myself tomorrow,” he sings of his impending death. He convinces himself that it is too late to recover singing “I will never be clean again.” He is aware of his inner turmoil, but he allows his pursuit of a dream to shackle him inside the mind. Smith now stands at a crossroads where he must make a

¹⁶ The Cure, “One Hundred Years,” *Pornography*, YouTube video, 6:41, November 8, 2014, <https://youtu.be/pHs9aEXGKPg>

¹⁷ The Cure, “Siamese Twins,” *Pornography*, YouTube video, 5:29, November 8, 2014, <https://youtu.be/BYFDRFv5g2Q>

¹⁸ The Cure, “The Figurehead,” *Pornography*, YouTube video, 6:15, November 8, 2014, <https://youtu.be/pbrqsNgRa9Y>

choice to continue chasing this impossible fantasy, or abandon its attainment for the sake of his life and art. He must learn to contradict and reinvent himself as an artist, and avoid becoming the successor to Ian Curtis. The remedy is in the twenty-sixth *Blütenstaub* fragment, contributed by Friedrich Schlegel.

Hat man nun einmal die Liebhaberei fürs Absolute und kann nicht davon lassen: so bleibt einem kein Ausweg, als sich selbst immer zu widersprechen, und entgegengesetzte Extreme zu verbinden. Um den Satz des Widerspruchs ist es doch unvermeidlich geschehen, und man hat nur die Wahl, ob man sich dabei leidend verhalten will, oder ob man die Notwendigkeit durch Anerkennung zur freien Handlung adeln will (Novalis 1960, 422).

Smith has the freedom to recognize his own artistic autonomy, and the only person telling him to commit to his fantasy is himself. Siouxsie Sioux and Wire had opened his eyes to self-expression and progressive change in rock music, but he never before had set a boundary between the two. He did not have to submit to the seductive calling of his ideal, and his ability to realize this sets him free. As he reflected upon his own mortality, he realized his inability to make the ultimate sacrifice for his music (Apter 2009, 185). “I had two choices at the time,” Smith says. “Which were either completely giving in [thereby emulating Joy Division’s Ian Curtis] or making a record of it and getting it out of me. It would have been very easy to just curl up and disappear” (168). Smith’s intimacy with the abyss had not quite reached the catastrophic levels of Curtis, but the band would face consequences for their flirtation nonetheless. The tensions showed the band unable to continue touring *Pornography*, and after thirty-three intense shows, Smith’s emotions boiled over and he chose to leave the band and return to England (Tolhurst 2016, 157).

The Dionysian abandonment of *Pornography* displays the impossibility of sustaining as an artist that obsessively fixates upon disillusion and ideals. When reality is suppressed by an inner fantasy, self-destruction sets in. Smith veered too far in his obsessive longings for his Romantic ideal, and the only way he could continue with his life and artistry was to contradict his typical approach to art and life. After a month-long detox, Smith decided to write music again, but this time with a different approach. In November of 1982, Smith reunited with Tolhurst to release the stand-alone single 'Let's Go to Bed' (Cure 1982).¹⁹ This change was led through writing pop hooks. He opened up his music for the inclusion of pop melodies and structures, writing catchy arpeggios on the synthesizer and guitar. His vocal melodies were more melodic while still maintaining his trademark mood of melancholy. These pop melodies were desired to inspire interest, rather than spontaneously approaching music through jamming or improvisation. It was a drastic change in sound for a band previously described as gothic rock. Smith learned to combine the excess and spontaneity of emotion with technicality and restraint. He merges his previously dominant Dionysian approach with an Apollonian approach to music. Smith immediately detested 'Let's Go to Bed,' as it contradicted his conviction as an artist married to authenticity. "I thought it was stupid," he said. "It's rubbish. It's a joke" (Apter 2009, 191). But it was the only way that Smith could continue as an artist without self-imploding, and the change served to help maintain his ground within reality. He learned that he could disengage from his art without completely draining himself emotionally. It allowed him to expand upon the band's sound and vision.

¹⁹ The Cure, "Let's Go to Bed," *Greatest Hits*, YouTube video, 3:34, September 24, 2017, <https://youtu.be/-1vuUFu475Y>

Feeling rejuvenated, Smith and Tolhurst released *the Top* in 1983, expanding upon the quirkiness of ‘Lets Go to Bed.’ Smith’s newfound freedom allowed for him to expand his vision to other territories of sound. *The Top* combined pop melodies, gothic rock, psychedelic rock and world music to create an eclectic sound. ‘The Caterpillar’ (Cure 1983) represents these abstract sounds well through the quirky instrumental play and Smith’s vocals of Dionysian ecstasy.²⁰ Rather than leading the music through gothic gloom alone, Smith approached the music through melody, composition and a spectrum of moods. There was now room for emotional expressions of love, lust, and joy. From 1985 to 1987, The Cure wrote synth pop songs with aspects of gothic rock added throughout on *the Head on the Door* and *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me*. But on their 1989 album *Disintegration*, The band manages to synchronize the two approaches into one totally new and distinct sound. Despite the changes, Smith remained attached to expressing himself in various aspects. He maintained his original message to the world, but decided to vastly expand upon its themes and subjects. Melody was allowed to be melodic, regardless of the music’s mood. Smith reflected an artist with fluctuating mood swings. The music could be both euphoric and melancholy without the worry of contradiction. Smith learned to accept his finite reality, and use his various emotions as a way of enhancing the complexities of his art. He was now reflecting the entire spectrum of human emotion, and he becomes entranced by the thought of infinite impossibilities. “Everything I’d ever dreamed of doing was coming to fruition,” Smith said. “I suddenly realized that there was an infinite amount of things I could do with the band” (Apter 2009, 233). He was filled with creative ideas to expand and elevate the band’s catalogue

²⁰ The Cure, “The Caterpillar,” *The Top*, YouTube video, 3:41, August 7, 2015, <https://youtu.be/pof0xEvBuo4>

of work, and these ideas were much more attainable than his juvenile ideal for immortal youth. Smith had also discerned within himself a genuine passion for life. “Life never got that painful for me,” he reflects. “Even when the void opened up before me, I always thought, ‘the sun will rise whether I’m here or not, so I may as well be here for as long as I can and try to find some enjoyment’” (185).

Despite this radical transformation for Smith, remnants of his Romantic ideal would linger within The Cure’s music, though this time through reflection. The first track on their 1996 album *Wild Mood Swings*, ‘Want,’ (Cure 1996) Smith sings of his disillusion with the insufficiencies and inadequacies of material life.²¹

I’m always wanting more
Anything I haven’t got
I just can’t stop

Smith continues in melancholy reflection upon the fragmentation of his humanity. “Never feel enough today, tomorrow must be more,” The human spirit cannot find complete satisfaction and fulfillment in modern life, and Smith laments the harsh reality of searching for it through drugs, dreams, fame and sex. It is the condition of modern humanity to ceaselessly desire more from life, and as humanity continues to progress away from the natural aspects of life, the further it strays from fulfillment and wholeness.

However hard I want
I know deep down inside
I’ll never really get more hope
Or any more time

Whatever it is that completely fulfills the human soul is nowhere to be found. Even if it were to be attained, time will have taken its toll upon the searcher. We cannot regain the time that’s lost in searching for the romantic ideal. Smith carries this knowledge within

²¹ The Cure, “Want,” *Wild Mood Swings*, YouTube video, 5:06, May 7, 2015, <https://youtu.be/XP6IeFi57bw>

him as an adult. Disillusions can exist absent of self-destruction. The difference from The Cure's early albums *17 Seconds*, *Faith* and *Pornography*, is that Smith's expressions are open to all aspects of human emotion. The message of songs such as 'Want' reflects upon the universal fragmentation of humanity rather than on Smith's brokenness alone. He expresses both pleasure and pain; with the pleasures of lust appearing a few tracks after 'Want' on the mariachi song, 'The 13th' (Cure 1996).²²

The twenty-sixth *Blütenstaub* fragment never implies that Smith must completely abandon the hobby for the ideal, but that overcoming it's hold upon the mind means venturing away from it's fulfillment. Smith continues to relay his discontent for various aspects of life throughout the music of The Cure, but his desire for the infinite no longer consumes him. In the penultimate track of the 1992 album *Wish*, Smith reflects upon his childhood happiness, perhaps the shores of Blackpool. In 'To Wish Impossible Things,' (Cure 1992) Smith expresses nostalgia for the primal innocence of yesterday.²³ As the penultimate track on *Wish*, the song embodies the decades long struggle for Smith of accepting the limitations of time on earth. Now, at 32 years of age, he knows that the innocence and bliss of youth can never be regained, but rather they can be remembered as memories.

Remember how it used to be
When the sun would fill the sky
Remember how it used to feel
Those days would never end

Smith oscillates between the desires of the soul and the realities of finitude, rather than enslaving himself to one or the other. He has found a way to reconcile his present state of

²² The Cure, "The 13th," *Wild Mood Swings*, YouTube video, 4:17, May 7, 2015, <https://youtu.be/i5128PDPras>

²³ The Cure, "To Wish Impossible Things," *Wish*, YouTube video, 4:41, February 25, 2015, <https://youtu.be/eULTj4EU4hA>

existence with the inadequacies of the world. All he wished for may have gone away, but he is accepts the fact.

Robert Smith fulfills Schlegel's advice in overcoming the Romantic ideal. He accepts his finite limitations and reinvents his approach to writing music. He remains melancholy and disillusioned, but he recognizes the joys of human life. Smith's circumstances allowed him avoid joining Ian Curtis in the existential abyss. This willingness to reinvent and contradict as an artist allowed Robert Smith and The Cure to write new music for over three decades. The Cure inspired rock groups in the 1990s such as Smashing Pumpkins, Nine Inch Nails and Deftones, as well as the emo and nü-metal scenes in the 2000s (Hyden 2019). The band's expansive influence extends the postpunk ethos into music outside of the postpunk subgenre, with Smashing Pumpkins' front man Billy Corgan following Robert Smith in writing lyrics of personal pain and disillusion, continuing the progressive force of dark German Romanticism in rock.

CHAPTER 3

BILLY CORGAN AND THE ENDEAVOR FOR ARTISTIC GREATNESS

No more promise, no more sorrow
No longer will I follow
Can anybody hear me
I just want to be me

– Billy Corgan, “Mayonaise,” *Siamese Dream*

For the entertainer, emotion and expression are like a light switch; entertainment, as an act and profession, makes it easy for one to disengage after the performance. But for the Romantic artist, the close relationship between art and life proves difficult to detach the artist from their content. To the Romantic artist, the pains of life must be real, and they must be expressed (Schuftan, 2009, 94). For Billy Corgan, the singer and songwriter of the Smashing Pumpkins, his pain was real, and he used his music as a medium in dealing with it. “I won’t deny the pain, I won’t deny the change,” he reflects in the chorus of ‘Galopogos’ (Pumpkins 1995).²⁴ The lyrics were always personal, reflecting the thoughts, actions, emotions and experiences of the singer himself. In combining his self-expressive lyrics with a visionary prowess of grandeur and expectation, Corgan sought to create the greatest rock music ever. Disillusion is explicit in many of the lyrics, reflecting the strife within his inner soul. “I wanted more, than life could ever grant me,” he laments in ‘Today’ (Pumpkins 1993).²⁵

²⁴ Smashing Pumpkins, “Galopogos (Remastered 2012),” *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 4:46, February 28, 2020, <https://youtu.be/iHK5WQrcCl4>

²⁵ Smashing Pumpkins, “Today (Official Video),” *Siamese Dream*, YouTube video, 4:01, 2012, <https://youtu.be/xmUZ6nCFNoU>

He expresses the torments that haunt him singing, “I’ll tear my heart out, before I get out.” This expression of inner fragmentation separated the Smashing Pumpkins lyrically from many of their contemporaries, with the consequences of Corgan’s solipsism and impossible expectations eventually tearing the band apart. This chapter is an analysis of the Smashing Pumpkins’ singer-lyricist Billy Corgan, and his Romantic connections, both lyrically and personally, to the works of German Romantic writers Heinrich Heine, Novalis and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Corgan’s Romantic inclinations represent the postpunk ethos’ progression beyond the confines of postpunk’s walls, as well as showcasing the progressive nature of German Romanticism as an artistic form of expression within rock. Corgan’s Romantic sensibilities were born out of childhood trauma, with his primitive fragmentation sending him in pursuit of a lost wholeness, which he believes can be achieved through the creation of the greatest rock music imaginable. Corgan’s working class background gives him the discipline and foundation to jump in pursuit of this ideal, but it consequentially brings friction and tension into the Smashing Pumpkins. Idealized expectations, when limitless or undefined, can be self-destructive for Romantic artist pushing too far for fulfillment. As with Joy Division’s Ian Curtis and the Cure’s Robert Smith, Corgan envisions an infinite ideal that becomes the all-consuming desire of his mind. His obsessive endeavors to reach artistic greatness blinds him from the forming abyss below. Corgan imitates the poet in Heinrich Heine’s poem “Die Loreley” (Heine 1972, 103).

Den Schiffer im kleinen Schiffe
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh’.

Billy Corgan's progressive vision for his band merged with solipsistic lyrics and vision that adhere to the postpunk ethos also seen previously in Ian Curtis and Robert Smith. Corgan had a genuine interest in pushing the band into new creative territories with the writing of each new album, merging aspects from diverse subgenres such as shoegaze, gothic rock and electronica. "Shoegaze" was a British subgenre of rock depicting androgynously whispered vocals mixed low beneath dream-like swirling guitars (Schuftan 2009, 90). It was an effort to move rock into an uncharted sonic landscape. From harps to alpine zithers, Corgan and the band incorporated an array of instruments unusual for rock music. This type of experimentation, combined with alternating production techniques were efforts to avoid artistically plateauing (Craft 2016). From 1991 to 2000, the Smashing Pumpkins would release five studio albums that exemplify this experimentation: *Gish*, *Siamese Dream*, *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, *Adore* and *Machina: the Machines of God*. Bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden were producing a different type of rock labeled as "grunge." The Seattle based sound comprised of merging aesthetic elements from metal and hardcore punk, with politics, culture and society the topics of many song lyrics. The Smashing Pumpkins, though, reflected disinterest in becoming the next in a wave of grunge acts. Corgan had an artistic vision of creating the greatest possible rock music by synthesizing his musical influences into a unique sound. It was a Romantic ideal sought in order for him to achieve happiness and wholeness within his life.

The music of the Smashing Pumpkins reflects the ethos of post-punk, rather than of punk. The Smashing Pumpkins represented the transcendence of postpunk, like Romanticism, as progressing as a mode of expression beyond a historical frame. They

were holdovers of solipsistic rock, with Corgan relaying a message of repression and existential disillusion like Robert Smith and Ian Curtis. Kurt Cobain of Nirvana reignited the punk message of protest and change with the 1991 release of their sophomore album *Nevermind*. While Cobain embodied a message of social disillusion, Corgan expressed existential disillusion with his own life, reflecting upon his childhood abuse and alienation within his adolescence. Corgan's inability to remove himself of his childhood presents how truly powerfully impactful primitive years can be for humans. The early German Romantic Novalis recognized the significance of human childhood, describing it as a golden age. The primitive innocence in children is the closest modern glimpse into a wholeness and unity of spirit pre-Enlightenment and industrial life. Lacking the happiness and carefree liberties of childhood, Corgan was plagued by melancholy at an early age (Schuftan 2009, 95). "I used to be a little boy, so old in my shoes," Corgan laments in 'Disarm' (Pumpkins 1993).²⁶ "And what I choose is my choice, what's a boy supposed to do?" His exposure to the terrors of human life pushed him into an early adulthood. The primary perspective of youth was extinguished before its arrival. These traumatic experiences remain with him throughout adolescence and into adulthood. In his book *Entertain Us! The rise and fall of alternative rock in the nineties*, Craig Schuftan writes of Corgan's alienation and fragmentation.

He had been rejected by his biological parents, who'd left him in the care of his stepmother, rejected in high school for being a too-tall geek with an ugly birthmark, and rejected for being a pop careerist in an indie world. He had, by the age of twenty-six, come to think of himself as an outsider, and saw his band in exactly the same terms (154).

²⁶ Smashing Pumpkins, "Disarm (Remastered)," *Siamese Dream*, YouTube Video, 3:16, August 18, 2018, https://youtu.be/x5GG_fr8WyM

Wherever he went, Corgan experienced rejection in new forms. Within his mind, to compensate for these negative experiences and feelings of low-self esteem, he had to do something that proved himself as having intrinsic and extrinsic value in this world. He sought to attain this through a Romantic ideal of artistic perfection.

Though Novalis writes of the golden age of childhood innocence, E.T.A Hoffman's 1816 novella *Der Sandmann* antithetically displays the dark effects of childhood trauma upon adult life. The central figure of the text, Nathanael, is a Romantic idealist sharing similarities to the Smashing Pumpkin's front man Billy Corgan. Nathanael's poetry is a significant form of expression within his adult life, as the traumatic memories and scars from his childhood influence it. He uses the memories of his past as a thematic focal point in writing poetry. In Nathanael's childhood, *der Sandmann* or "the Sandman," is at the center of his trauma. It is a mythical being that takes hold of his imagination, and becomes a figure attached to his reality (Röder 2003, 66). Nathanael's mother tells the Sandman tale, with the intention of scaring him into going to sleep in the evenings. She describes the Sandman as a wicked man who visits bad children who are unwilling to go to sleep. The Sandman throws sand into the eyes of these disobedient children, popping their eyes out of their sockets. Lastly he throws the eyes into his sack and feeds them to his children on the moon (Hoffman 1963, 5). Nathanael's ability to differentiate reality and fantasy is first distorted by the reoccurring visits of the lawyer Coppelius, who visits Nathanael's father late in the evening. Nathaniel connects these nightly visits with the Sandman's arrival, and it leads his imagination to overtake his reality.

“Grässlich malte sich nun im Innern mir das Bild des grausamen Sandmanns aus; so wie es abends die Treppe heraufpolterte, zitterte ich vor Angst und Entsetzen. Nichts als den unter Tränen hergestotterten Ruf: der Sandmann! der Sandmann! konnte die Mutter aus mir herausbringen. Ich lief darauf in das Schlafzimmer, und wohl die ganze Nacht über quälte mich die fürchterliche Erscheinung des Sandmanns” (5).

An explosion in his father’s office one evening, results in his father’s death, and it leads Nathanael to connect the lawyer Coppelius with the Sandman. This realization haunts Nathanael into his adult life. As an adult, his fiancé Klara takes note of the trauma that influenced his gloomy poetry. Klara reflects, “Doch jedes Wort, alles was Rede vermag, schien dir farblos und frostig und tot” (18). At this point, Nathaniel should be removed from the fable of his childhood. Yet, he is unable to do so, because the sandman spelled for him the end of innocence and happiness. His poetry becomes a way for him to channel his angst. Corgan also does this with the lyric, because his dark past produces a powerful image of terrors within his life. These dark realities are often overlooked in popular music, with much of contemporary music serving the consumer with an illusionary escape from life’s complexities. Corgan and Nathaniel produce art that forces the audience to face the dark terrors of human existence. Artistic self-expression allows the world to see more deeply than it otherwise would. The authenticity of the artist elevates the art into a higher form.

The rejection and loneliness of Corgan’s youth had a profound effect upon his art. Rather than write music that was “cynical, nihilistic and self-deprecating,” Corgan chose to write music that was “sincere, romantic and selfish” (Schuftan, 2012, 155). He would reject those that reject him, and he rejected the contemporary music trends that dominated the airways. In *Der Sandmann*, Nathanael takes similar actions by turning away from the Klara’s criticism for an automaton named Olympia. Olympia provided for Nathaniel’s art

a false sense of attention and appreciation, something Klara could not offer. He severely lacked confidence as an artist, and Klara's rational approach to art prevented her appreciation for his gloomy poetry (Röder 2003, 59). But Nathanael discovers a startling truth about Olympia.

Erstarrt stand Nathanael – nur zu deutlich hatte er gesehen, Olympias toderbleichtes Wachsgesicht hatte keine Augen, statt ihrer schwarze Höhlen; sie war eine leblose Puppe (Hoffman 1963, 37).

Nathanael's discovery of Olympia's true nature has an uncanny resemblance to the Smashing Pumpkins' song 'By Starlight,' (Pumpkins 1995) on *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*.²⁷ Corgan had described his wedding day as an unpleasant event. As he looked into his wife's eyes at the altar, she appeared to be "a million miles away." (Corgan 2005) He reflects upon this experience singing, "Dead eyes, dead eyes, and are you just like me? Cause her eyes, her eyes were as vacant as the seas." The night of the wedding, with his wife sound asleep, Corgan went out onto his balcony and gazed up at the stars, believing he had made a mistake with his marriage (2005). He wondered if his wife felt the same about him, and this wonder can be heard in the chorus, as he asks, "are you just like me?" Nathanael and Corgan share in interpreting their love interests as empty, because their replacement of reality with a romantic idealization has left them dissatisfied. Olympia was not the desired woman that Nathanael believed her to be, nor was Corgan's wife the satisfactory expectation to cure his ailing heart. Here the ideal clashes with the real. There had been a refusal to step outside of their idealized view of companionship, and for Corgan and Nathanael, the only thing left for them was their art (Röder 2003, 65). At the end of *Der Sandmann*, Nathanael madly jumps to his death,

²⁷ Smashing Pumpkins, "By Starlight (Remastered 2012)," *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 4:48, February 28, 2020, <https://youtu.be/9HDAkjLCyAw>

committing suicide over Coppelius' reappearance (Hoffman 1963, 42). Nathanael, as an adult, was unable to escape his debilitating obsessions with the Sandman, and it took its toll on his art, cognition and mortality.

German Romantic themes of trauma, melancholy and dreaming are significant throughout the Smashing Pumpkins album's *Siamese Dream* and *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*. The band's debut record though, *Gish*, contains lyrical themes of spirituality and mysticism that predate the lyrical shift into Corgan's self-expression. The album fuses sixties psychedelic rock and seventies arena rock with shoegaze aesthetics pioneered by the Scottish band My Bloody Valentine. *Gish* offers the only known example of Bassist D'arcy Wretzky singing lead vocals on a Smashing Pumpkins record, and it can be heard on the melancholy acoustic ballad 'Daydream' (Pumpkins 1991).²⁸ Wretzky's contribution as a vocalist reveals the combined effort of the band, that as of yet was not dominated by Corgan's artistic vision. There is a drastic shift in both sound and lyrical approach going from *Gish* in 1991 to *Siamese Dream* in 1993. This shift was brought on by Corgan's ideal for the band and the pressure that came in achieving it. He pressures himself to attain this Romantic ideal of his quicker than he previously expected, and it resulted in tensions and fighting in the studio. Wretzky and guitarist James Iha were in the process of a romantic breakup, and drummer Jimmy Chamberlain dealt with a crippling heroin addiction that forced the band to move recording studios to Marietta, Georgia. This move was in the hopes of distancing Chamberlain from any drug connections during production. Corgan, too, faced a crippling depression that led to him planning his suicide (Pitchfork 2005). The front man, believing their window was closing

²⁸ Smashing Pumpkins, "Daydream (Remastered 2011)," *Gish*, YouTube video, 3:07, August 27, 2018, <https://youtu.be/SA8chNGanIY>

to create the best record, tightened his grip upon the studio, and Corgan allegedly took it upon himself to record all of the bass and guitar tracks on the album. “I just have a vision,” Corgan said around the time of production. “And I can’t let them not having a vision stop me” (Schuftan, 2012, 156). The approach to *Siamese Dream* is a merging of the contradictory elements of Dionysian and Apollonian art, discussed by Friedrich Nietzsche in *die Geburt der Tragödie*. The instrumentation is tightly structured with Apollonian precision and form. The images of Corgan’s imagination are given shape through sound. The lyrics then venture away from the ambiguous spirituality of *Gish* to a more personal and vulnerable expression of inner turmoil and pain. He was “zugleich Rausch- und Traumkünstler” (Nietzsche 1954, 25). Corgan wanted perfection within the studio, as he believed the studio to be the best place for achieving his artistic vision. The songs are tightly structured; with guitar tracks layered on top the original tracks to create a uniquely clean distortion. The sound of *Siamese Dream* drew closer to the sound of stadium rock than to the sludgy riffs of grunge.

The opening track of *Siamese Dream*, “Cherub Rock,” (Pumpkins 1993) is a proclamation by the band that they are no longer outsiders interested in conforming to the indie rock purist’s music norms (Schuftan, 2012, 157).²⁹ Author Kevin Craft writes of The Smashing Pumpkins’ refusal to shroud their ambition in anti-commercial postures, and this led the indie scene’s labeling them “careerist sellouts” (Craft 2016). Yet what The Smashing Pumpkins wanted was to write and record the most ambitious music possible with the tools they had access to in studio. The lyrics of ‘Cherub Rock’ are

²⁹ Smashing Pumpkins, “Cherub Rock (Remastered 2011),” *Siamese Dream*, YouTube video, 4:59, August 15, 2018, <https://youtu.be/6ywIjjj3YuA>

snarky and cynical, expressing desires to break out from the underground, to break down the barriers to their sound:

Freak out
And give in
Doesn't matter what you believe in
Stay cool
And be somebody's fool this year

The song continues to build toward a climax where Corgan emotively belts, "let me out." This imperative can be both a reflection of the band breaking free of the indie scene, but it can also be interpreted as Corgan breaking free of his imprisonment to the past. He will be free of the rejection, free of the darkness, as he will show the world the greatness of his band. The Smashing Pumpkins were not interested in being told who they ought to be, just as no German Romantic would have wanted to be defined as being too spiritual or too materialistic. Corgan expresses his desire for individuality and transparency in life and art in a later track on *Siamese Dream*, 'Mayonaise' (Pumpkins 1993).³⁰ "Can anybody hear me?" He begs. "I just want to be me." The Smashing Pumpkins would be Corgan's personal message against rock music conformity.

The album's second track 'Quiet' (Pumpkins 1993) cryptically hints at the trauma of his childhood.³¹ The backtracking psychedelic guitar in the introduction sets up the listener with an eeriness and horror as if to evoke the fears of a helpless child. This sound compliments the unsettling subject matter in the lyrics.

For years I've been sleeping
Helpless
Couldn't tell a soul

³⁰ Smashing Pumpkins, "Mayonaise (Remastered)," *Siamese Dream*, YouTube video, 5:49, August 15, 2018, https://youtu.be/Vbu_K41efvY

³¹ Smashing Pumpkins, "Quiet (Remastered)," *Siamese Dream*, YouTube video, 3:42, August 15, 2018, <https://youtu.be/ewvw9CzcEFo>

Corgan, throughout his adolescence and adult years had remained silent about the trauma. In his alienation and rejection, he felt helpless and unable to cry for help. The words that follow may be directed at his stepmother the abuser, or his parents the neglectors.

Be ashamed
Of the mess you've made
My eyes never forget, you see

The childhood memories remained with Corgan far beyond his days of youth, just as Nathanael carried his fears of the Sandman with him into his adulthood. Corgan places the blame on his tormentors and neglectors, whoever they may be here, and expresses that those who had broken him ought to be ashamed. To whom the imperative is specifically directed here is unclear, though it becomes a bit less ambiguous in the acoustic ballad 'Disarm' (Pumpkins 1993).³² The line "cut that little child" allows us to infer that it is perhaps a parental figure impacting their child. The second verse in the track presents to the listener his struggle with neglect and alienation.

Disarm you with a smile
And leave you like they left me here
To wither in denial
The bitterness of one who's left alone
Ooh, the years burn

Corgan's bitterness of being left alone also mirrors the final years of the Romantic poet Heinrich Heine. Heine, who had become extremely sick in May of 1848, was confined to his *Matratzengruft* or "Mattress-Grave," until his death. As a desperately sick old man, he would write his own lamentations with raw emotion (Feise 1961, xv). He experienced his own sadness of one withering and left alone. To most listeners, it may be unnerving to hear the raw expressions of violence, turmoil and loneliness draped in acoustic guitars

³² Smashing Pumpkins, "Disarm (Official Video)," *Siamese Dream*, YouTube video, 3:20, August 2, 2011, <https://youtu.be/d1acEVmnVhI>

and chiming bells in 'Disarm.' Nevertheless, this merging of contradictory moods was intentional. In an interview with *Rage* magazine, Corgan explicitly revealed the meaning behind the song.

The reason I wrote 'Disarm' was because I didn't have the guts to kill my parents, so I thought I'd get back at them through song. Rather than have an angry, angry, angry, violent song I thought I'd write something beautiful and make them realize what tender feelings I have inside my heart. (Rage 1993)

Corgan had a longing for love and acceptance, as any child would, and his deprivation of it would haunt him into his adult life. Corgan and Nathanael are melancholy, marching into adult life bitter, angst-filled and downtrodden. They are bombarded by darkness, entranced by their traumatic memories. Drowning amidst psychological turmoil, only the full achievement of artistic ideals can bring forth wholeness, satisfaction, and contentment for their adult lives.

Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness departs from the sound of *Siamese Dream* by venturing deeper into the realms of chaos, excess, and Dionysian abandonment. The tracks on *Mellon Collie* invite the listener to join Corgan in reflecting upon his melancholy, angst, and existential disillusion, sharing similarities to the lyrical laments in Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht*. The opening track, sharing the title of the album, is a piano instrumental presenting the listener with a mood and motif that reoccurs throughout the album. Shrouded in strings, the piano melody evokes the solitude of the night, where dreams, hopes and visions of grandeur seem achievable. The listener should feel a sense of comfort and contentment. The opener serves as an instrumental prelude to the following track 'Tonight, Tonight;' (Pumpkins 1995) sonically and lyrically capturing a

glimpse into the idealistic fantasies that are played out within Corgan's mind.³³ The string arrangement mimics the aesthetic conventions heard in Classicist music, with the lyrics evoking optimism in reaching the Romantic absolute. Here the listener is presented with a dichotomy. *Mellon Collie* begins in a dreamlike trance that resembles aesthetics of the night. Though the album is split into two sides titled *Dawn to Dusk* and *Starlight to Twilight*, 'Tonight, Tonight' takes place before dawn from the perspective of one dreaming in sleep. The song plays with the mystical dichotomy between "die Nacht" and "der Tag" observed in Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht* (Novalis 1960, 126). Labeled as hymns, they are songs of worship and praise, with the night the deified figure of worship. In the first hymn, the night is set up as the spirit of Romanticism, while the day illuminates apocalyptic depictions of a world under the dominion of the Enlightenment.

The narrator writes:

Fernab liegt die Welt
Wie versankt in eine tiefe Gruft
Wie wüst und einsam
Ihre Stelle!

The world below the night is observed as a wasteland of distant memories, wishes of youth, dreams of childhood, brief joys and vain hopes for a long life (126). 'Tonight, Tonight,' is a song to the night that embodies the spirit of Romanticism. This spirit of Romanticism takes the dreamer high above the dusty wastelands of post-enlightenment life. "Believe, believe in me, believe, that life can change that you're not stuck in vain," Corgan sings affront a triumphant orchestra. "The impossible is possible tonight," he sings in the final coda. It is as if the fragmented boy, now in adulthood, has finally shattered the chains of trauma and disillusion for good. In these moments, melancholy

³³ Smashing Pumpkins, "Tonight, Tonight (Official Video)," *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 4:19, 2012, <https://youtu.be/NOG3eus4ZSo>

disintegrates within, and an eternal bliss finally enraptures the once ailing soul. Reality sets in with the preceding track, ‘Jellybelly,’ (Pumpkins 1995) where the dreamer awakens from the fantasy.³⁴ This dreamer in ‘Tonight, Tonight’ is abruptly awakened to discover the fleeting nature of the dream, and the futile hopes for achieving the fantasy of wholeness. Disillusion greets him as he awakens. “Welcome to nowhere fast,” Corgan cynically snarls in the opening lines. “Nothing here ever lasts.” Retuned from the dream world of illusions, pre-existing feelings of hopelessness, apathy and existential despair set in. What had seemed so real had only been a dream. What the dreamer wants he knows he cannot have, and with this knowledge he arises “in grauen Kleidern, wie Abendnebel nach der Sonne, Untergang” (Novalis 1960, 126).

In ‘Thirty-three,’ (Pumpkins 1995) Corgan laments, like the poet in *Hymnen an die Nacht*, over the death of youth and the death of innocence.³⁵ “Humor me before I go,” Corgan croons. The artist is death obsessed strolling through the streets of his neighborhood. Pulling up his collar, he attempts to hide his face from the world. But he knows he cannot hide, as the “cluttered streets greet” him, and the “earth laughs” at him. Supper waits for him on the table, and he knows he cannot be late. Even at home satisfaction escapes him. He feels homeless and lost in spirit, a disheartened wanderer in search for a dwelling place of wholeness. He tells himself that he must face the cold alone, and continues forward with his disillusioned life.

Wrapped up in the pleasures of the world
I’ve journeyed here and there and back again
But in the same old haunts I still find my friends

³⁴ Smashing Pumpkins, “Jellybelly (Remastered 2012),” *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 3:02, February 28, 2020, <https://youtu.be/df1SjWNf1A>

³⁵ Smashing Pumpkins, “Thirty-Three (Official Video),” *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 4:08, August 2, 2011, <https://youtu.be/AYSbztCCTIA>

Corgan acknowledges his pursuit of pleasure in which he has wandered in search for to no avail. Wholeness is the idyllic refuge he seeks, but the brokenness he feels within has not been mended. His old friends, his traumas of the past, continue to haunt and he cannot do anything to ease the pain of all he's lost. Corgan's world is one without color. Everywhere he goes, he sees it dressed in grey.

In 'Tales of a Scorched Earth,' (Pumpkins 1995) Corgan's screamed vocals hold little back about his inner pain.³⁶ He drifts toward nihilism, sharing similarities to Robert Smith's existential rage on *Pornography*. The lyrics reflect a desire to escape his haunted past, as his present state of existence resembles death.

Farewell goodnight last one out turn out the lights
And let me be, let me die inside...

...And we're all dead yeah we're all dead
Inside the future of a shattered past

The erratic, and often unpredictable, journey throughout the twenty-eight-song double album reflects the erratic variety of emotions filling Corgan's head. If the Romantic artist is to take inspiration from what he or she considers to be genuine and sincere, the Dionysian spirit of pain and terror must be ever-present within the art; otherwise it ceases to be Romantic. This was Nietzsche's demand for art; that it showcased the reality of human suffering as an "aesthetic phenomenon" (Schuftan 2009, 244). The Smashing Pumpkins music answers this, as Corgan intended his music to reflect "the true embodiment of the artist's soul" (Schuftan 2012, 244).

Corgan would experience an internal conflict during *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*. His conflict would rest between the desire to write honestly and the

³⁶ Smashing Pumpkins, "Tales of a Scorched Earth (Remastered 2012)," *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 3:45, February 28, 2020, <https://youtu.be/Zj6RGBj9DaU>

repercussions of not feeding into the desires of the audience. Corgan was done with expressing anger, but it was anger that the audience wanted. It was an artistic *Zerrissenheit*, an “inner conflict arising within the individual,” and the conflict stood between artistic authenticity and artistic expectation (Hofrichter 1963, 48). *Zerrissenheit* is reflected within the lyrics of ‘Bullet with Butterfly Wings’ (Pumpkins 1995).³⁷

The world is a vampire, sent to drain
Secret destroyers, hold you up to the flames
And what do I get, for my pain?
Betrayed desires, and a piece of the game

He is engulfed within the flames of external desires that contradicted his own. Comparing his audience to vampires he metaphorically feels them draining artistic freedom of expression. Here he questions his dedication to expressing anger and pain, as he wants to express what’s genuinely feeling within. In the chorus, Corgan uses a metaphor of his imprisonment to represent their oppression singing, “Despite all my rage, I am still just a rat in a cage.” Due to a rising fame, he is imprisoned by the demand of critics and fans, and he becomes fatigued in showcasing anger and torment show after show. “But can you fake it for just one more show?” He questions himself regarding where he stands as an authentic artist. As mentioned previously, the romantic artist cannot turn the stage persona off after the show, because the stage persona is the real persona. Years of reflecting upon trauma and angst were beginning to take its toll, and he was heading into fatigue as an artist. This fatigue would have a giant impact upon their next studio album. Ironically Corgan was a vampire himself by draining his band mates of their artistic expression and contributions to the band’s music. His chase to fulfill the Romantic ideal

³⁷ Smashing Pumpkins, “Bullet With Butterfly Wings (Official Video),” *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 4:26, 2012, <https://youtu.be/8-r-V0uK4u0>

keeps him from observing the reality of the growing disenchantment within the band. His solipsism shielded him from seeing the abyss forming beneath the band's career. With the next Smashing Pumpkins record, it would spell the beginning of the end.

The release of *Adore* in 1998 saw the Smashing Pumpkins continue to experiment as a band. Yet, their experimentation took a sharp turn away from the mega success of *Mellon Collie* and *Siamese Dream*. The album was a fusion of gothic rock, electronica and folk that sounded unlike anything the band had previously released. Distorted guitar riffs and live drums were exchanged for acoustic guitars, pianos, synthesizers and retro drum machines. Corgan's ideal led him to create a rock version of Schlegel's romantic vision. The music was a combination of contradictory aesthetics sounding both ancient and futuristic. *Adore* was Corgan choosing his artistry over external expectations, but by making this decision, many fans that appreciated the rage and thrashing guitars felt alienated (Corgan 2005). *Adore* was Corgan's descent from the peak. Though he may not have reached his own limit in pursuing the ideal, he had reached the limit in maintaining his audiences attention. The album was as raw as *Siamese Dream* and *Mellon Collie*, but the lyrical themes were more mature and distant from the youth filled rage of before. Featuring soft dynamics and sluggish tempos, the instrumentation reflected the inner state of Corgan during this period. "Mother, I'm tired," He croons in the acoustic ballad 'Once Upon a Time' (Pumpkins 1998).³⁸ He expresses his inner turmoil regarding his relationship to his mother. In his mind he has failed to make his mother proud, perhaps because he has failed to find satisfaction in his own life.

³⁸ Smashing Pumpkins, "Once Upon a Time," *Adore*, YouTube video, 4:04, August 30, 2018, <https://youtu.be/5eX7kZLBotg>

Mother I've tried
Wasting my life
I haven't given up, I lied
To make you so proud in my eyes

Corgan is musing over the death of his mother and his missed opportunities. Like his childhood, he cannot go back and fix things with his family, and all he can feel is regret and grief.

Mother I hope you know
That I miss you so
Time has ravaged on my soul
To wipe a mother's tears grown cold

Divorce, the death of his mother, the drug overdose of touring musician Jonathan Melvoin and Jimmy Chamberlain's firing contributed to the dramatic shift in the band's sound. Nevertheless it is the death of Corgan's mother that most impacted the change. He reflects upon her.

I didn't grow up with my mother, and so losing her for real was like, some sort of latent childhood, some sort of unresolved issue. When she left for real, it was sort of like I was done (Pitchfork 2005).

His mother was apart of the ideal to overcome his fragmentation. To have her see his success was crucial. Corgan never had the chance to resolve his childhood issues, and it took many years to reach closure with the pain. Along with Corgan's inner fragmentation, *Adore* represented the sound of a fragmented band slowly falling apart (Corgan 2005). Chamberlain was gone, and it was the first time the band had not been complete. His divorce deepened his wounds. Each corner of life was torn into pieces. He reflects upon his pain during the writing of *Adore*.

I secretly yearned that the embrace of it would heal some of the wounds of my mother's death and probably honestly the death of the band as well...but none of that worked, none of it came true (Corgan 2005).

Corgan now seems aware of the approaching abyss, and the final track on *Adore* ‘17,’ (Pumpkins 1998) symbolizes the fragmentation of his band.³⁹ The track is a 17 second piano clip taken from an unreleased track titled ‘Blissed and Gone.’ The clip is incomplete, like the band and Corgan’s vision for it. The piano cuts out abruptly without a structured cadence to indicate the song’s completion.

Billy Corgan and the Smashing Pumpkins would release one more record in 2000, *Machina: the Machines of God*, before disbanding. Wretzky would leave the band before the album was even completed. *Machina* was an album that combined the various aspects of the bands past into one new sound. The ancient yet futuristic vision is more flushed out on the album. The hard rock guitars of *Mellon Collie* and *Gish*, the shoegaze textures of *Siamese Dream* along with the gothic mood of *Adore* are all combined into one giant sound. It presents the listener with a fragmentary glimpse at Corgan’s grandiose vision for the Smashing Pumpkins when he first conceived his Romantic ideal. The obsessive quest for artistic greatness lacked a quantifiable way of attainment. Without a line drawn in pursuing greatness, Corgan’s chance at reaching the idealistic summit of greatness imploded with each departing band member. “We seek the unseekable and we speak the unspeakable,” Corgan sings in the coda of ‘Cupid de Locke’ (Pumpkins 1995),⁴⁰ and though he uses the pronoun “we,” the search was his alone, and he dragged his band mates along to meet its impossible fulfillment. A Romantic artist in rock, he genuinely believed in the potential fulfillment of his vision, and he genuinely meant every word he wrote. “Someday I promise we’ll be perfect,” he sings as he idealizes a future unity and

³⁹ Smashing Pumpkins, “17,” *Adore*, YouTube video, 0:17, June 12, 2011, <https://youtu.be/zJn-zBPCxzI>

⁴⁰ Smashing Pumpkins, “Cupid De Locke (Remastered),” *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, YouTube video, 2:50, February 28, 2020, <https://youtu.be/EO0OURc9WDU>

wholeness in ‘Perfect’ (Pumpkins 1998).⁴¹ In retrospect, Corgan had in a way fulfilled his vision, but he failed to recognize its limits. His romanticized expectations kept him ascending toward an unreachable peak. The Smashing Pumpkins reached the number one spot on the Billboard 200 with *Mellon Collie* in 1996. They even won Grammy awards for ‘Bullet with Butterfly Wings’ and the music video for ‘Tonight, Tonight,’ and yet Corgan had to ask if there was a way to reach higher (Partridge 2015). His discontent in sitting as the number one rock band in the world is evident of the impossibility of his Romantic ideal.

Billy Corgan is another example of the volatility of the postpunk ethos and its roll as a progressive force within rock music. His lyrics of pain, melancholy, angst and trauma exemplify dark German Romanticism as a transcendent phenomenon within modern artistic expression. The Smashing Pumpkins, as Corgan’s artistic vehicle, was supposed to be the healing ointment for his inner fragmentation. It was supposed to be a medicine to mend his brokenness into something beautiful and whole, yet the infinite dream proved again, as it had with Ian Curtis and Robert Smith, to be a destructive force in plunging the artist down into darkness.

⁴¹ Smashing Pumpkins, “Perfect (Official Video),” *Adore*, YouTube video, 3:31, July 29, 2011, <https://youtu.be/VKYY8DxVZHE>

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